
Vol. 14, No. 1 May 2019

CONTENTS

<i>Andrew Picard and Myk Habets</i> Editorial Announcement	1
<i>Michael D. O'Neil</i> Editorial: Re-Thinking Baptism	3
<i>Bill J. Leonard</i> Baptists and Baptism: A Twenty-First Century Dilemma	5
<i>Michael D. O'Neil</i> "For as Many of You as Were Baptised into Christ have Clothed Yourselves with Christ": Baptism, Baptists, and the Renewal of the Church	13
<i>Anne Klose</i> Playing Our Part: A Who's-Who of Baptism and Formation	23
<i>Frank D. Rees</i> Baptism by Immersion – More than Initiation: A Response to the Report of the International Dialogue between the Baptist World Alliance and the World Methodist Church	34
<i>Myk Habets</i> Writing Good Critical Book Reviews	50
<i>Jordan Jones</i> Critical Review Essay	50
Reviews	55

**The Pacific Journal
of
Theological Research**

ISSN 1177-0228

Editors

Rev Dr Myk Habets
MHabets@laidlaw.ac.nz

Rev Andrew Picard
andrew.picard@carey.ac.nz

Book Reviews Editor

Dr Greg Liston
GListon@laidlaw.ac.nz

Editorial Board

Prof Paul Fiddes
Regent's Park College

Dr Steve Harmon
Gardner-Webb University

Dr Steve Holmes
St. Andrews University

Dr Morcom
Malyon College

Dr Michael O'Neil
Vose Seminary

Dr Frank Rees
Whitley College

Dr Sexton
University of SoCal

Dr David Starling
Morling College

Dr Brian Talbot
Dundee, Scotland

Dr Martin Sutherland
Australian College of Theology

Contributing Institutions

Carey Baptist College (Auckland, New Zealand)
Malyon College (Brisbane, Australia)
Whitley College (Melbourne, Australia)

Morling College (Sydney, Australia)
Vose Seminary (Perth, Australia)

The Pacific Journal of Theological Research (PJTR) is an open-access online journal which aims to provide an international vehicle for scholarly theological research with a special focus on the Pacific region. However, topics are not limited to the Pacific region, and all subject matter potentially of significance for theological scholarship and ecclesial communities will be considered. *PJTR* is especially interested in interdisciplinary biblical, theological, and historical research that intersects with other scholarly disciplines and knowledge sources. *PJTR* is published twice-yearly in May and November. Articles are blind peer-reviewed, with submissions sent to international scholars in the appropriate fields for critical review before being accepted for publication. The editors will provide a style guide on enquiry. All manuscript submissions should be addressed to Myk Habets at: MHabets@laidlaw.ac.nz.

URL: <http://www.baptistresearch.org.nz/the-pacific-journal-of-theological-research.html>

All business communications

Rev Andrew Picard

Carey Baptist College

PO BOX 12149

Auckland

New Zealand

Fax: +64 9 525 4096

Email: andrew.picard@carey.ac.nz

The Pacific Journal of Theological Research is sponsored by the N.Z. Baptist Research and Historical Society and the R.J. Thompson Centre for Theological Studies at Carey Baptist College.

© *Pacific Journal of Theological Research*, All Rights Reserved, Auckland, New Zealand

EDITORIAL ANNOUNCEMENT: “A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME...”

Myk Habets and Andrew Picard

This journal began as *The New Zealand Journal of Baptist Research* (1996) and was renamed as *The Pacific Journal of Baptist Research* (2005) and is now to be known as *The Pacific Journal of Theological Research*. Martin Sutherland, then Senior Editor and pioneer of the journal, wrote a very helpful editorial in the initial 1996 volume that captures the intersectional intentions of the journal and the kind of theology envisaged at its inception. The stated aim of the journal was “to make a significant contribution to our understanding of Baptist life in New Zealand.”¹ In its original inception, Sutherland’s focus was singularly on New Zealand. “This journal is intended as a forum for careful thought and examination of all aspects of New Zealand Baptist life and mission both in this country and overseas.”² But Sutherland’s vision was never a sectarian retreat from scholarly dialogue and debate. Indeed, Sutherland envisaged an integrative and interdisciplinary Baptist theology that must be brought into dialogue with all of life. “We must go beyond these traditional ‘Christian’ contributions. Among us there are a multitude of skills and talents. We need them all. The insights of disciplines such as economics, sociology, psychology and political studies together with careful reflections on praxis—all these must inform our attempts at effective mission in this country.”³

In 2005, the journal was renamed *The Pacific Journal of Baptist Research*. There was no editorial commentary on this new iteration, but the note to contributors stressed an important development in its vision. Whilst the journal’s roots lay in New Zealand, the second iteration of the journal sought to provide a vehicle for international scholarship, research and debate.⁴ The Pacific locator was contextual in Sutherland’s view, and did not limit submissions to the Pacific region. Likewise, submissions needed no longer to be Baptist in provenance, but of potential significance to Baptist and Anabaptist communities.⁵

As the interests, needs and contributions to the journal have grown in the last fourteen years, there is a need to reflect these changes. This third iteration of the journal, *the Pacific Journal of Theological Research*, remains committed to the original vision of integrative and interdisciplinary theology. We also remain committed to the Baptist roots of this work, but the name and vision of the journal needs to change in order to represent the widening and deepening contributions that include all ecclesial communities as the origins and destinations of the scholarly research and debate. To reflect these changes *PJBR* will now be known as *The Pacific Journal of Theological Research (PJTR)* and will be co-edited by Myk Habets and Andrew Picard. We believe this maintains the original vision of the journal and its roots, whilst expanding its scholarship and readership. *PJTR* is also formally an imprint of Archer Press, which is itself a department of the Baptist Union of New Zealand under the auspices of the New Zealand Baptist Research Society.

¹ Martin Sutherland, “A Note to Contributors,” *The New Zealand Journal of Baptist Research* 1 (1996): 3.

² Martin Sutherland, “Baptist Research—Why Bother?” *The New Zealand Journal of Baptist Research* 1 (1996): 7.

³ Sutherland, “Baptist Research,” 7–8.

⁴ Martin Sutherland, “Notes to Contributors,” *PJBR* 3 (2007): 2.

⁵ Sutherland, “Notes to Contributors,” *PJBR* 3 (2007): 2

The Pacific Journal of Theological Research (PJTR) is an open-access online journal which aims to provide an international vehicle for scholarly theological research with a special focus on the Pacific region. However, topics are not limited to the Pacific region, and all subject matter potentially of significance for theological scholarship and ecclesial communities will be considered. *PJTR* is especially interested in interdisciplinary biblical, theological, and historical research that intersects with other scholarly disciplines and knowledge sources. *PJTR* is published twice-yearly in May and November. Articles are blind peer-reviewed, with submissions sent to international scholars in the appropriate fields for critical review before being accepted for publication. The editors will provide a style guide on enquiry. All manuscript submissions should be addressed to Myk Habets at: myk.habets@carey.ac.nz.

The editors would like to take this opportunity to thank the editorial board, sponsoring institutions, contributors, and readers who together, make this journal an increasingly interesting and valuable vehicle for scholarly exchange. We look forward to the third iteration of the journal and thank you for your continued support.

EDITORIAL: Re-Thinking Baptism

Michael D. O'Neil

While the practice of baptism is almost universal in Christian churches, the practice of this practice is anything but universal. Many differences and even fault lines are evident between various groups and sometimes within the same denomination. Differences include such things as the verbal formula employed to baptise the candidate, or who may baptise or be baptised, and the mode of administration. The moral and ecclesiastical significance of the rite is also understood differently in different contexts. Recent developments such as the Seeker or Emerging Church models of Christian worship have also exerted significant influence on the practice of Christian baptism. These concerns are not merely practical but theological, and not merely theological, but practical. In this instance, as is often the case, theory and praxis co-inhere.

In light of this intimate and abiding connection between theory and practice, the contributors in this volume have set themselves to 're-think' baptism, to consider afresh the theology and practice of the rite within a specifically Baptist context. It is hoped, of course, that these reflections might prove beneficial to a wider audience than those who identify as Baptists.

Bill Leonard, Founding Dean and Professor Emeritus of the Divinity School at Wake Forest University, begins the task of re-thinking with an historical overview of Baptist baptismal practice, and asks whether, in view of the dramatic and permanent transitions being experienced by the churches in the west, baptism means 'anything at all' in the early twenty-first century. Recalling stories of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, and the early Baptists who gathered 'at the river,' Leonard argues that modern Christians 'go back to where we belong...to the river' so that they might discover again and again the liberating and radical meaning of this act of faith. I must also let you know that Professor Leonard prepared his essay in the midst of very difficult circumstances as hurricane Florence swamped the state of North Carolina with thirty-five inches of rain in a matter of days, resulting in widespread flooding, billions of dollars in property damage, and the claiming of fifty-three lives. I am particularly grateful for Bill's contribution, not only for setting the scene for this issue, and opening the discussion, but because it was the chapter on baptism in his book *The Challenge of Being Baptist* which was the catalyst of this project.

My own essay had its origin as an address given at the induction of Rev. Stephen Ingram as the Chair of the National Council of Australian Baptist Ministries in May 2018. I take my lead from Bill Leonard and also adopt an historical perspective to speak to the present situation of the church. I suggest that Baptist convictions concerning believer's baptism have the potential to stimulate genuine and long-term renewal in the church if baptism is coupled to explicit practices of Christian formation inspired by the example of Christians from earlier eras in the history of the church.

Anne Klose of Malyon College in Brisbane continues the discussion of baptism and formation with an exploration of the roles and responsibilities of the various participants in the practice, whom she identifies

as God, the candidate, and the congregation. Anne insists that baptism is both the foundation and the template of spiritual formation, and that it is the nexus of crucial covenantal relations into which the person is baptised—a relationship not only with God and all that this implies, and also with the church as the covenant community of God's people.

The final essay on this theme is by Frank Rees, former Principal of Whitley College in Melbourne and presently serving as Chair of the Academic Board of the University of Divinity in the same city. Frank offers a response to the recent Report of the International Dialogue between the Baptist World Alliance and the World Methodist Council on the question of baptism. His response begins with a summation of this important ecumenical document before considering the broader theological meaning of baptism itself as immersion into the very life of God. Because this is so, baptism has significance for the whole of Christian life and discipleship and not merely 'Christian initiation.'

Finally, Myk Habets, the senior editor of this journal, has contributed a very practical essay on the writing of book reviews which will prove useful to early career researchers and lecturers seeking a succinct resource for encouraging good reading and reviewing habits in their students.

Our hope is that you enjoy engaging in this task of 're-thinking' the theology and practice of baptism, and especially that churches, pastors, and other Christian ministry practitioners will be encouraged to think deeply and seriously about this crucial issue of Christian faith and life.

BAPTISTS AND BAPTISM: A TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY DILEMMA

Bill J. Leonard
Founding Dean and Professor Emeritus,
School of Divinity, Wake Forest University

In 1645, Anglican cleric Daniel Featley published one of the first critiques levelled against “the Dippers,” a relatively new British sect that would soon become known as Baptists. Among multiple criticisms, Featley declared:

They preach, and print, and practice their Heretical impieties openly; they hold their Conventicles weekly in our chief Cities, and Suburbs thereof, and there prophesie by turns; and (that I may use the phrase of Tertullian) *aedificantur in ruinam*, they build one another in the faith of their Sect, to the ruin of their souls; they flock in great multitudes to their Jordans, and both Sexes enter into the River, and are dipt after their manner with a kind of spell containing the heads of their erroneous tenets, and their engaging themselves in their schismatical Covenants, and (if I may so speak) combination of separation. And as they defile our Rivers with their impure washings, and our Pulpits with their false prophecies and fanatical enthusiasms, so the presses sweat and groan under the load of their blasphemies.⁶

Featley debated several Baptists in a gathering in Southwark, England, in the mid-1640s, and published their exchanges in the 1645 book entitled *The Dippers Dipt or, the Anabaptists Duck'd and Plung'd over Head and Ears, at a Disputation in Southwark*. As he saw it, the “Dippers” or “Anabaptists” were little more than a rabble of sectarian anarchists who with little or no theological training or knowledge had set themselves and their off-brand dogmas against the learned, orthodox representatives of the Anglican Christian establishment. Their doctrinal claims, he said, were patently heretical, utilized primarily to mask the sexual immorality evident in their practice of public immersion of both men and women whose water-soaked garments revealed their private body parts. Featley concluded that prurient public displays were merely one element of the Anabaptists’ lustful activities, undergirded by their destructive theological attitudes. Indeed, Featley insisted that,

[A]ll the sacraments of the Church may and ought to be administered without giving any just scandal. But the resort of great multitudes of men and women together in the evening, and going naked into Rivers, there to be plunged and Dipt, cannot be done without scandal, especially where the State giveth no allowance to any such practice, nor appointeth any order to prevent such foul abuses as are

⁶ Daniel Featley, *The Dippers Dipt or, the Anabaptists Duck'd and Plung'd over head and Ears, at a Disputation in Southwark* (London: Printed for N.B and Richard Royston, 1645), A4-5.

like at such disorderly meetings to be committed. *Ergo*, The Sacrament of Baptism ought not to be administered with such plunging or *Dipping*.⁷

Featley acknowledged that Anglicans generally agreed, “Dipping may be used at Baptism,” and that “the Church of England both alloweth it and practiseth it; yet it is in no way necessary, or essential to Baptism.”⁸ For Daniel Featley and other Anglican leaders, adult baptism by immersion, at least in a public setting, was a scandalous act, to be opposed by both church and state for its lasciviousness.

Pushing back, the early Baptists asserted that Christian baptism began at the river, an act accepted by and administered to the Son of God. John the Baptizer came storming out of the wilderness demanding river baptism as a sign of true repentance. Then comes Jesus to the river, seeking baptism. John hesitates, but Jesus insists, and into, under, muddy Jordan he goes, taking all God’s people with him.

For early Baptists, Jesus’ immersion by John in the river Jordan was both the model and method to be followed by those who claimed faith in him. In fact, historian William Brackney identifies immersion baptism as that most unifying distinctive of the people called Baptists. He concludes that more than any other characteristic of the Baptist tradition, believers’ baptism by immersion was the essence of historic Baptist identity.⁹ Baptism is thus an event and a theology which unites Baptists to each other, as well as to Christ and his Church.

Seventeenth century Baptists challenged the prevailing infant baptism of Roman Catholic and Reformation churches by rejecting ‘pedo-baptism’ as an inappropriate practice outside the proper biblical theology and mode. Their commitment to the theology of a believers’ church required a confession of faith in Christ by individuals, essentially adults, who were capable of moral discernment and personal repentance.¹⁰ Baptism was understood as an outward sign of one’s experience of God’s saving grace through faith in Christ. The 1611 confession of faith written by the founding Baptist communion in Amsterdam declared: “That the church of Christ is a company of faithful people separated from the world by the word & spirit of God, being knit unto the Lord, & one another, by Baptism upon their own confession of the faith and sins.”¹¹ Baptists began and continue as a believers’ church, grounded in the need for all persons who claim membership in the church to affirm an experience of grace through Christ, receiving baptism on the basis of that confession.

That initial Baptist congregation was formed in 1609 by a group of British Separatists in exile in Amsterdam. Their leaders, John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, were Separatists who came to believe that the

⁷ Ibid, 39. See also Bill J. Leonard, “Sex, Class, and Religious Freedom: Daniel Featley vs. the Early Baptists,” *Baptist History and Heritage*, (Spring 2018): 26–42.

⁸ Ibid, 36–37.

⁹ William H. Brackney, “‘Commonly, (Though Falsely) Called. . .’: Reflections on the Search for Baptist Identity” in *Perspectives in Churchmanship*, edited by David M. Scholer, (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1986), 79–80.

¹⁰ The earliest Baptists were generally church-related individuals, baptized as infants in Anglican churches, who repudiated that ritual as no real baptism, and received believer’s baptism by affusion (pouring) or, by the 1640s, Immersion. Generally, they administered baptism to adolescents and adults, not to children. Particular (Calvinist) Baptists acknowledged that elect children could be converted whenever God chose to awaken their souls to the need for grace.

¹¹ William L. Lumpkin and Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* Second Edition (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2011), 111.

Church of England was not a true church. They led their little Amsterdam community in renouncing their Anglican baptism and, confessing their faith in Christ, to receive baptism by trine affusion, pouring water three times on the head in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. British historian A. C. Underwood described the event: “Pastor and deacons laid down their office, the church disbanded or avowed itself no church, and all stood as private individuals, unbaptized. All being equal, Smyth proposed that Helwys their social leader baptize them, but he deferred to his spiritual leader.”¹² Smyth baptized himself, then baptized Helwys and the others.

By the 1640s, a group of British Particular Baptists had discovered immersion as practised by the Collegiant Mennonites in the Netherlands, concluding that baptism “ought to be by dipping ye Body into ye Water, resembling Burial & rising again.”¹³ The First London Confession of Particular Baptists (1644) is even more specific in its description of baptism as “an Ordinance of the new Testament, given by Christ to be dispensed only upon persons professing faith, or that are Disciples, or taught, who upon profession of faith, or that are Disciples, or taught, who upon profession of faith, ought to be baptized.” The confession continues that,

The way and manner of the dispensing of this Ordinance the Scripture holds out to be dipping or plunging the whole body under water, it being a sign, but answer the thing signified, which are these: first, the washing the whole soul in the blood of Christ. Secondly, that interest the Saints have in the death, burial, and resurrection; thirdly together with a confirmation of our faith, that as certainly as the body is buried under water, and riseth again, so certainly shall the bodies of the Saints be raised by the power of Christ, in the day of resurrection to reign with Christ.¹⁴

Baptism by immersion became an identifying characteristic of Baptists from that day to this, a practice not without controversy inside and outside the Baptist family. In colonial America, Baptist gatherings at rivers and creeks sometimes produced mob violence from establishmentarian Puritans who opposed the founding of Baptist churches in their towns. William McLoughlin wrote of those occasions: “To avoid trouble, Baptists usually tried to hold their baptismal ceremonies in out-of-the-way places. But sometimes they made a big show of it. In either case, they invited violent reactions from both the respectable and disreputable members of the community.”¹⁵

Nineteenth century Baptists in the United States turned on each other in serious debates over the meaning of baptism, its proper administration, and its implications for church membership. Old Landmarkism, so called, traced Baptist origins through a ‘trail of blood’ that included other sectarian groups from the early days of Christianity including Donatists, Novatians, Waldensians, Anabaptists, and other dissenters deemed heretical by certain European religious establishments. Landmarkism also erroneously

¹² Alfred C. Underwood, *A History of English Baptists* (London: Baptist Union Publishing Department, 1947), 37–38. See also Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2003), 23–26.

¹³ Leonard, *Baptist Ways*, 29.

¹⁴ William L. Lumpkin and Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 155.

¹⁵ William G. McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty: The Baptists' Struggle in New England, 1630-1833* (Hanover, NH: Brown University Press, 1991), 197.

posited that these groups were 'Baptist in everything but name,' thus seeking to prove that Baptists were the 'only true church,' from the beginning of the faith. This allowed them not only to repudiate infant baptism, but also to denounce as invalid 'alien immersion,' an immersion administered by non-Baptist, non-Landmark ministers. Rebaptism was thus required of all who had not received immersion in Landmark congregations, even if they had been previously immersed.¹⁶

By the twentieth century, Baptists were also divided over the question of admitting to church membership those who could testify to an experience of God's grace, having received baptism as infants, or non-immersion baptism in adulthood. That issue remains divisive with some congregations requiring immersion of all persons who receive membership in their specific church. Membership is granted only to the immersed. Other congregations promote what is sometimes called 'open baptism,' receiving as members those who testify to faith, and accepting their infant or non-immersion baptism as valid for membership in a Baptist church. These divisions have often been extended as more people from other denominations seek or consider membership in Baptist congregations.

The twentieth century also gave rise to a phenomenon involving the rebaptism of persons who had received previous baptism in Baptist churches, a practice particularly evident in Baptist churches in the American South. One reason for those multiple immersions may have involved the practice of baptizing young children, sometimes as early as ages 5 or 6. As these children grew to adolescence and adulthood, many became concerned that their earlier baptism was not a valid conversion because they 'did not understand,' 'were pressured' into being baptized, or were 'not really saved.' At the same time, certain churches and pastors emphasized the need for the 'conversion of church members' who had received baptism earlier, but whose conversions were called into question.

In a classic work entitled *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice*, American Baptist historians Norman H. Maring and Winthrop S. Hudson responded to rebaptism practices, noting:

Such rebaptism is of dubious validity and ought to be discouraged. It is normal for adults to grow to deeper levels of Christian understanding and assurance, and their earlier experience may then seem vague and deficient in meaning. It would be a mistake, however, to allow every experience of spiritual renewal to become an occasion to ask for a rebaptism. ... This problem of rebaptizing church members already baptized upon a profession of their faith underscores the advisability of administering baptism only to persons who have reached an age at which they can make a responsible decision to commit their life to the lordship of Jesus Christ.¹⁷

In the twenty-first century, Baptists, like other American religious communities, are living in a time of permanent transition in their institutional and ecclesiastical life that impacts Christian groups across the theological spectrum. Indeed, in the United States, many congregations confront aging constituents,

¹⁶ Leonard, *Baptist Ways*, 183-184.

¹⁷ Norman H. Maring and Winthrop S. Hudson, *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice*, Revised Edition (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1991). See also Bill J. Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 90.

declining finances, and a society in which one in five Americans claim no religious affiliation whatsoever. Some speak of a post-denominational, even post-Christian culture, with new challenges and opportunities the order of the day. Others observe that traditional ways of calling people to conversion, particularly through revivals and other evangelistic traditions are increasingly less viable than in the past. Fewer conversions mean fewer baptisms and dwindling church attendance. If Baptists once took beliefs about baptism for granted, they can do so no longer, and understand that even some of the most active church members may not be clear on what baptism means and why it is an important spiritual experience.¹⁸

The question, ‘Does baptism save you?’, once so important to American Protestants competing seems less relevant as the church moves across the twenty-first century. A more appropriate question is, ‘Does Baptism mean anything at all?’ For many modern’s inside and outside the church, baptism is neither powerful nor significant, but something of an anachronistic initiation ritual of a bygone era. To others, baptism is an antiseptic event, tacked on to worship, streamlined for the sake of convenience. Most churches do not gather at the river anymore. We have taken it inside and toned it down considerably. Some Christian traditions use minimal amounts of water. Baptists dip the entire body, often into heated, fiberglass baptisteries full of fresh water, ‘no muss, no fuss.’ In many churches, after the baptismal service, you can hear the strains of distant hair dryers making new converts presentable before their return to the worshiping congregation. Perhaps we would do better to welcome them into the congregation, dripping a little baptismal water on the carpet and on the rest of us!

In one sense, baptism remains a central event in Baptist identity and practice, administered with joy and celebration as an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. Yet in another sense, across the theological spectrum almost every Baptist group in the United States is experiencing a decline in the number of annual baptisms. For example, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), America’s largest Protestant denomination, has experienced over a decade of decline in baptisms and church membership. Denominational statistics from 2012 suggest that the only age group showing an SBC baptismal increase was the five-year-old’s and that as many as 80 percent of SBC churches baptized only one or no one between the ages of eighteen and thirty—dire statistics for the twice-born future.¹⁹ In their annual report of 2017, SBC churches reported baptizing 254,122 people, some 26.5 percent fewer baptisms than in 2007. That recent ratio was one baptism for every 59 church members.²⁰ The American Baptist Churches, another of the country’s oldest Baptist denominations, reports a significant decline in the number of baptisms, evident in a forty-one percent drop in the last five years.²¹

¹⁸ Bill J. Leonard, “Dull Habit or Acute Fever? William James and the Protestant Conversion Crisis,” *Harvard Divinity School Bulletin* (Summer/Autumn 2015): 48–58.

¹⁹ Kate Tracy, “Five Reasons Why Most Southern Baptist Churches Baptized Almost No Millennials,” *Christianity Today*, May 29, 2014, www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2014/may.

²⁰ Lisa Cannon Green, “ACP: Worship Attendance Rises, Baptisms Decline,” *Baptist Press*, June 1, 2018.

²¹ Chelsen Vicari, “Where Does the American Baptist Churches USA Stand on Sex, Abortion, and Decline?” *Juicy Ecumenism*, June 14, 2018, <https://juicyecumenism.com/2018/06/14/american-baptist-churches-usa-stand-sex-abortion-decline/>. Other Baptist groups are less clear on their baptismal statistics; however, they are no doubt part of the decline evident among the broader Evangelical traditions in the U.S. as evident in the contention that Evangelicals ‘peaked’ in number in the 1990s at some 29% and in 2017 were listed at 17% of the population.

Closely related to the decline of baptisms among Baptists in the United States is the rise of a broad group of religiously unaffiliated individuals often referred to as the “nones,” persons identified in various surveys as those who have distanced themselves from religious institutions. For many years such studies showed that the “nones” or the “unaffiliated” were consistently numbered at around seven percent of the American population. Likewise, succeeding surveys reflect unrelenting increase of “nones,” or “nons,” individuals who self-identify as having no significant engagement with traditional religious communities. Recent studies indicate that the number religiously unaffiliated Americans increase annually, currently the largest single religious identification at 25% as contrast with white evangelicals at some 21%.²² Thus one in five Americans claims no engagement with a religious community. That number increases to one in three for millennials, ages 18 to 30. Those demographic and religion-related developments create major identity issues for American churches and denominations. Baptismal, membership, financial, and institutional declines in the Southern Baptist Convention are a dramatic case in point.²³

In such moments of uncertainty and transition, how are Baptists to respond? Perhaps, like Christians before us in similar circumstances, we return to those things which have been there from the beginning of the church: faith in Jesus Christ and baptism into Christ’s body, the Church. When the old mechanisms and institutions will not hold, and new ones are a long time coming, we go back where we belong. . . to the river. At the river, at baptism, we remember our past to respond to our future.

Four hundred years after those exiled Baptists began their new movement in Amsterdam, Baptists might reassert that Christian baptism is a radical event. It is not merely a command we fulfil, or a membership requirement we must endure to get into the church. It is an act we experience which transforms the experience itself. Baptism does not create salvation, it accompanies it. Baptism is not merely a symbol; rather it is a symbol, which means baptism is an act of faith, and a celebration of God’s grace.

Yet however we administer it, baptism should be a significant moment for participant and observer alike. And every time we do it, we should say again something of what baptism means to the people of God. We might remember, for example, that to be baptized is to put on Christ. As Paul writes, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27). We not only believe in Jesus, but also identify with him and his way of living in the world.

In the early Christian centuries, converts were baptized naked. Now that would perk up a Sunday morning worship service! And they put on white robes when they came up out of the water. It was a sign

²² Betsy Cooper, Daniel Cox, Rachel Lienesch, Robert P. Jones, “Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion—and Why They’re Unlikely to Come Back,” September 22, 2016, PRRI. <http://www.prii.org/research/prii-rns-poll-nones-atheist-leaving-religion/>.

²³ While the number of SBC-related congregations increased, reported membership declined more than 200,000, down 1.32 percent to 15.3 million members. Average weekly worship attendance declined by 1.72 percent to 5.6 million worshippers. Southern Baptists also experienced a decline in baptisms, down 3.3 percent to 295,212. The number of churches affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention grew by 294 to 46,793, a 0.63 percent increase over 2014. This is the 17th year in a row the number of SBC churches has grown. <https://www.getreligion.org/getreligion/2016/6/8/news-in-those-southern-baptist-statistics-baptisms-babies-and-crucial-ethnic-churches>.

that they had literally put on Christ like a new garment. We, like they, are the Christ-bearers of our world, carrying Christ with us out there where we belong.

We might also say that baptism is not merely a symbol of faith—it is an act of faith. Perhaps we might call it a faithful act. Faith and baptism are linked inseparably. All Christian communions affirm that unity. Faith keeps baptism from becoming a purely magic ritual while baptism keeps faith from deteriorating into a purely individualistic experience.

Most of all, perhaps, baptism is the symbol of liberation in Christ. It is the promise of freedom to all who believe. Nowhere is this more evident than in the time of slavery in the American South. White Christians frequently qualified the gospel by insisting that baptism changed only the slave's eternal status, not their earthly condition. But try as they might, they could not keep the liberating power of the gospel from finding its way into the hearts and hopes of the African-Americans. Thus, in 1804, a Kentucky slave woman named Winnie was disciplined by the Forks of Elkhorn Baptist Church where she was a member for saying that "she once thought it her duty to serve her mistress and master, but since the Lord had converted her [since her baptism] she had never believed that any Christian [could keep] Negroes or slaves." And she got into more trouble for saying that "there were thousands of white people wallowing in hell for their treatment to Negroes—and she did not care if there was many more."²⁴ That woman talked free, didn't she, even in slavery?

If we want to keep people in bondage, we should never tell them the story of Jesus, or baptize them into the radical faith of the gospel. To be baptized, therefore is to enter the river, the 'glad river,' through which all the saints have trod. It is to belong to a people. Those who are baptized into Christ are stuck with each other, Paul says, though he says it a little more eloquently than that. "For Christ is like a single body, with its many limbs and organs which, many as they are, together make up one body. For indeed, we were all brought into one body by baptism in the one Spirit. Whether we are Jews or Greeks, whether slave or free, and that one Holy Spirit was poured out for all of us to drink" (I Cor. 12: 12-13). We are a people of liberation, not bondage, captivated by a gospel which is often too radical for us.

This liberating gospel compels us to go out into the world, confronting issues of race and gender, worship and spirituality, witness and mission, sin and salvation—scary stuff. Let us remember that the word Baptist itself is merely an adjective. Baptism unites us with all Christians across the world and extends our calling to persons inside and outside the church. We are the community of the baptized, and it is in community that we continually return to the river, discovering again and again the meaning of this act of faith.

Our daughter, Stephanie, is a person with special needs, with learning and motor skill disabilities. Concepts do not come easily for her. Because of that I supposed that she might never receive baptism since she cannot meet all the conceptual pre-requisites demanded by most Baptists. You see, she does not understand the substitutionary theory of the atonement the way the rest of us do. She will never fathom the

²⁴ William Warren Sweet, ed., *Religion on the American Frontier: The Baptists 1783–1830* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1964), 329.

historical critical method of biblical study or the plenary verbal theory of biblical inspiration. But on the third Sunday in December 1991, on the way home from church, Stephanie, age 16, announced to her mother and me, “I think it’s time for me to be baptized.” We talked about it and she was resolved, so we went to see our pastor, and he was everything a pastor should be for such a moment. He did not speak of what she had to *know*, but what she wished to *be*. “If you receive baptism, Stephanie,” he said, “you are saying that you want to be a follower of Jesus.” Do you want that? She said yes, and we prayed together.

And on Christmas Eve in the year of our Lord, 1991, Stephanie Leonard entered the baptistery of the Crescent Hill Baptist Church, Louisville. “Profess your faith, the pastor said. “Jesus is Lord,” Stephanie replied. And under she went in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in the presence of a congregation which had nurtured her to faith all her 16 years.

Those events taught me this: we are all special needs persons. In some of us it is just a bit more public than in others. If pressed, I must admit that I know more about sin and salvation, history and theology, doctrine and dogma, than my daughter ever will. But I am not certain that such knowledge makes me any closer to grace than she was on that Christmas Eve.

British Baptist theologian Paul Fiddes offers a renewed emphasis on the importance of baptism in Baptist life and tradition, writing “that many Baptists have failed to give due place to the grace of God received at *baptism*.” Rather, they emphasized “the faith of the person coming for baptism, and for the act to be a ‘sign’ of dying and rising with Christ only in the sense of a *visual aid* or illustration.” Thus, baptism was “reduced to an act of obedience and witness alone.” Instead, Fiddes proposes another “long Baptist tradition” that links the grace of God with the experience of baptism itself.²⁵ Instead, he suggests that,

There is room for the saving grace of God in conversion *and* in believers’ baptism if conversion is but one moment in a larger process, in a long story of the saving grace of God that begins with the prevenient work of the Spirit deep in the mysteries of the human heart and ends with the glorifying of the person in the new creation. This is, after all, the New Testament understanding of salvation which is past, present and future. We have arrived once more at the idea of Christian initiation as a journey, but this time from the starting point of the sovereignty of grace, as a power that enables all human response.²⁶

We are always going back there, to the river, aren’t we? Rediscovering the implications and complications of divine grace. For the years ahead, we need great patience with each other, and great humility in the face of the challenges ahead. By faith, we can know that we count, after all, at the river. And for now, that will have to be good news enough, until that day when all God’s people shall gather at the river, that flows by the throne of God.

²⁵ Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2003), 239.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 240.

“FOR AS MANY OF YOU AS WERE BAPTISED INTO CHRIST HAVE CLOTHED YOURSELVES WITH CHRIST”: BAPTISM, BAPTISTS, AND THE RENEWAL OF THE CHURCH

Michael D. O’Neil
Director of Research, Vose Seminary¹

INTRODUCTION

There would be little argument, I think, to the assertion that believer’s baptism stands as the central ritual and symbol of Baptist church life, and that it serves to protect other critical distinctives such as regenerate church membership. Bill Leonard, author of *The Challenge of Being Baptist: Owning a Scandalous Past and an Uncertain Future*, is concerned, however—and I share his concern—that contemporary modes of church life and practice have had a deleterious effect not merely on baptismal practice, but on what it signifies and conveys, and so on Christian faithfulness more generally with the result that the church’s identity and mission into the future is also at least hindered, if not jeopardised.

In this essay, therefore, I take up one of the challenges Bill Leonard has issued in his book. Leonard’s title includes what I think is an intentional double-entendre around the word ‘challenge’: at times it is a challenge *being* a Baptist, on account of a sometimes scandalous past—and even scandalous present; but he also *challenges* his audience to actually *be Baptists* in the face of an uncertain future; to recover boldly, in other words, historical Baptist distinctives. Although he issues several arenas of challenge, I aim specifically to address his twofold challenge that “Baptist churches need to again confront the meaning of regeneration, conversion, and a believer’s church” and in so doing to reaffirm believer’s baptism as “a radical act of Christian commitment, covenantal relationships, and antiestablishment dissent.”² Being a Baptist into the future demands, in Leonard’s view, this kind of theological re-thinking if we are to remain faithful not simply as Baptists but as Christians. To make my case, however, I have to tell a longer story, and so begin with the matter of baptism in the first centuries of the Christian church.

THE EARLY CHRISTIANS

Already by the early fifth century infant baptism was so widely practised, so widely *assumed* as normal Christian practice, that Augustine, in his disputes with Pelagius, could appeal to the practice as a justification for his doctrine of original sin—we practise infant baptism because we are aware of the inherent stain of

¹ This essay was initially prepared as an address given at the induction of Rev. Stephen Ingram as Chair of the National Council of the Australian Baptist Ministries, May 15, 2018 in Perth, Western Australia. Vose Seminary is an affiliate institution of the Australian College of Theology.

² Bill J. Leonard, *The Challenge of Being Baptist: Owning a Scandalous Past and an Uncertain Future* (Waco: Baylor, 2010), 117–18.

sin upon all humanity, and seek the divine remedy whereby that sin might be remitted.³ Infant baptism had indeed been practised since at least the late second century, although its introduction, arguably, was for pastoral rather than theological reasons.⁴ More likely, the church was wrestling with the acceptance of the children of believers into the church, and especially in those not infrequent cases when their children's lives were threatened by illness or accident. Christian parents naturally were concerned for the spiritual welfare of their children and longed for the assurance that their children, too, would be heirs of the eternal kingdom of God. Despite the questions which we might—now in hindsight—ask concerning the emergence of this practice and the welcome of children of Christian parents into the church, what is noteworthy is the significance and centrality of baptism in the minds, theology, and practice of the early Christians.

In the church of the first centuries prior to the accession of Constantine, baptism was the culmination and crown of a long and careful process of conversion. In his 2016 book *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church* Alan Kreider, an Anabaptist theologian and missionary, details this process which often might take as long as three years, or in some cases, even longer.⁵ The process began with evangelisation which is of interest in itself, since the documentation we have from the early centuries suggests that after the initial apostolic and sub-apostolic age there were no evangelists per se. The early church wrote no treatises on mission, did not send missionaries, did not conduct evangelistic rallies, meetings or crusades, and did not even allow non-believers to attend their worship services. Yet, suggests Kreider, citing the research of Rodney Stark, the church may have grown as much as forty percent per decade from the end of the first century to the beginning of the fourth, spreading across the extent of the Roman Empire in the west, as well as in all directions beyond the boundaries of the empire.⁶ This phenomenal rate of growth almost beggars belief, especially when we consider not only the lack of explicit evangelistic activity on the part of the church, but also recall that becoming a Christian in that context was highly undesirable because illegal, and may well result in loss of social status, persecution, and at times, even martyrdom. Becoming a Christian was not easy. Becoming a Christian was not desirable. And yet the church grew—and grew, and grew.

Kreider argues that the church grew by attraction, though not the attractiveness of the church's worship services, or their innovative programmes, or their slick or targeted marketing, or their desirable social profile, or their range of ministries catering to every felt need imaginable. Rather, it was the attractiveness of the lives of those early Christians:

Outsiders became Christian because, for example, they observed the patient way Christians did business with them. We have observed some pagans who found their own rituals unsatisfactory and were willing to consider alternative approaches that Christians embodied. We have seen outsiders expressing amazement at the confident power of Christian women and wondering at the source of

³ See Augustine, "On the Merits and Remission of Sins, and on the Baptism of Infants," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers First Series Volume 5 Augustine: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1887; reprint, 1994).

⁴ Nigel G. Wright, *Free Church, Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), 81.

⁵ Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 133–84.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

their power. We have seen outsiders who heard rumors of the *magnalia* (events of spiritual power) that occurred in Christian gatherings. We have watched as outsiders observed that Christians had distinctive ways of living—burying their poor, refusing to expose unwanted infants, not swearing oaths. Non-Christians scrutinized them; they were aware of the Christians' character and behavior. According to Tertullian, they said, "Look . . . how they love one another . . . and how they are ready to die for each other."⁷

Christians not only were honest business people and neighbours, but lived unusual lives of moral integrity, honouring life and family, and serving the poor and sick, especially in the Christian community, and even beyond the bounds of their community. This was their evangelistic strategy: a visible life of good deeds and not merely words.

But now another question arises: why did the early Christians act the way that they did? The answer has to do with the intentional formation that occurred in the lives of would-be Christians prior to baptism. As Tertullian put it around 200AD, "Christians are made, not born."⁸

What the outsiders observed and appreciated was the result of this formation rather than the formation itself. Once an outsider expressed interest in exploring Christianity they were inducted into 'the catechumenate,' which served as an outer vestibule to the life of the church. The purpose of the catechumenate was to provide would-be Christians with the opportunity to learn the ways of the Christian life. Specifically, it aimed to alter irreversibly the habits of perception and standards of judgment of novices coming out of a pagan life style.⁹

Sometime in the second century Christians decided to slow the process of conversion down by insisting that their converts *embody* change that reflected the teaching and character of Jesus. They insisted on this in part because of what the Jesus whom they worshiped had said, but also because they discovered that embodied change was essential to Christians' witness. If people talked like Christians but behaved like pagans, pagans would not become Christians, and the church would not remain Christian.¹⁰

The diagram below shows that the journey toward baptism involved four stages separated by three 'scrutinies.'¹¹ In the first two scrutinies, it was the sponsor who was questioned and had to advocate for the candidate, while in the third scrutiny, the bishop interviewed the candidate directly. The first scrutiny considered the candidate's relationships and jobs, for it was felt that there were some occupations, and presumably, relations that made it unlikely if not impossible that the candidate would actually be able to

⁷ Ibid., 133. Kreider is citing Tertullian, *Apology* 39.7. See Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson, ed. *Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume 3: Tertullian* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1885; reprint, 1994), 46.

⁸ Kreider, *The Patient Ferment*, 134. Kreider is citing Tertullian, *Apology* 18.4. See Roberts & Donaldson, *Tertullian*, 32.

⁹ Kreider, *The Patient Ferment*, 139.

¹⁰ Ibid., 176.

¹¹ The diagram is found in *ibid.*, 148. The contemporary Roman Catholic 'Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults' is a modern adaptation of this process for adult converts. See, for example, the Rite portrayed diagrammatically at <http://holyfamily.org/rite-of-christian-initiation-of-adults-and-children-2/> and the process explained at <https://www.rcia.org.au/major-rites-and-periods-of-the-rcia-process/>.

‘hear the Word.’ Actors, for example, who often performed nude or near-nude, or those whose occupations involved killing others, were encouraged or required to seek other employment. The second scrutiny explored the extent to which candidate had actually taken on the life and ethos of the Christian community. If they had done so they advanced then to actual baptismal preparation, including doctrinal instruction (“hearing the gospel”). It is noteworthy, that doctrinal and creedal instruction *followed* the fulsome embodiment of the character and way of Jesus.¹²

1. Evangelism	First Scrutiny: Relationships & Jobs	2. Catechumenate	Second Scrutiny: Habitus & Character	3. Baptismal Preparation	Third Scrutiny: Exorcism	4. Baptism
Encountering Christians, finding a sponsor		Hearing the Word		Hearing the gospel		Singing a new song*
Years or months	Until “character” is formed	Weeks or months	For life			

*The phrase “singing a new song” comes not from the *Apostolic Tradition* but from Origen, *Hom. Exod. 5.5*.

In their understanding conversion was not simply an event or experience of divine power. It was more than a feeling, a decision, or change of thinking. Conversion must include a whole-of-life change in which one took up the way of Christ and his kingdom in their life. Conversion in this sense included ‘the embodied reformation of the convert’ brought about by catechesis, and a bodily ritual—baptism—in which the candidate declares that Jesus is Lord, identifies primarily with the Christian family (“I am a Christian”), and commits himself or herself to living in the Christian way.¹³

The catechumen was to develop a new *habitus*—reflexive bodily behaviour that corresponded to the central dispositions and lifestyle of the community’s common life. The Christian *habitus* was a way of life rooted in a host of biblical passages and especially in the teachings of Jesus—that over time and with practice, became embodied and habitual. The catechumens’ task was to learn to live this way of life.¹⁴ Becoming a Christian was not merely a decision to ‘accept Christ,’ nor an acceptance of Christian doctrine.

¹² It is also worth considering that this approach follows a pattern of ‘behave—believe—belong’ in contrast to the more contemporary ‘belong—believe—behave’ model followed in many churches today. This is merely to note the distinction; it remains one of the questions Baptists might seriously consider as they take up Leonard’s challenge. For a discussion of the matter see Brian S. Harris, “From ‘Behave, Believe, Belong’ to ‘Belong, Believe, Behave’—A Missional Journey for the 21st Century,” in *Text & Task: Scripture & Mission*, ed. Michael Parsons (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005).

¹³ Kreider, *The Patient Ferment*, 176.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 165–66.

Rather, it was to embrace a whole new way of living that dealt with everyday issues such as truthfulness, sexual fidelity, provision and burial. And at the heart of this habitus was worship.¹⁵

[Justin Martyr] presents the Christians' lifestyle as a kind of counter-habitus to the lifestyle of the empire's non-Christian inhabitants. Justin sees the Romans' life as a habitus of un-freedom, characterized by addictive practices in four primal areas: sexual ethics, marred by fornication; the occult, trapped by magical arts; wealth and possessions, distorted by competitive acquisitiveness; and violence and xenophobia, filled with hatred and murder toward people of different tribes and customs. ... Having been 'persuaded,' Christians have renounced their old habitus and entered an alternative, life-giving habitus in each of the four areas: in sex, continence; in place of magic, dedication to God; in wealth, 'bringing what we have into a common fund and sharing with everyone in need'; in violence and xenophobia, 'living together and praying for our enemies, and trying to persuade those who unjustly hate us. ... The teachings of Christ are at the heart of the Christians' counter-habitus, and they must be embodied...¹⁶

Entry into the Christian family was both precious and costly, and effected by baptism. Those entering the community were to live distinctively, sharing their economic resources and giving generously to aid fellow Christians. They were to become non-violent in their attitudes, words, physical bearing, and actions. Speech, lifestyle and family were topics of special consideration. Catechumens were taught vigorously to avoid idolatry and sexual immorality. They were to learn the master narrative of Scripture and especially the teachings of Jesus—so they could *live* them. They were given role models to emulate and encouraged to foster a culture of truthfulness and peace. They were given practical instruction on the application of all of these things with respect to the common issues of the day. How long would this process last? As long as it took a catechumen's character to be formed.

After the accession of Constantine in the early fourth century and the subsequent imperial patronage of the church, new Christians flooded the churches in such numbers that this process became impracticable. Further, the conjunction of this church-state synthesis and infant baptism in subsequent centuries led to the situation where one indeed became a Christian, contrary to Tertullian, by being born. One's birth into the state was complemented by one's baptism into the (state) church; Christianity was no longer a radical decision for Christ and his kingdom, and a rejection of the kingdom and praxis of this world, but a matter of geography and cultural custom.

THE EARLY BAPTISTS

Modern Baptists typically trace their origin to a small group of English Separatists who, having fled persecution in their home country, had immigrated to Amsterdam. The decisive event occurred in 1609 when John Smyth baptised himself and other members of the little congregation by effusion. It was the

¹⁵ Ibid., 142.

¹⁶ Ibid., 143–44.

rejection of infant baptism and the adoption of believer's baptism that distinguished the newly-formed Baptists from their Separatist and Puritan roots.¹⁷ An indication of early Baptist baptismal theology and practice can be seen in Thomas Helwys's confession of 1611:

The church of CHRIST is a company of faithful people (1 Corinthians 1.2; Ephesians 1.1), separated from the world by the word and Spirit of GOD (2 Corinthians 6:17), being knit unto the LORD, and one to another by Baptism (1 Corinthians 12:13), upon their own confession of the faith (Acts 8:37) and sins (Matthew 3:6).¹⁸

Baptism is a response to the prior work of the divine Word and Spirit by which the believer is separated from the world, and becomes a member of that company of faithful people which is the church. Baptism 'knits' the person to the Lord and the members of the community 'one unto another.' This baptism occurs upon the confession of their own faith and sins. Baptism was, for these early Baptists, the 'constitution' of the church, and a means of resisting the so-called 'false ministry, false worship and false government' of the established church, and so also a repudiation of the power of the state to control or dictate the affairs of the church.¹⁹ The church is viewed as a covenant community, and the churches developed processes for affirming or denying the profession of those who sought membership in the church.²⁰ These processes were based on a clear understanding of conversion, as detailed in the 1660 Standard Confession of the General Baptists. Conversion involved several steps: one must *assent* to the truth of the gospel, *believe* with all their hearts that forgiveness of sins and eternal life are to be had in Christ, *esteem* Christ as worthy of their constant affections, and subjection to all his commandments, and therefore *resolve* with purpose of heart to so subject themselves to him in all things—and therefore live no longer for themselves, but *commit* themselves to his grace and confidently *depend* on him.²¹ While this portrayal of conversion is not as comprehensive as that of the early Christians—it does not appear to require the embodiment of the new life before baptism is administered—it certainly indicates a similar degree of resolve that the believer is expected to live out in the midst of the community.

The impact of the Great Awakenings and revivalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, radically changed Baptist theology and practice with respect to conversion.

Indeed, from the mid-nineteenth to the late twentieth century, revivals became a major venue for Baptist evangelism and conversion theology. Revivals shortened the process of conversion, fostered 'intense individualization' of religious experiences, extended conversionistic emotionalism, and shaped simple plans of salvation that were easily preached and appropriated. In short, revivalism

¹⁷ See Smyth's polemic against infant baptism in John Smyth, "The Character of the Beast, 1609" in, Joseph Early Jr., ed. *Readings in Baptist History: Four Centuries of Selected Documents* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2008), 1–3.

¹⁸ Thomas Helwys "A Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining in Amsterdam in Holland, 1611" Article 10 in *ibid.*, 9.

¹⁹ See Hughes & Anne Bromheade, "Letter to Sir William Hammerton, 1609" in *ibid.*, 4–6.

²⁰ Leonard, *The Challenge*, 79.

²¹ W. L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Chicago: Judson Press, 1959), 226–27.

created a theology of conversion and a methodology for securing it that shaped Baptist life to the present.²²

CONVERSION AND BAPTISM

While revivalism had definite benefits for the church—numerous people were brought into the Christian faith and the church—certain deficits also arose, including especially the separation of discipleship and church membership from the idea of salvation.²³ Conversion, according to Leonard, has become propositional, individualised, emotive, and transactional, something to be resisted with the same determination with which Luther resisted the transactional conversion of the indulgence trade in the sixteenth century.²⁴ We might also add to his list; ‘conversion’ is understood as a singular event, a decision of the individual, and something complete in and of itself, and guaranteeing salvation in and of itself. Churches and ministers therefore ‘aim for decisions’ in their services and preaching, creating the right atmosphere and removing all barriers in order to facilitate this all-important ‘decision.’ In such an environment baptism, too, may become individualised, another instance of the personal expressivism rampant in contemporary culture, and so evacuated of its theological and congregational significance.²⁵ But baptism is not simply one more ‘lifestyle choice’ in a series of such choices, or something that one can ‘experience’ in the present before moving on to other, newer, more enlivening experiences elsewhere.

In truth, baptism is fundamental. Baptism represents the death of the self and its rebirth in Christ, a decisive breach with the life that has gone before. Baptism establishes a new identity, a new affiliation, a new mode of living, and a new life orientation, direction, and purpose. Baptism is a human action of submission and dedication, not merely to the invisible God in such a way that there is no real consequence of this act, but also to the community into which one is being baptised. Baptism is a concrete, public, and visible act with concrete, public and visible implications. In being baptised the candidate is publicly declaring their fulsome allegiance to and identification with Christ, submitting to his reign, hoping in his promise, joining him in *his* service of God and of others, becoming conformed to him in his death in the hope of

²² Leonard, *The Challenge*, 86.

²³ Scot McKnight suggests that Evangelicals have a gospel which is only a “pale reflection of the gospel of Jesus and the apostles”—a gospel which actually subverts the true gospel and deconstructs the church. See Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 24, 62. Also relevant here is Bonhoeffer’s notion of ‘cheap grace’—grace we give to ourselves, grace as a *system* or *doctrine* of God’s unconditioned and all-forgiving mercy, though with the presumption that no real repentance or discipleship is required from humanity. Bonhoeffer describes cheap grace: “Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.” See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1959; repr., 1995), 44–45.

²⁴ Leonard, *The Challenge*, 94.

²⁵ Charles Taylor refers to expressivism in the ‘age of authenticity’ as “the understanding of life which emerges with the Romantic expressivism of the late-eighteenth century, that each one of us has his/her own way of realizing our humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one’s own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority.” See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2007), 475.

sharing with him in resurrection glory. In being baptised the candidate is named with the threefold name of the one God, and as such is called into the fellowship of this God, into a participation in the divine life and mission, a life of sonship after the pattern of the incarnate Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit and in worshipful obedience to God the Father. In being baptised, the candidate is washed of their old sins and the polluting effects of a pagan life, so that a new way of living begins. They have passed through the waters of new birth as Israel passed through the Red Sea, delivered from the tyranny of their previous lord into the liberty and fruitfulness of the Promised Land. In baptism the believer is plunged by the Spirit into the Body of Christ—a particular local congregation—and so into its life of discipleship, the support of its fellowship, a submission to its spiritual oversight, accountability and discipline, and a participation in its ministry and mission. Baptism is a human work in response to the divine awakening that comes through the gospel. But it is also an act of the church in acknowledging and affirming this divine work. And in this work the Spirit of God is also at work giving grace to the candidate, uniting them with Christ and with his church.²⁶ Baptism is fundamental, involving the wholesale reshaping of a person's entire existence, identity, life purpose, allegiances, and relationships. Like marriage, it is not to be entered into lightly, but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God.²⁷

THE RENEWAL OF THE CHURCH

The church today exists in a time of great change, challenge and opportunity. In our culture immense pressure is being applied to the church and to Christians to withdraw from the public square, to privatise their faith, and to affirm only that which the culture authorises, as though the church had another lord to which it must yield obedience, and another source of revelation to which it must give heed.²⁸ Yet anecdotal evidence also suggests that as Western culture is becoming more polarised, ordinary people are asking questions about faith; the Spirit is at work.

How ready is the church for these times into which we have been called? A few years before his death John Stott was asked in a seminar, what he saw as the greatest issue confronting the church. While organisers groaned at the impossible question Stott walked to the whiteboard and wrote three words: *Growth without Depth*. His counsel to remedy the situation was that preachers feed their congregations with a strong diet of sound expository preaching. Sound counsel indeed.²⁹ More recently, Thomas Bergler in his *The Juvenilization*

²⁶ This exposition of baptism draws on such biblical passages as Colossians 2–3; Romans 6; 1 Corinthians 10; the narrative accounts of the baptism of Jesus in Matthew 3 and Luke 3, and those in Acts. See also the expositions of the meaning of baptism in Wright, *Free Church*, 73–77, and Tracey Mark Stout, *A Fellowship of Baptism: Karl Barth's Ecclesiology in Light of His Understanding of Baptism*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick, 2010), 28–42.

²⁷ The preamble to the marriage ceremony from the Book of Common Prayer.

²⁸ The language echoes Thesis 1 of the Barmen Declaration: “Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death. We reject the false doctrine, as though the church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God's revelation.” (see: <https://www.ekd.de/en/The-Barmen-Declaration-303.htm>)

²⁹ Stott says much the same thing in his *The Contemporary Christian*: “Nothing, it seems to me, is more important for the life and growth, health and depth of the contemporary church than a recovery of serious biblical preaching.” John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian: An Urgent Plea for Double Listening* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 208.

of American Christianity has charged the church at large with immaturity: “We are all adolescents now.”³⁰ He counsels the church to hold forth a robust vision of spiritual maturity, and to provide the practices and environments conducive to the development of such maturity, with intentional efforts directed towards means of evangelism and discipleship that explicitly repudiate and counteract the characteristic weaknesses and besetting sins of the culture.³¹

I suggest that Baptists are uniquely gifted to encounter and navigate the challenging times in which we live. It has never been particularly respectable to be a Baptist, except perhaps, at times, in the American south. Baptists have often found themselves on the outer, marginalised with respect to the main cultural currents and expectations. Yet Baptists may find within their tradition firm resources to ground their convictions, inform their practice, and stiffen their resolve in the face of hostility. The Baptist vision of the church as a covenant community under the immediate lordship of Christ provides a secure sense of identity and connection as a bulwark against the demands of a culture increasingly hostile to Christian faith, at least in its public pronouncements. In particular, their central practice—believer’s baptism—provides an opportunity for Baptists consciously to retrieve the associated practices involved in a process which facilitates the kind of thorough-going conversion aimed at by the early Christians and early Baptists. In my estimation, such retrieval will be crucial if the churches are to navigate the mounting challenges of our time and place with faithfulness and fruitfulness.

The churches of the future may well engage in creative forms of evangelism, ministry and worship; they may well employ the latest leadership technologies and management techniques; and they may well sponsor strategic initiatives aimed at community formation, restoration, healing, and justice. All these and more, hopefully, will belong to the church of the future. But they are not the future of the church. Emil Brunner reminds us that true sanctification and discipleship consists in dwelling in Christ, in *being* more than in *doing*, for what the world needs most, “beyond all else is not action, but new men”—saints; those who live from the love of Christ and in his love, for it is from the new being that there arises ever and again a new action.³² The formation of saints is slow and patient work calling for a grounded community and saintly mentors, as well as a robust theology of conversion and its associated practices. In such a theology believer’s baptism is not merely a step along the way, but the definitive step whereby one’s breach with the past is enacted by one’s whole-of-life allegiance to a new Lord, a new community, and a new way of being in the world.

Therefore, I commend to all Baptists everywhere, the challenge issued by Bill Leonard: that we rethink our understanding—and therefore our practice—of conversion and baptism, and what it means to be a believer’s church; and that we do so in all their theological, ecclesiological, congregational, missional, personal, and practical significance and implications, wrestling with the complexity of the matter, and the many questions of practice which will inevitably arise. The goal is not that we do what the ancients did and

³⁰ Thomas E. Bergler, *The Juvenilization of American Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 1–18.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 226–29.

³² Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of of the Church, Faith, and the Consummation: Dogmatics Volume 3* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 303.

as they did it; I suggest that this may be an impossible or even undesirable goal.³³ Rather, we aim to retrieve the substance of their vision and practice, adapted as necessary for our own quite different context. The goal is the formation of the communion of saints once more in our own time and place as an embodied witness to the saving life, death, way, and teaching of Jesus, that truly, Christ might be formed in us again. As the apostle has said: “For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Galatians 3:27).

³³ English Baptist John Colwell suggests as much: “Though Alan Kreider and others rue the loss of the lengthy catechumenate that came to characterise the early Church, it might be more coherent with the biblical narrative and with a sacramental theology of baptism to rue its inception. ... We do not become disciples in detachment from the Church and the means of grace that constitute its sacramental life; rather we are shaped in the habits and virtues of discipleship precisely through our participation in the Church and its sacramental life. Baptism therefore, properly conceived, should mark the beginning of a life-long ‘catechumenate’ rather than the conclusion of a preliminary and ‘qualifying’ catechumenate. Indeed, the very notion of a ‘qualifying’ catechumenate offends a doctrine of grace.” See John E. Colwell, *Promise & Presence: An Exploration of Sacramental Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), 131–32.

PLAYING OUR PART: A WHO'S-WHO OF BAPTISM AND FORMATION

Anne Klose
Malyon College¹

Introduction

Michael O'Neil raises the vital issue of the relationship between baptism and spiritual formation for the sake of "the renewal of the church".² In doing so, he revisits Alan Kreider's exploration of the ways in which the post-Apostolic church instituted the processes associated with the catechumenate. These occurred over a prolonged period during which new believers were instructed in the faith and encouraged in a Christian habitus, a deeply formed way of life, in preparation for their baptism.³ The expectation was, therefore, that new converts would undergo a significant degree of formation prior to their baptism.

In valuing this connection between baptism and formation, O'Neil is not arguing for a reappropriation of such practices. In fact, he suggests, that this may be an impossible or even undesirable goal.⁴ Specifically, we might conclude, such a move would constitute a denial of New Testament teaching concerning the close temporal association between conversion and baptism, and the historical Baptist affirmation of this. We can, nevertheless, with O'Neil, laud this early commitment to recognise the inextricable links between baptism and formation. We may argue concerning their order but not their necessary and profound interconnectedness.

Such was certainly the commitment of the early Baptists for whom baptism was understood as the initiatory rite of new believers into the visible, gathered church who, together, would seek to fulfil the covenant undertakings given in baptism.⁵ The primary purpose of each church community was to walk together and watch over one another in order to honour Christ, their prophet, priest and king, as those being formed in his likeness. The first fruits of such formation, such as professions of repentance and faith and commitment to obedience, were expected to be apparent in those who testified to their rebirth and sought baptism and its associated church membership.⁶ But, as I will explore further below, in this context, the thought that the baptisand's ongoing formation would not be pursued thereafter with all seriousness by both the baptisand and their church community, was unthinkable.

¹ Malyon College is an affiliate institution of the Australian College of Theology.

² See, Michael D. O'Neil, "For As Many of You as Were Baptised into Christ have Clothed Yourselves with Christ": Baptism, Baptists, and the Renewal of the Church" *Pacific Journal of Theological Research* 14, no. 1 (May 2019): 21-22.

³ Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 134.

⁴ O'Neil, "For as Many," 22.

⁵ This focus on the early Baptists, as I have argued elsewhere, acts as a corrective to the post-Enlightenment influences which have resulted in the distortion and attenuation of many important aspects of church life. Anne Klose, *Covenantal Priesthood: A Narrative of Community for Baptist Churches* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2018), 8.

⁶ William L. Lumpkin, ed., "The Second London Confession of Faith (1677)," in *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1969), 291.

My purpose in this paper is to outline who plays what parts in baptism and formation, and how and why do they do this. In doing so I will explore *baptism* as the foundation of and template for *spiritual formation* through the lens of its *various participants* within the context of *covenant*.

In this brief work I will make a number of assumptions regarding each of the four terms highlighted in this. In relation to baptism, I will be referring to this in its New Testament context which holds believer baptism together with a whole constellation of divine-human encounters which occur at the outset of the Christian life and represent the “impressive array of blessings attached to baptism.”⁷ This does not imply that, for example, baptism produces regeneration but rather that, in New Testament terms, they cannot be regarded as unrelated: it is impossible to imagine either without the other. It is therefore appropriate to hold them together as closely as possible in our considerations.

Spiritual formation (or simply, formation) is that life-long process of growing in Christlikeness which is largely synonymous with such terms as sanctification and discipleship.⁸ It involves every aspect of life and, again, has both divine and human elements.

Regarding the participants in baptism and the part they each play, I take my lead from James McClendon for whom baptism “is a triply enacted sign, a deed in which *God* and *candidate* and (through its designated minister) *church* all act to effect a turn in one life-story (the candidate’s) on the basis of Jesus’ crucified and risen life.”⁹ The role of each of these participants will be explored with regard to both baptism itself and the call to formation which is inherent in it.

And finally, I use the term covenant, also in its scriptural context, as designating the fundamental form of God’s relating with humanity. In this context I take baptism to be the sign of entry into the new covenant, inaugurated by Christ.¹⁰

I hope to demonstrate that these concepts, understood and practised in relation to one another, will indeed, contribute to “the renewal of the church.”

THE PARTICIPANTS IN BAPTISM: WHO IS DOING WHAT AND WHY?

The focus of believer baptism in many Baptist churches tends to fall heavily on the part played by the candidate for baptism. It is this individual who has believed in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, who comes in obedience to Christ’s command, and who is now making a public declaration of their faith. As I

⁷ Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries*, vol. Kindle (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 199. See further discussion below under “God.”

⁸ See for example, Steven L. Porter, “Sanctification in a New Key: Relieving Evangelical Anxieties over Spiritual Formation,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 1, no. 2 (September 2008): 129–148.

⁹ James Wm. McClendon, *Doctrine*, Systematic Theology Vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 390, emphasis in original.

¹⁰ The connection is implicit throughout the New Testament but clearest in Col 2:8-15, as long as it is remembered that the parallel Paul draws is between baptism and *spiritual* circumcision. For early Baptist recognition of this see “The Church” below.

explore below, the role played by the baptisand is indeed of great significance, but only as it takes its place within the wider story of God's redemptive work in initiating and sustaining covenant with his people.

God

God's preeminent role in baptism may be understood in a number of ways which represent, not discrete options, but points along a continuum. At the very least, God may be understood to be active in baptism in his entirely gracious calling of the new believer into new covenant faith and life. It is God who, in Christ and by his Spirit, has provided everything necessary to bring the baptisand to the point of baptism. As George Beasley-Murray has so comprehensively outlined, the New Testament indicates that these baptismally related blessings include:

forgiveness of sin, Acts 2:38 and cleansing from sins, Acts 22:16; 1 Cor. 6:11; union with Christ, Gal. 3:27, and particularly union with Him in his death and resurrection, Rom. 6:3ff; Col. 2:11f, with all that implies of release from sin's power, as well as guilt, and the sharing of the risen life of the Redeemer, Rom. 6:1-11; participation in Christ's sonship, Gal. 3:26f; consecration to God, 1 Cor. 6:11, hence membership in the Church, the Body of Christ, 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27-29; possession of the Spirit, Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 6:11; 12:13, and therefore the new life in the Spirit, i.e. regeneration, Tit. 3:5; Jn. 3:5; grace to live according to the will of God, Rom. 6:1ff; Col. 3:1ff; deliverance from the evil powers that rule this world, Col. 1:13; the inheritance of the Kingdom of God, Jn. 3:5, and the pledge of the resurrection of the body, Eph. 1:13f; 4:30.¹¹

All in all, it is God who has been at work in new believers: it is not that they are including God in their story but rather that God has graciously received them into the wide sweep of his own, and that in baptism they are coming to understand their place in it.

These actions on God's part should, in relation to believer baptism, normally lie in the relatively recent *past* and provide a significant focus for the practice of baptism. In the *present*, in baptism itself, it might be considered that, at the very least, God is present and active by his Spirit in the same way that he is widely expected to be present and active in other communal and devotional activities such as prayer and singing. We do not seem to feel the need to caution those who faithfully expect God's presence with them during such activities that there is 'nothing magical' happening, but it appears to be said with some regularity concerning both baptism and the Lord's Supper. This is certainly a pre-emptive strike against any belief in the automatic bestowal of grace which is inherent in some forms of sacramentalism, but seems to rule out any sense of expectancy concerning God's presence and activity in baptism.¹² And finally along the continuum, there are, as we are now becoming aware, specifically Baptist forms of sacramentalism which

¹¹ George R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 1962), 263–64.

¹² The Baptist rejection of any hint of sacerdotalism and the 'sacramentarianism' that went with it became particularly vehement in the wake of the nineteenth century rise of Tractarianism. David W. Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries: A History of a Global People* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 188

permit the fullest account of God's role in baptism.¹³ Whichever form of God's agency we choose to acknowledge, there is much to be gained as we seek to engage the faithful imagination of both baptisand and church community concerning baptism. To echo George Beasley-Murray, "It behoves us accordingly to make much of baptism. It is given as the trysting place of the sinner with his Saviour; he who has met Him there will not despise it. But in the last resort it is only a place: the Lord Himself is its glory, as He is its grace. Let the glory then be given to whom it belongs!"¹⁴

Such a focus on the priority of God's part in baptism is vital to an appropriate understanding of the nature of formation. It is God himself who works to bring about all the baptismal blessings which are vital to the ongoing process of our spiritual formation.¹⁵ We do not, then, shift from the realm of grace to the dictatorship of works with our progression from justification to sanctification, but rather God's gracious covenant-sustaining action continues to be at work throughout our formation. As in baptism, whilst we most certainly have a part to play in participating in God's transformational work in us, it is God who is primarily at work in this by his Spirit (Phil 2:13; 2 Cor 3:18). And it is God who underwrites the final completion of our Christ-likeness. In baptism, we are united with Christ's resurrection and we are sealed by his Holy Spirit as "the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people" (Eph 1:13). On these terms, God promises that we can look to Jesus as the "pioneer and perfecter", or "author and finisher of our faith" (Heb 12:2 KJV). We *will* grow up into Christ (Eph 4:15); Christ *will* be formed in us (Gal 4:19); and "we *will* be like him, for we will see him as he is" (1 John 3:2, emphasis added). God will, finally do this work in us, and this, far from rendering our efforts towards formation useless, provokes and empowers us for them.

All in all, God is at work in and through baptism for the believer's past, present and future.

The Baptisand

Now indeed we arrive at the part of the new believer who comes to be baptised. For Paul Fiddes the combination of "Calvinist insistence upon the enabling grace of God and Arminian affirmation of 'choosing' Christ" which affirmed the freedom of both God and humanity is part of the genius of the Baptist approach to faith.¹⁶ The free or voluntary response of the human person before God and the world is enacted in baptism. This provides an objective or concrete event which will stand as an Ebenezer or memorial stone in the believer's life (1 Sam 7:12). It is not privatised or internalised in ways which may be questioned at some future date, but rather any of those present will be able to testify that at such and such a place and on such and such a date, this person gave their testimony of God's saving work in them, and

¹³ See my exploration of these in Klose, *Covenantal Priesthood*, 83, 97–98, 180–84.

¹⁴ Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 305.

¹⁵ Again, this term indicates not a causal but a correlational relationship between baptism and the constellation of blessings associated with baptism in the New Testament.

¹⁶ Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), 39. In isolation, this comment minimises the difference between the General and Particular strands of English Baptist life, but does succeed in pointing us to their shared underlying commitment.

gave their promise in response to God's covenanting initiative. There may well be times in the believer's life when, in the trials and temptations of formation, she falls back upon these promises: God has promised and he is faithful; she has promised and she cannot, she will not turn back.

Both parties, the divine and the human, do indeed have their part to play in baptism and, while it is unconscionable to write off God's role in summoning people into covenant as it is represented in baptism, it is also dangerous to underestimate the gravity of the covenant response which the baptisand is called upon to make.

Human response to God's covenant-making is regarded with great solemnity throughout Scripture. It is in fact, a matter of life and death (Deut 30:15). It *is* God who initiates and sustains covenant but the human role is valorised rather than negated by this. In human terms, what could be more significant than the human response to such divine initiative? As Kreider outlines, the lengthy period of preparation prior to baptism in the post-Apostolic period was commensurate with this degree of gravity, given that in baptism each candidate "declares that Jesus is Lord, identifies primarily with the Christian family ('I am a Christian'), and commits himself or herself to living in a Christian way."¹⁷ Although for the early Baptists baptism preceded most of the spiritual formation which was expected to transpire in believer's lives, the connection was nevertheless strongly maintained. In baptism, either implicitly or explicitly, baptisands indicated their affirmation of covenant responsibilities toward God and their church community.¹⁸

When the gravity of the covenant undertakings given in baptism is made apparent to candidates then there is perhaps another hurdle to overcome. For some it may be that the seriousness of such a commitment may sink in all too well.¹⁹ This occurs, however, in the absence of a full grasp of the nature of such covenant-making with God. First, it must be recognised that this has already occurred. To enter into faith *is* to enter into a new covenant relationship with God. Recognition of this in baptism only serves to bring this to the baptisand's attention and to make its form explicit. Secondly, the very nature of the new covenant must be considered. As Stephen Wellum makes clear, God *has always* been gracious in his covenant-making but, contrary to Reformed formulations of Covenant Theology, the *new* covenant is indeed just that: "in the coming of Christ the *nature and structure* of the new covenant has changed, which, at least, entails that *all* those within the 'new covenant community' are people, by definition, who presently have experienced regeneration of the heart and the full forgiveness of sin (see Jer 31:29-34)."²⁰ As we have previously explored, God has already accomplished this and, through the immediacy of this new covenant relationship between himself and each believer – each one knowing him for themselves (Jer 31:29-30) and his presence with every believer by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2) – he has undertaken to bring his work to

¹⁷ Kreider, *The Patient Ferment*, 176.

¹⁸ See further discussion of this under "The Church" below.

¹⁹ In my local church setting some applicants for membership have expressed reluctance to sign a membership covenant on the basis that they fear they will be unable to fulfil its 'requirements.' This despite its clear references to God's grace, members' reliance on his enabling, and the gracious nature of authentic church community.

²⁰ Stephen J. Wellum, "Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants," in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn Wright (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 105, emphases in original.

completion.²¹ The new covenant's newness is also related to the qualitative pre-eminence of Christ's saving work: "What is the *better* nature of the covenant? It is this: because of who the Redeemer is and what he offers as a sacrifice we now have a *more effective* sacrifice and thus a *more effective* covenant; indeed we have a covenant that 'is not susceptible to the breach perpetrated in the past.'"²²

This is the context in which candidates for baptism come to make their baptismal promises in response to God's covenant summons to them.²³ God not only summons them on the basis of the covenant promises he has already made, but also provides for the believer's response, and it is on this basis that "we promise to be faithful to the Lord in terms of covenant obligations, namely, repentance, faith, and obedience."²⁴ It is God's new covenant undertaking which therefore provides the entire context for the baptisand's response. This does not negate the significance of the candidates' response but rather enables them to offer it with deep commitment in thankfulness for all that God has done, *and* with great confidence because of all God will continue to do. And again, the dynamic of formation comes into view.

The connection between baptism and formation may be understood in many ways, but one of the most striking is provided by the Pauline language of baptismal clothing. As the baptisands are immersed beneath the waters of baptism and then raised up from them, they enact the death of their old selves and their rising again to new life in Christ and in doing so, they identify themselves with Christ (Rom 6:3-4; 1 Cor 6:11; Col 2:11-14) thus participating in their formation into his likeness. Or to express it another way, we "have clothed ourselves with Christ" (Gal 3:27; see also Eph 4:24). At some point the early church developed a symbolic process of dis-robing and re-robing, of taking off their old clothes and self in baptism, and putting on new clothes and a new self – Christ.²⁵ This is the kind of image that would have come to mind for Paul's readers at Colossae when he said to them, "Do not lie to one another, *seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self*, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator" (Col 3:9, emphasis added).

In baptism, believers have thus put on Christ in a way which God himself underwrites by his new covenant undertakings. By faith, and through the gracious work of God in Jesus Christ, in baptism believers have already received all the blessings associated with baptism.

And yet... concerning Christian formation, Paul uses many of these very same terms to call his fellow believers to conduct themselves in keeping with these attributes in their daily conduct. So, following on from Col 3:9, he goes on to say, "As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

²¹ Ibid. 143.

²² Ibid. 145.

²³ Resources for such baptismal promises can be found, for example, in The Baptist Union of Great Britain, *Gathering for Worship: Patterns and Prayers for the Community of Disciples*, ed. Christopher J. Ellis and Myra Blyth (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2005).

²⁴ Ibid. 106.

²⁵ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1982), 186.

Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col 3:12-14). Similarly, believers have put on Christ (Gal 3:27) and yet are still to “put on Christ” (Rom 13:14).²⁶

How can both be true? Such imperatives appear in danger of renegeing on the indicatives concerning all that God has already done. For Paul baptism was indeed the time when the entirety of God’s saving work in Christ became active in believers – but they are then called to continue the process, growing into what was complete at their baptism. Paul’s meaning according to F.F Bruce is, “‘Be what you are’... ‘Be in ordinary practice what God’s grace has made you.’”²⁷ Putting on Christ in baptism is not simply an outward identification with him but rather is to become a “habitual association and identification with Christ... ‘being clothed with all the graces that were in him’.”²⁸

In considering this we confront one of the evangelical complaints against spiritual formation and its disciplines. Making something habitual, we know, requires a significant degree of effort. Does this not suggest that whilst we are saved by grace, we are in danger of again shifting the grounds of our spiritual formation or sanctification from grace to works? Dallas Willard is succinct concerning this: “God is not opposed to effort but to earning.”²⁹ We need to unlearn old patterns and relearn new patterns: “our hearts, wills, minds and bodies have to be retrained in new patterns of thought and behavior.”³⁰ This again points us to the kind of effort which is required. Living out our baptismal undertakings cannot be reduced to a frantic hope that when we are, perhaps suddenly, faced with the need to deny ourselves (Matt 16:24), or to regard one another as better than ourselves (Phil 2:3), or to respond “with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience” (Col 3:12), we will simply be able to summon up such attitudes and patterns of behaviour on the spot. The spiritual disciplines are the means by which we slowly and steadily build these virtuous habits – a Christian habitus – and in doing so “grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph 4:15) in whom we have been baptismally clothed.

The Church

As so many of the Scripture references used in this paper to this point demonstrate, such formation is almost entirely relational: it is “a community project” which is only feasible in relationship with “one another.”³¹ In relation to baptism, this is demonstrated by its function as an initiatory rite into the church/covenant community and by the part that community plays in baptism and the formation which follows.

²⁶ For example, in Gal 5:25, believers are both proclaimed to ‘live by the Spirit’ and required to ‘keep in step with the Spirit,’ and in Rom 6:2 Christians are declared to have ‘died to sin’ but in Rom 6:11 they are urged to ‘consider themselves dead to sin.’

²⁷ Bruce, *Galatians*, 186.

²⁸ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 473.

²⁹ Jan Johnson, Keith J. Matthews, and Dallas Willard, *Dallas Willard’s Study Guide to the Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2001), 107.

³⁰ Alan Andrews, “Introduction,” in *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation*, ed. Alan Andrews (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010), 14.

³¹ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 164.

With our current tendency in church practice to focus heavily on the role of the baptisand, the fact that baptism is understood as a rite of initiation into the church cannot be assumed. That baptism is a personal testimony of faith in a public context is incontrovertible. But it is not only this: “For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13, see also Gal 3:28). Our initiation into Christ is inevitably our initiation into his body, the church.

The first challenge arises straight away in terms of what we understand this “church” to be. For many it would appear that the church in this context (if it is considered at all) is understood only in its universal form. This arises, unfortunately, from the individualism which has been layered upon the personal nature of salvation and the immediacy of Christ’s Lordship in the life of the believer, particularly within some strands of Baptist thought. For Francis Wayland, for example, since “religion is a matter which concerns exclusively the relations between an individual and his Maker,”³² the universal church, as an aggregate of saved individuals which remains a largely abstract concept, is all that matters.³³ Such an exclusive emphasis on personal regeneration relegates the local church to a place of marginal significance and membership of the entirely regenerate universal church is, in such a context, of far greater significance and appeal, than membership of the ordinary, earth-bound, flawed and intensely demanding, local expression of it. For Grenz, the outcome is inevitably that “if the visible church is soteriologically irrelevant, participation in it can quickly become, at best, motivated more by pragmatic concerns than by a sense of necessity, and at worst, merely a matter of personal preference.”³⁴ Grenz neatly summarises the view of many of those who (occasionally) fill the pews of Baptist churches.

This clearly contradicts the Baptist insistence on the priority of the local church which, in New Testament terms, is to be understood as “the visible fellowship of believers gathered in a specific location... the most concrete expression of the covenanting people.”³⁵ The relationship between the churches local and universal is such that “each church is the full manifestation in space and time of the one, true, heavenly, eschatological, new covenant church.”³⁶ Baptism, therefore, is certainly into the universal church, but it is unthinkable that this is not expressed through incorporation into a particular local gathering of believers.³⁷ On this basis, whilst baptism by immersion may indeed occur in many different practical contexts

³² Francis Wayland, *Notes on the Principles and Practices of Baptist Churches* (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman & Co., 1857), 178.

³³ Norman H. Maring, “The Individualism of Francis Wayland,” in *Baptist Concepts of the Church: A Survey of the Historical and Theological Issues Which Have Produced Changes in Church Order*, ed. Winthrop Still Hudson (Los Angeles: Judson Press, 1959), 146. Maring, “The Individualism of Francis Wayland”, 146.

³⁴ Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 299.

³⁵ Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 267.

³⁶ Donald A. Carson, “Evangelicals, Ecumenism and the Church,” in *Evangelical Affirmations*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 366.

³⁷ This tension between the universality and particularity of the church into which we are baptised is recognised in the transfer of membership from one local church to another. A new baptism is certainly not required, but there is an acknowledgement that this is the new local church to which this baptised person now belongs.

(baptistries, swimming pools, rivers, seas and even 44-gallon drums),³⁸ baptismal practices go astray when they are removed from the context of the local church community.

The first challenge of grasping the importance of the local church is then followed by the question of the significance of it in baptism and formation. If the local church matters in this context, how is this to be understood?

The significance of the part played by the local church in baptism is borne out by the dual nature of the covenant into which the believer is baptised. Covenant with God is never undertaken in isolation but always assumes a covenant community. And this is, in fact, the cornerstone of Baptist ecclesiology from its roots in English separatism, so that based on the key text of Matthew 18:15-20, “they believed that their life together was created by the unifying presence and power of Christ, made known to them in and through the covenantal relationship they had embraced with one another in faith.”³⁹ With the seventeenth century rediscovery of the significance of believer baptism such covenant undertakings were then understood to be made in baptism itself.⁴⁰ In what form does the church then exist? It comes into being as those called by God into covenant with himself join together in that covenant status through baptism.

On this basis baptism as initiation into the new covenant with God and initiation into membership of the local church are clearly indivisible, in theology if not in practice. Our Baptist heritage indicates that practices in this regard have varied from time to time with commitment to church membership covenants being made explicit at the time of baptism or being understood as subsumed into it.⁴¹ According to Paul Fiddes, the adoption of believer baptism meant that “for most of the seventeenth century, then, Baptists clearly thought of the gathering of the local church in covenant terms, even if they did not have the ‘outward form’.”⁴² Such an outward form was, however, re-established by Benjamin and Elias Keach, whose model covenant of 1697 attempted to give equal emphasis to baptism and covenant.⁴³

Even given the understanding that baptism is *into* the local church, a third challenge is apparent in grasping that believers are also baptised *by* the local church. I was struck some time ago by a painting by a Christian artist which depicted a lone figure in baptismal waters. The choice to represent the believer alone with God was a deliberate one. We can perhaps understand this impulse but the issue it raises is critical: whilst the Christian faith is deeply personal and immediate, it is neither experienced nor expressed in individualistic isolation. So, according to Miroslav Volf, the sacraments are of a type “which no person can self-administer and yet which each person must receive personally.”⁴⁴ This is borne out by Anthony Cross,

³⁸ This latter was witnessed during a church planting visit to the Philippines when no other body of water was available and brings to mind the flexibility counselled by The Didache. Robert F. Lay, *Readings in Historical Theology: Primary Sources of the Christian Faith*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2009), 27.

³⁹ Stephen Brachlow, “Life Together in Exile: The Social Bond of Separatist Ecclesiology,” in *Pilgrim Pathways: Essays in Baptist History in Honour of B.R. White*, ed. William H. Brackney and Paul S. Fiddes (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1999), 116. See, for example, Lumpkin, “The Second London Confession of Faith (1677),” 286.

⁴⁰ Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, 30.

⁴¹ B.R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition: From the Marian Martyrs to the Pilgrim Fathers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 133.

⁴² Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, 31.

⁴³ Charles W. Deweese, “Baptist Church Covenants,” in *The Baptist History Collection: Source Documents*, 25.

⁴⁴ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 163.

for whom, “In the actual act of baptizing the candidate is passive, in that they ‘are baptized’ – they are in the position of receivers – and the church, through its representative and the presence of the gathered community into which the baptized is being initiated, is active, in that they baptize ‘in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit’.”⁴⁵

In this regard, it is perhaps all too easy for congregants to imagine that those who administer baptism do so incidentally, only as practically necessary facilitators of the action between God and the individual baptisand, or at most that “they” (those who administer baptism) are the church. But Cross alerts us to the potential for us to make much clearer that it is “we” the church – those committed to this local church and gathered to sponsor, bear witness and receive this person into covenant communion – who, corporately and through this representative, do the baptising.⁴⁶

And this should immediately bring those in the pews to the front of their seats. Baptism is no “spectator sport.” Those who are in committed (preferably covenant) communion with this local church might do well to consider themselves, spiritually if not physically, present in the baptistry. It is cold and wet, and the waters convey both the privilege and responsibility of participating together in baptising this new member of Christ’s body. And this, in turn, bears with it the recollection of the content and import of the member’s own baptismal vows which they should be prompted to recall and consider in this context.

The acknowledgement of the participation of the church in baptism is perhaps an affront to the baptisand’s self-sufficiency but also holds the promise of others bearing with her and supporting her in her formation. The church’s involvement in baptism is representative of its role in the formation of those who join it. The communal nature of such formation has received increasing levels of attention in recent times,⁴⁷ but the concept was certainly familiar to early Baptists. This in fact was the whole focus of their church covenants which were concerned with the formation of each member *and* the church community as a whole. Under the aegis of their covenant with God, they were, graciously and with deep awareness of their own failings, called to “walk in all holiness, godliness, humility, and brotherly love, as much as in us lieth to render our communion delightful to God, comfortable to ourselves, and lovely to the rest of the Lord’s people.”⁴⁸ They were to “watch over” one another, not suffering sin in one another and being ready to “warn, rebuke, and admonish one another with meekness,” and yet also to confidentially bear “with one another’s weaknesses, failings, and infirmities with much tenderness.”⁴⁹ This formation, rather than any

⁴⁵ Anthony R. Cross, *Recovering the Evangelical Sacrament: Baptisma Semper Reformandum* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 280.

⁴⁶ This raises the issue of the reluctance of many Australian Baptist churches to recognise any distinction between covenant members and those who, no matter how committed, have not explicitly recognised their covenant relationship with this local church. I have canvassed these issues in Klose, *Covenantal Priesthood*, 29, 38, 114, 159.

⁴⁷ See for example, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954); Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1981); Paul Pettit, ed., *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2008).

⁴⁸ Benjamin and Elias Keach, “Covenant of Benjamin and Elias Keech (1697),” in *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms*, ed. Timothy George and Denise George (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 178.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

constitutional/legal rights and obligations, formed the beating heart of early practices concerning Baptist baptism and church membership.

In summary, the church does indeed have a vital role to play in both baptism and formation.

CONCLUSION

Michael O'Neil has drawn our attention to baptism's inextricable links with spiritual formation. Such formation, as Kreider's work reminds us, is vital to the church's capacity to *be the church* and to win others to Christ. Baptism is the foundational divine-human event for this formation and, through the parts played by its various participants, it provides the template for how such formation will continue across a lifetime of growth in Christ-likeness. God's role is, of course, preeminent: whether in baptism or formation, he is present and at work. Baptisands too have their role to play, responding to God's covenant summons in baptism and formation with their whole lives. And the church must play its part, baptising in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and, together, seeking to be formed in Christlikeness in their own lives and as a church community. It is our renewed grasp and practice of all this which holds great promise as we play our part and seek the renewal of the church.

**BAPTISM BY IMMERSION – MORE THAN INITIATION: A RESPONSE TO
THE REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE
BAPTIST WORLD ALLIANCE AND THE WORLD METHODIST COUNCIL**

Frank D. Rees
University of Divinity

The recent Report of the International Dialogue between the Baptist World Alliance and the World Methodist Council, titled *Faith Working Through Love*, provides some very helpful insights into the Baptist understanding and practice of baptism, but equally raises some challenging issues.¹ Beginning with a brief summary of the relevant sections of the Report, we will examine the significance of baptism by immersion as the formation of Christian discipleship, not just as a single event but one that has a continuing effect on the life of the Christian disciple. The specific contributions of this Report will be set within the wider Baptist discussion of baptism, particularly the interest in a sacramental view and the recovery of a covenantal perspective. Baptism is not only to be understood as Christian initiation but is the effective incorporation of members of the body of Christ. It is vital to emphasize, equally, the inter-relationship of baptism and the Lord's Supper, each of which both expresses and effects the spiritual life of those who are 'in Christ'. Both baptism and the Lord's Supper re-member the body of Christ and enable Christians to participate in the life of God.

THE REPORT

The Report is very helpfully structured in sections and numbered paragraphs. Beginning with an outline of its process and a sketch of the history of each denomination, it then presents three main sections: Church, Authority, and Salvation; Baptism and Christian Initiation; and Worship and Witness. The Report concludes with recommendations for continuing fellowship and dialogue. Our particular interest is the section on Baptism, which comprises paragraphs 66 to 92. It is interesting that most of the specific and substantive recommendations concern baptism and these will provide a basis for the discussion which follows.

Paragraph 66 claims that Methodists and Baptists hold many things in common, though it also notes some significant disagreements. The situation is complicated by diverging practices within each denomination and by the fact that the same language may be used but with different meanings. The consensus statement in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (WCC, 1982) provided a helpful starting point for

¹ *Faith Working Through Love*: Report of the International Dialogue between the Baptist World Alliance and the World Methodist Council, 2018. Hereafter the title will be abbreviated in the text as 'The Report', indicating relevant paragraph numbers. The full report can be found at <http://worldmethodistcouncil.org/resources/ecumenical-dialogues/>. An immensely helpful study guide has been produced for the Report also: Valerie Duval-Poujol and Ulrike Schuler, eds., *Faith Working Through Love: Study Guide accompanying the Final Report of the International Dialogue between the Baptist World Alliance and the World Methodist Council*, 2018.

dialogue (Paragraph 67). After noting the basic practices of each community, the Report then affirms the mutual objective of baptism:

Though the practices of our churches may differ, Baptists and Methodists are committed to the historic Christian tradition of baptizing with water, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and *to the end of making disciples*. God's mission calls us to introduce people to Christ and work with them *towards the goal of full Christian maturity*. (Paragraph 69, emphasis added.)

Both churches here affirm, as indicated by the phrases in italics, the role of baptism as foundational to Christian life and discipleship. We shall return to a discussion of baptism in the name of the triune God.

Having begun with this strong mutual affirmation, Paragraph 69 concludes, however, with the observation that 'the typical baptismal practices of our churches are divergent and seemingly incompatible, but we also recognize that through one another's practices true disciples are made'. What is noteworthy here is not only the acknowledgement of 'seeming incompatibility' but the shift of focus onto making 'true disciples'. This focus leads to the main element in this section of the Report, a comparison of two approaches to Christian initiation. This is both helpful and, I shall argue, also unfortunate for Baptists at least, as it has the potential to minimize the significance and power of baptism to a distinct event, largely characterised by the time and place and the specific local community of faith. Whilst all of these elements are important for Baptist ecclesiology, they are dependent upon a more profoundly theological understanding of baptism as the spiritual incorporation of the believer into the body of Christ and thus the life of God in the world past, present and future.

Paragraphs 71 and 72 note the *covenantal* basis of baptism, describing the church as a covenant community and baptism as "a sign of God's covenant that binds us to God and God's people through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ." Unfortunately, while the next sentence mentions 'covenant-making' and 'covenant renewal' no further details or explanations of these aspects are offered.²

The Report then notes that recent developments in ecumenical dialogue concerning baptism have found it helpful 'to speak of baptism within a process of initiation or a journey of Christian beginnings'. This Report follows that pattern, suggesting that "Baptists and Methodists might understand their divergent approaches as alternate patterns of the process of Christian initiation" (Paragraph 74). The Report then sets out this table of two patterns of Christian initiation:

Pattern 1

- (a) Infant Dedication
- (b) Christian Nurture and Catechetical Instruction
- (c) Repentance followed by Baptism and Confession of Faith, including

Pattern 2

- (a) Infant Baptism
- (b) Christian Nurture and Catechetical Instruction
- (c) Repentance and the Confession and Confirmation of Faith,

² The character of baptism as participation in a covenant with God and the church, and whether these aspects imply a sacramental view of baptism, has been explored in a significant work by Brandon C. Jones, *Waters of Promise: Finding Meaning in Believer Baptism* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012).

the Laying on of Hands	including the Laying on of Hands
(d) Reception into membership	(d) Reception into membership
Participation in the Lord's Supper	Participation in the Lord's Supper
followed by life of Discipleship.	followed by life of Discipleship. ³

What is significant here is the concluding phrase ‘followed by life of discipleship’, which can be taken to mean that discipleship *follows* baptism, reception into membership and participation in the Lord’s Supper. This suggestion clearly arises from a focus on initiation, understood as an originating or foundational *event*. The difficulty here is the implication that the baptised person is not yet a disciple, whereas I shall argue for the view that those who are baptised are already disciples—by definition those who are not yet fully formed in faith and witness but who, nonetheless, have come to see that their lives are gathered into the creative, life-transforming presence and mission of the triune God. Baptism is, according to this view, an enactment and outworking of the immersive reality of conversion, a confirming means of grace and a prolepsis of the hope of resurrection with Christ.

Subsequent paragraphs in the Report explain each of the elements listed in the table above, including the Methodist understanding of Confirmation and some discussion of enhanced symbolic ritual aspects of baptismal practice. There is an acknowledgement that Baptists “have not always been faithful in and effective in making disciples of those whom we baptize, calling us to give greater intentionality to the instruction in holiness,” while Methodists affirm that their trust in the lively faith of a congregation, or of parents, has not always been well founded’ (Paragraph 79). Both churches oppose indiscriminate baptism and commit themselves to more effective nurture and catechesis. The remaining paragraphs of this section explore the relationship of baptism to discipleship and growth in grace.

It is here that significant differences emerge. It is worth quoting the rather complex opening sentences of Paragraph 82, which names these differences:

We recognize that there are different emphases in talking about what Methodists and Baptists call ‘means of grace’ and ‘growth in grace,’ through preaching and teaching, both pre- and post-baptism. We detect some apparent polarities in the faith of the candidate/faith of the church, human response/God’s action, baptism in water/baptism in Spirit, and faith/baptism, but we want to affirm that it is a case of both/and rather than either/or in all of these cases.

The paragraph that follows offers a basis for affirming these ‘both/ands’—a common affirmation that baptism “bears witness to regeneration or rebirth,” albeit that this reality is understood differently. Thus, Baptists see baptism “as a witness to and seal of the divine work of regeneration, and so see it as properly following repentance and awakening of faith.” As such, baptism is the rite of entry into the church, which ‘protects the character of the church’ as a community of believers. Whereas Methodists also celebrate

³ It is perhaps worth noting that the patterns of initiation as outlined both seem to imply a non-missionary context. That is to say, they envisage people coming to baptism from within a Christian family, within a Christian community. There is no clear indication of what might be the pattern in a situation where people come to a conversion experience as adults, nor any suggestion that this might be a genuinely desirable and common occurrence.

God's work of regeneration, and are committed to regenerate church membership, "they do not see restricting baptism to believers only as the way to protect these gospel truths. Methodists understand baptism to be a sign of God's grace at work in the life of the child born into the family of faith long before being capable of making a personal response" (Paragraph 83).

It is here, and in the recommendations at the conclusion of the Report, that we see some helpful indications for Baptists to reflect more deeply and clearly on the biblical and theological meaning of our practice. The fundamental question is what baptism is and how it has continuous significance for Christian life. Most helpful here is Recommendation 6, which encourages Baptists and Methodists to "remember, reaffirm, and rejoice in their own baptism regularly." The sentence that follows is immensely important: "We believe that greater attention needs to be given to liturgies emphasizing active remembrance (*anamnesis*) of our own baptism, and providing opportunities for the reaffirmation of baptismal vows."

In what follows, I shall draw upon current Baptist scholarship about baptism to offer some response to the challenges of this Report. One vital concern is the continuing question of the nature and meaning of baptism. From these reflections, I shall argue for the need for a much closer understanding of the relationship between the Lord's Supper, which is the primary focus of Christian anamnesis, and the life of the baptised. Here we celebrate and participate in the one life in communion with the whole body of Christ and are *re-membered* and sustained in that life. We receive and affirm the life in which we are immersed.

BAPTISM AS IMMERSION IN GOD

Baptism is not primarily about immersion in water. It is about being immersed in God. It is the sign of this creative, continuous reality to which one has come alive. This transformation at the heart of the Apostle Paul's own experience and teaching gave rise to images such as a new birth or waking up from a deadness. It is what he meant by being 'in Christ'.⁴

The commandment of Jesus, commonly called the Great Commission, urges his followers to go and make disciples of all nations, 'baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (Matt. 28:19-20). An interesting rendition of this commission is offered in the *Complete Jewish Bible*, a translation by David H. Stern for the Jewish New Testament Publications group: "Therefore, go and make people from all nations into *talidim*, immersing them in the reality of the Father, the Son and the *Ruach HaKodesh*."⁵

Immersed 'in the reality of God': this rendition evokes the idea that Christian faith is participation in the eschatological reality of God's presence, transforming this world into God's promised celebration of *koinonia*, life together, a new creation demonstrated in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth,

⁴ James D. G. Dunn argues that the expression 'in Christ' (occurring 83 times in the undisputed letters of Paul, together with many other related forms) is a distinctively Pauline way of understanding Christian identity. Participation in Christ is the basic character of Christian life and is also the direct meaning of Christian baptism. James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). See particularly Section 15. 1.

⁵ David H. Stern, *Complete Jewish Bible* (Clarkville: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1998).

and remembered at the Lord's Table. It is this life and this reality into which Christians are 'initiated'. Baptism, then, is a symbol and a means of this life. Here I draw upon Paul Tillich's explanation of a symbol as a sign which participates in the reality to which it points.⁶ Baptism itself is not the reality of God's life but is powerfully symbolic of that life and as we are immersed in water we enact and symbolise that reality to which we have come alive. In order to explore these wider implications of baptism, we will consider the current discussion amongst Baptist scholars about baptism as a sacrament or a living sign. First, however, we need to address the more traditional translation of Matthew 28:19 and the historic practice (affirmed in the Report by both Methodists and Baptists) of baptising 'in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.'

BAPTISED 'IN THE NAME'

There has long been discussion surrounding the baptismal formula, 'in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.' There are two matters for consideration here: first, *which* names are to be invoked when someone is baptised and secondly the significance of the *name* as such.

In the last century a movement has developed, particularly amongst Pentecostal Christians, towards baptism in the name of Jesus (only), though this practice has considerable historical precedent. It is not difficult to draw from the New Testament the inference that the first Christians baptised in the name of Jesus, or perhaps Jesus Christ. At Pentecost, the new believers were urged to be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts. 2. 38). Similarly, when Philip had preached to some Samaritans 'the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ' they were baptised. Interestingly the Revised Version (published in the late 19th Century) adds 'into the name of the Lord Jesus' after the word 'baptised,' a stress which is not supported by the standard Greek texts (Acts 8:12). Nevertheless, the practice of baptism in the name of Jesus continues in the Acts narratives: Cornelius is baptised in the name of the Lord, with the clear implication that it is Jesus who is Lord. Indeed, some versions of this story, including the Vulgate, make it clear by rendering it 'in the name of Jesus Christ' (Acts 10:48). Believers at Ephesus also were baptised 'in the name of the Lord Jesus' (Acts. 19:5).

Similarly, Paul's own reference to 'all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus' (Romans 6:3) may be understood as being baptised into or with the name of Christ. The same expression is used in Gal. 3:27, where Paul says that those who were baptised 'into Christ' have clothed themselves with Christ. The imagery here, as in Romans 6:3-4, and Col. 2:12, clearly links the identity of the baptised with Christ, such that even where the word 'name' is not explicitly used it may be taken to be implied.

Something of the significance of this formulation, baptising in the name of Jesus Christ, can be seen when we consider the wider biblical idea of 'calling upon the name of the Lord'. Joel D. Estes has helpfully traced the significance of this idea throughout the entire Bible, noting the cultic context of many such

⁶ Tillich sought to explain religious symbols in a number of places, but most succinctly in Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), 41-54.

usages.⁷ Whilst the broader aspects of this study are beyond our current subject, the critical issue concerns the idea expressed in Romans 10:13, ‘Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.’

Clearly ‘the name’ here is more than a word or a label. Rather, in the words of Martin Vincent’s classic word study, the name of the Lord is “the expression of the sum total of the divine Being; not his designation as god or Lord, but the formula in which all his attributes and characteristics are summed up.”⁸ To call upon the name of the Lord is to bear homage to and to align oneself with the Lord, in trust and hope. This is a very strong theme throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. In particular, Romans 10:13 has very direct resonance with Joel 2:32.

Two points from Estes’ study are of specific relevance here. First, from his study of this section of Romans 10 he asserts in summary that to call upon the name of the Lord is not exactly the same thing as to believe, as some have suggested, though the two elements are inseparable.⁹ This supports the broader conclusion that confession of Jesus as Lord was “rather well fixed within early Christianity.” The suggestion here is that this confession was not so much a response to persecution (though it may still have been used in that context) but arose within a liturgical life, a life of worship and (specifically) baptism. Indeed Estes concludes that “the NT consistently uses the expression ‘call on the name of the Lord’ to denote the worship of Jesus, which he suggests was a defining characteristic of early Christian communities.”¹⁰

Second, Estes notes the extraordinary character of this development. “At no point is the phrase [call upon the name of the Lord] used among pre-Christian writers to refer to any figures (angels, divine mediators, etc.) other than YHWH, the God of Israel. However, in the New Testament this situation is reversed.”¹¹ It is startling, Estes observes, that the phrase is never applied to God, but only to Jesus. This he sees as ‘a singular innovation’ of Christian worship. It indicates the fundamental development of a Christian theology, reaching first in worship and later in doctrinal formulation to the affirmation of Jesus as Lord and God as Trinity.

Given this well-established worship of Jesus as Lord, it may seem surprising that within a very short period of time the Didache instructs that Christians are to be baptised in the triune name. Didache 7 instructs that as baptism is administered, the name of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is to be invoked.

⁷ Joel D. Estes, “Calling upon the Name of the Lord: The Meaning and Significance of *ἐπικαλεῖω* in Romans 10:13” *Themelios* 41.1 (2016): 20–36.

⁸ Martin Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, (originally published 1887), comment on ‘in the name’, occurring in Matthew 28:19. My reference is to the Amazon Kindle Edition, Copyright Bart Byl, 2013, Location 2241. The close association of the name of Christ with God, or the name of God, is affirmed in the detailed study found in Gerhard Friedrich (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967). The article on the word ‘name,’ *ὄνομα* includes the statement, “In the NT the name, person and work of God are—with various differentiations—inseparably linked with the name, person and work of Jesus Christ” (271).

⁹ Estes, “Calling upon the Name of the Lord,” 24.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 32–33.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

This practice draws its inspiration from the instruction of Jesus in Matt. 28:19 and clearly reflects the understanding of Christ as Lord within the developing trinitarian theology.¹²

It seems that the two practices, baptising in the name of Jesus Christ and baptising in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, continued throughout many centuries. Indeed there is a long history of commentary upon the former. For example, in his Epistle 72, Cyprian engages in extensive and sometimes tortuous critique of the baptismal practices of various ‘heretics.’ Can these baptisms be valid and people so baptised be admitted to the Church? Cyprian affirms that those baptised in the name of Jesus (only) have indeed been validly baptised since that baptism is implicitly baptism in the name of the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.¹³ Ambrose made a similar judgment, while (much later) the Baptist Standard Confession of 1660 affirms baptism of believers either in the name of Christ or in the Triune name.¹⁴ For his part, Martin Luther regarded baptisms in the name of Jesus (only) as acceptable provided they were carried out in good faith, and he considered the ‘anxious disputings’ over the wording—the names used in the rite—were mere ‘pedantry’.¹⁵

This latter comment, however, raises the question of whether it is simply a matter of wording. Surely not. As already noted, a name so invoked is far more than a label or designation. To act ‘in the name’ of someone is to act upon their authority or in concert with their purposes. This is what is signified when Jesus invited his followers to ‘ask in my name’—and what is in accordance with his will and purposes will be granted (John 14:13-14; John 16:23-24; cf. Mark 11:24, Matt. 21:22).

If, then, the name has such significance, does it make a difference whether people are baptised in the name of Jesus only, or in the triune name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit? For some, to follow the trinitarian formula is to follow the instruction of Jesus, as indicated in Matthew 28:19. Those who emphasise the notion of baptism as an *ordinance* draw significance from this verse, as a direct instruction from Jesus. Those who practice baptism in the name of Jesus (only) may also appeal to many New Testament verses. It is not possible to determine one direction or another by appeal to Scripture alone. Perhaps the only resolution to this question is the affirmation that to confess Jesus as Lord is also to affirm the one God, who is known as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The difference in words here is not a difference in the identity of God, but rather indicates ways of seeing and knowing God. Christians affirm that we know the triune

¹² Beasley-Murray argues that possibly the original words of Jesus, the command to baptise in the name of Lord Jesus (as evidenced by the practice of the Apostles), were “later conformed to Church terminology.” George R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1963), 82–83.

¹³ Cyprian, Epistle 72, addressed to Pope Stephen. “Cyprian and Other Bishops at the Council of Carthage to Stephen,” In *Letters (1–81) The Fathers of the Church*, Volume 51, 265–68 (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1964). Available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt284z4s> [accessed October 2, 2018].

¹⁴ St Ambrose: “So those baptised in the Name of Christ are held to be baptized in the Name of the Father and of the Holy Spirit, if, that is, there is belief in the Three Persons, otherwise the baptism is null.” St Ambrose, *On the Holy Spirit*, Book 1, Chapter 3. Available at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/34021.htm>. [Accessed October 2, 2018]. The Baptist Standard Confession, made at London in 1660, affirms in Paragraph XI that the church is “to Baptise (that is in English to Dip) in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, or in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Available at http://www.baptistcenter.net/confessions/Standard_Confession_1660.pdf [accessed October 2, 2018].

¹⁵ Martin Luther, *Prelude to the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, First published 1530; Project Wittenberg Online Electronic Project Edition, <http://www.projectwittenberg.org>. Chapter 3, ‘The Sacrament of Baptism’. Paragraph 3.14 [accessed, October 2, 2018].

God through knowing and confessing Jesus Christ as Lord. It is the Spirit of God who enables us to know him and to make this confession (1 John 4:2-3; Romans 8:12-17.) To confess Jesus as Lord is to acknowledge the One who sent him into the world, his Father. In this way, then, to 'name' Christ as Lord is to acknowledge the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. To be baptised into Christ is also to be baptised into the reality of the triune God.

The power of 'naming', a creative mystery shared by the Creator with humans according to Genesis 2:19, is a vital part of the drama of baptism and in many traditions the 'Christian name' is given to a person at their baptism. From the beginning, baptism has been known as a mystery, part of the original sense of the word 'sacrament.' There has been much discussion among Baptists around the idea of 'sacraments,' with some strongly resistant to the notion and others, particularly British scholars in recent decades, affirming a 'sacramental Baptist' position. While it not possible to rehearse all of the issues here, it is pertinent to identify several key aspects.

BAPTISM AS A LIVING SIGN

Richard Kidd explores the idea of 'living signs' as a way of understanding baptism. His essay, "Baptism and the Identity of Christian Communities" begins with a characteristic recognition of 'a muddle.' He notes not only the divisions between different Christian communities and their baptismal practices but also the diversity of practice within his own Baptist tradition. How should baptism be understood within "a plural society, where no one cares whether we are Christians or not"?¹⁶ Drawing upon a linguistic theory of signs, Kidd explores the idea that baptism is a living sign, which forms and shapes not just individual Christians' identity but also the identity of communities engaging in those baptismal rituals. He argues that living signs may be 'cut free' from an originating context and acquire different meanings as they are used in various ways by other communities. This insight helps to explain the 'muddle' about baptism:

The sign we call 'baptism' does not simply carry a pre-given meaning, nor is it uniquely tied to a ritual. It does not have its whole meaning lurking below the surface that can be pierced by a technique such as biblical study or historical reconstruction. Because it 'lives', the sign we call baptism has already generated many independent histories; each points beyond itself, and each bears meaning only in relation to other signs with which it connects.¹⁷

Richard Kidd's essay is one of the many insightful contributions to the collection *Reflections on the Water: Understanding God and the World through the Baptism of Believers*. In that same volume, Christopher Ellis writes of baptism as a sacrament, arguing specifically from the freedom of God, made known in Jesus

¹⁶ Richard Kidd, "Baptism and the Identity of Christian Communities" in *Reflections on the Water: Understanding God and the World through the Baptism of Believers*, ed. Paul S. Fiddes (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 1996), 85–99, 90.

¹⁷ Ibid. 91. Later I shall return to this important suggestion that baptism bears meaning in relation to another vital Christian 'sign,' namely the Lord's Supper.

Christ especially as one who is active in the world for the salvation of human beings. Ellis combines the idea of baptism as an ‘ordinance’ with this particular understanding of God’s sacramental activity:

In baptism the one who is baptized is seen to be following the example of Christ, and yet this is an inadequate explanation. The person moves beyond following an example to being united with the risen Christ in the power of the Spirit—united with Christ in his baptism, in his death on the cross, and in his resurrection. Thus the believer rises from the water to live the resurrection life in the ‘in-between time.’¹⁸

Ellis goes on to describe baptism as a sacrament of proclamation, partnership, presence, prophecy and promise, all made possible through ‘the sacramental freedom of God’.¹⁹

Central to the possibility of this sacramental or ‘living sign’ understanding of baptism, however, is an understanding of creation as itself a medium of God’s presence and action. Thus in his essay “Baptism and Creation” Paul Fiddes identifies the vital linkage between the believer, the community of faith and the created order.

In baptism, then, the candidate *and* the community find themselves involved in a deeper way in God’s relationships with church, human community, and cosmos. The water as an element of creation enables that participation to take place, evoking such experiences as birth, cleansing, conflict, journey, and renewal. These motifs are planted deeply in the human awareness of the natural world, but they also belong to the story of God’s pilgrimage with His people through history and are finally focused in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.²⁰

Later in the same volume, Hazel Sherman picks up this idea of baptism as participation in God, linking it as we have done, to the notion of baptism in the triune name. “What’s in a name?” she asks. “There is a connection between identity and name that we can recognize as a distant relation to the passionate conviction that name and nature are intertwined, that in fact there is everything in a name. Christian baptism is baptism into the very life of God, named not in the stark otherness of ‘God’ but in threefold relationship.”²¹

There is much in the New Testament to ground these ideas of the life of the baptized as participation in the life of God, as we have seen more generally described as life in Christ. Perhaps the most powerful New Testament image of this baptism into a new life in God is the Pauline concept of dying to an old way and being raised to live in the Spirit, to be ‘in Christ’. The opening verses of Romans 6 use the physical drama of baptism as a picture-sermon on the meaning of baptism as new birth. In addition, there are

¹⁸ Christopher Ellis, “Baptism and the Sacramental Freedom of God” in *Reflections on the Water*, 23–45; 27.

¹⁹ Ibid. “Baptism,” 35–41.

²⁰ Paul S. Fiddes, “Baptism and Creation,” in *Reflections on the Water*, 47–67; 65.

²¹ Hazel Sherman, “Baptized—in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” in *Reflections on the Water*, 101–116; 110.

numerous passages where Paul writes of Christians as being dead to sin or to the former life, and now *alive to Christ* and the way of salvation. 2 Corinthians 5:17 refers to this life situation as ‘a new creation.’

It is helpful to identify some of the positive characteristics of this new life of the baptized. It is intrinsic to this conception that those who are baptised are not isolated individuals. They are inherently members of the ‘body of Christ.’ Though they are each baptised, they are never alone in this process. In most forms of this ritual, a person is brought to the baptismal pool by others and welcomed by the community as new members of the local church. Most importantly, Christ is the head of this new baptismal, resurrection body. This is another way of saying that Christ is Lord, which was most likely the earliest baptismal confession.

Second, this new birth image implies the need for growth. Disciples begin as ‘little ones’ growing into Christ. The Spirit enables and directs this growth, as Ephesians 4 suggests, so that the whole body grows together into the maturity of Christ and ‘into Christ.’ It is not an individual growth but growth as members of the body of Christ. It is growth into the very likeness of Christ, which is the same as saying that the community becomes the garden of the Spirit, where the fruits of the Spirit emerge.

All of this reflects Jesus’ own proclamation of the reign of God. To be alive ‘in Christ’ is to be drawn actively into the drama of God and gathered into the movement of God’s purposes in the world. Baptism is thus the re-orientation of the person towards the future of Jesus, not simply to follow his example from the past but to engage now in his mission towards the fulfilment of his mission, the promised reign of God. Jesus’ own baptism meant a commitment towards ministry, cross and resurrection. For Christians too, baptism means a re-orientation of existence towards a ‘new world,’ as was disclosed in that same life, death and resurrection. Jürgen Moltmann summed up these aspects in the pithy sentence, ‘Christian baptism is eschatology put into practice’.²²

It is precisely here that it is crucial to maintain a clear and strong link between the two sacraments or ordinances, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, as both invite us into the past, present and future of Jesus Christ.

BAPTISM AND THE LORD’S SUPPER: LIFE AS THE BODY OF CHRIST

In his immensely significant offering of a ‘Catholic Baptist’ ecclesiology, Barry Harvey details some of the critical elements we have already noted, particularly in a chapter entitled “Sacramental Sinews: Liturgy and the Remembering of Christ’s body.” Harvey contends that we need to recover a deeper sense of what is happening when the “sacramental signs instituted by Christ” are “properly performed.”²³ In this one sentence Harvey combines an appreciation for *sacraments*, a recognition of the essential emphasis on their

²² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, trans. Margaret Kohn (London: SCM Press, 1977), 235.

²³ Barry Harvey, *Can These Bones Live? A Catholic Baptist Engagement with Ecclesiology, Hermeneutics, and Social Theory* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008), 201. By ‘we’ Harvey means not only Baptists, though he certainly does address his own community.

having been instituted by Christ—they are thus *ordinances*—and a reference to the Reformation stress on the *right administration* of these rituals.

Harvey then asks, in common with several of the scholars already mentioned, how these signs work. He refers to sacraments as ‘apocalyptic actions’, drawing upon the proper sense of apocalypse as revelation: what takes place in baptism and the Lord’s Supper is the epiphany of the new creation. Here there is a vital link with the theology of creation. Harvey’s purpose, though, is to explain in more specific detail the ‘discipline’ needed to perceive and receive these gifts of God. The church has a ‘cosmical and eschatological vocation’ to receive the power to become what it is, namely *the* sacrament in Christ of the new creation.²⁴

The theological basis of this possibility requires that we address the secularist and largely functionalist ethos of our broader culture. How can ‘mere things’ relate us so directly and intimately to God? This is only possible if we affirm a sacramentality in creation itself. Here I find a most interesting resonance with the view explored long ago by Donald Baillie in his excellent study of *The Theology of the Sacraments*. Baillie asked whether the idea of God acting through particular acts, rituals or elements—bread, wine, water—is something entirely unique to those acts and those rituals or is it more like a concentration or special focussing of what is more general in the whole universe. Is the ‘sacramental’ capacity entirely in the Word preached, enabling those elements to become special agents of God’s presence, or does that Word bring into focus something inherent in the material structures of the universe far more generally?²⁵

For Baillie there is a necessary linkage between a theology of sacraments and a theology of creation. He expresses the connection as follows:

[W]hen Christianity took the common elements of water and bread and wine and made sacraments of them, it was because this universe is the sacramental kind of place in which that can fitly happen; because these elements, these creatures of God, do lend themselves to such a use; and because we men and women, who are another sort of God’s creatures, do require in our religion such a use of material things and symbolic actions.²⁶

What is crucial here is the description of the elements of water, bread and wine as ‘creatures’, parts of God’s creation, and the analogous description of humans as fellow-creatures, and then the idea that these action-pictures are things we need. It is part of our created nature to need such things; they help us to know and see God. It is on this basis that we argued above that the action-picture of immersion in water enables us to see that we are immersed in the reality of God. In rising from the water we come alive to this ‘new creation’ already given to us, now to be lived into.

Baillie was intrigued to find that Calvin had such a wider view of nature: “he bases the Christian sacraments on this broader basis of nature, recognizing that God can take any one of His created elements

²⁴ Ibid. 202.

²⁵ Donald Baillie, *The Theology of the Sacraments and Other Papers* (London: Faber & Faber, 1957), see especially 42–47, ‘A Sacramental Universe.’

²⁶ Ibid. 44.

and use it sacramentally, apart from the sacraments in the narrow and proper sense.”²⁷ Calvin uses the example of the rainbow, which God uses as a pledge to Noah: and he asks the serious question how can the refraction of light really be a pledge of the faithfulness and goodness of God? While we can explain the physical data in what we might call a scientific way, nonetheless it is stupid to deny that such physical realities can also be used by God ‘for the promotion of His own glory’ and he explains that the Word of God can so impress us that what were previously seen as ‘mere elements’ can now become sacraments.

Again we note the need to learn to perceive this sacramental dimension of the world around us. While Calvin stresses the word of God as the primary influence here, Harvey follows Dietrich Bonhoeffer in stressing the revelatory role of baptism and the Lord’s Supper: “It is at the baptismal font and the table of the crucified and risen Lord, then, that men and women have most directly and insistently to do ‘with the realization of the Christ-reality.’”²⁸

The ‘realization of the Christ-reality’ here has the double meaning of that reality coming into awareness and that women and men come to be that reality—the body of Christ. This is the critical insight Harvey has to offer us here. The baptised and communicating people become parts of the new creation. Baptism is ‘the sign and seal of this new regime.’

It should not be imagined, however, that the new creation has come in its fulness, in some special sub-section of humanity, the church. The concept of the body of Christ has to be understood as having at least three different aspects: the historical body of Jesus; his mystical, resurrection body; and the ecclesial body. The critical idea for our current discussion is the role played by baptism and the Lord’s Supper in evoking and maintaining the reality of the ecclesial body. Harvey uses the term ‘constitute’ here: “Together the Eucharist and the church community constitute the contemporary performance of the historical body, the unique event of Jesus.”²⁹ This is not to say that the church as an institution is the continuation or the extension of the historical ministry of Jesus. Rather, that exceptional reality to which we refer as ‘the Incarnation’ is something that God continues to do in a different way, now in a community of persons, who are *re-membered* continually as the body of Christ. As food and wine are shared, the Spirit of God remembers the body of Christ.³⁰ In a world which constantly dismembers us, separating us into individuals and dividing each of us into disjointed aspects of life—work, home, feeling, thinking, bodily activity, etc.—this notion of a creative recovery of our personal and communal unity is an astonishing gift, to be perceived only through the gift and activity of the Creator Spirit. Roger Haight, in a recent exploration of how we might most helpfully think of God’s presence and action in the world, suggests the notion of ‘transcendent presence.’ We should not think of God as ‘intervening’ in the world, in evolution or in historical events, because the world is not a ‘closed system.’ God is already present to and active in this finite world. We can

²⁷ Ibid. 45. The reference is to John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV.xiv.18, The Library of Christian Classics, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 2:1294.

²⁸ Harvey, *Can These Bones Live?* 212. Harvey’s reference here is to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 6, Trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott, ed. Clifford J. Green (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 58.

²⁹ Barry Harvey, *Can These Bones Live?* 214.

³⁰ Ibid. 215.

learn to perceive and participate in the activity of God in the world precisely because the world is indwelt by the transcendent creator-God.³¹

CONCLUSION

We return, then, to the Report of the International Dialogue between the Baptist World Alliance and the World Methodist Council. In response to a section of the Report, it was suggested above that the discussion of baptism in terms of patterns of 'initiation' has both positive value in enabling ecumenical understanding and some important limitations and difficulties. What we have considered in this paper is the character of the life of the baptised Christian, a life immersed in the reality and presence of God, 'alive' to God in Christ and growing into Christ. We have identified a number of biblical and theological ideas which give further character to this concept: what it means to be baptised *in the name* of Jesus, or of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and we have considered the nature of baptism as a *living sign*, made possible by the character of the created order, and ourselves as human participants in this creation, in which God continues to be both present and active. Finally, we have identified the activity of God re-membering the body of Christ, thus evoking that vital New Testament notion of anamnesis, a remembrance in which Christ is present.

All of this suggests that the concept of 'initiation', found to be a helpful basis for ecumenical conversation has both significant benefit and some major limitations. If an initiation is understood as a single event, after which follows a life characterised by other activities and processes, then this is too limited an idea of baptism. Baptism itself encompasses and is characterised by the life that it reveals and makes possible. It is far more than an initiation in that sense. But if by initiation we allow that continuing character of baptism, which is renewed and enabled by regular participation in the Lord's Supper, then we may see in it the evocation of a life from and with God, eschatological in its nature, already although not yet the fullness of the new creation.

³¹ Roger Haight, "Spirituality, Evolution, Creator God," *Theological Studies* 79, no. 2 (June 2018): 251–73.

WRITING GOOD CRITICAL BOOK REVIEWS

Myk Habets, Senior Editor *PJTR*

WHY?

Critical book reviews are a staple feature of academic publishing. Most academic journals have a critical book review section, and this serves several purposes which are worth knowing before submitting a critical book review to a journal. First, publishers supply books for review to all major publishers (and bloggers, etc) because it is free publicity which puts the book in front of the right audience and increases the chances of better sales. So, there are market forces at work here. Second, busy academics don't want to have to trawl through entire libraries looking for the right work to use in their research—accurate and well written reviews are a way to sift large volumes of information quickly and efficiently. These are the major reasons behind the critical book reviews industry. But I think there is another reason for book reviews, namely, they are an effective way to develop good reading, writing, and critical thinking skills by academics themselves. These three reasons, at least, seem to me to be the major factors behind the publication of critical book reviews.

WHAT?

Noting the reasons critical book reviews exist helps in answering the question as to what they should seek to achieve. A book review can be as short as several hundred words, but that is not a critical book review. A critical book reviews would normally be anywhere between 1,000—2,500 words. Anything longer than 2,500 words constitutes a critical review essay and, in that instance, should then be developed to come in at 3,500 words or more.

Critical book reviews should provide a clear and concise precis of the book—one which honestly and accurately describes the book, its intent, and content. If that is all that is done, however, then this constitutes a book review. A critical book review should then proceed with an informed critical interaction with the book. This can be achieved in several ways. Sometimes the entire scope of the book will be the focus for critical comment; other times it will be a chapter by chapter approach; and still other times a critical review will choose to pick up on a certain limited number of themes and comment on those. There is no one way to do a review and the nature of the book and the arguments being made will largely dictate how the review is conducted. Edited books, especially large ones, prove to be a challenge given the limited word count of the review can't begin to do justice to the volume. In these instances, a comment is normally made on the scope of the project and then several chapters might be singled out for specific comment to illustrate the overall arguments and direction of the volume.

The author of the critical review should speak as one expert writing to other experts about the book under review and that should form the basis of their critical interaction. Does this book engage with the latest scholarship? Is it comprehensive? Does it achieve what it sets out to do? Where does it fit within the

wider scholarship? What should be made of the book? How could it be used? Is it worth purchasing? These and other related questions form the *raison d'être* of the review for the reviewer.

Some general virtues should guide the reviewer, including but not limited to: honesty, charity, respect, don't write anything you wouldn't say to the author's face, integrity, and academic rigour. Academic publishing is premised on the idea that research is published for the scholarly community to interrogate its claims and to collectively negotiate its usefulness. A critical review is one way to contribute to this aim. So be honest but be fair and don't entertain *ad hominem* arguments or set up any straw men which you then take down. Seek first to understand then be understood is a good general principle.

HOW?

The mechanics of writing a review will differ from one academic to another so what follows is simply how I go about writing a critical book review in the hopes that a window into one person's routine might prove useful to others. To-date I have published over 55 critical book reviews, so I have some modest experience. As I read the book under review I open a file on my computer and take notes from the moment I start reading. I am looking for the central thesis of the book, for its key research questions, and for how the author/s develop their argument. The scope of the book is considered and how comprehensive the topic has been covered are things I am especially looking for and noting. I note down key contributions, things that stand out in the book—the good, the bad, and the ugly, as it were. Strength, weaknesses, gaps, and unique contributions are all noted.

Throughout the process of reading the book I am especially looking for the argument, the development of ideas, the level of scholarship, and the usefulness of the work. I am working through what I think of the work and how it should best be considered. I also begin to develop my own ideas on the topic—why else am I reviewing this work if I don't have my own ideas on the field of study—and what I might contribute in my finished review.

By the end of reading the book I have some reasonable notes and can then sit down and in light of the whole book go through those notes and formulate a coherent review. I normally have far too many words for the review by this stage and so I then edit the work down to the journal's requirements. This editing process is helpful as it forces me to think about what is most important in the work, what most needs to be said, and what I think other academics will most need to know about this work. I also keep in mind that the author, who, if they are anything like me, will no doubt read this review, and so I want to be charitable and responsible, but also have something to say. I then check for spelling and grammar, which normally results in a rewrite of a paragraph or so, and then send it in to the journal with a short prayer.

WHEN?

In my experience early career academics (1–6 years in) should do multiple critical book reviews each year. For the reasons stated above this develops good habits in researchers, it gets people's names out there in

the academic community, and it is a way to forge some important networks with publishers and editors. If the reviews are well written it is also a way for other academics to identify up-and-coming researchers who may be invited to participate in various publishing projects in the future. So early career academics should be doing reviews regularly. Mid-career academics (7–10 years in) normally do a lot less reviews as they are now invested in their own projects and other commitments such as committees and leadership tend to take up any remaining time. Senior academics (10 years +) don't tend to do many reviews and the ones they do complete are normally at the invitation of the publisher, editor, or author. These reviews are important and hearing from senior academics in these concise and constructively critical ways is both important and informative.

As an editor of several theological journals I know how important critical book reviews are and how well-written reviews by researchers who know what they are talking about are deeply valued. *PJTR* welcomes book reviews. Please contact the Book Reviews editor Dr Greg Liston if you require further information.

CRITICAL REVIEW ESSAY

Stanley Hauerwas. *The Work of Theology*. Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015. (293 pp.) [ISBN: 9780802871909]

Jordan L. Jones
Auckland, New Zealand

The Work of Theology is as dynamic as a Möbius strip. Mirroring its enigmatic writer, Stanley Hauerwas, and vindicating his claim that “the character of theology and the theologian are inseparable” (p. 22). The book traverses ethics, ‘methodology’, constructive theology, and political theology. Hauerwas forewarns his readers that the book is “unusual” in its internal “organisation” which is neither “random essays,” nor cumulative chapter arguments (p. 7). This “organisation” is hinted at through the “how” that commences each chapter title (except the post-script).

The essays ripple out from Hauerwas’ assertion in Chapter 1 that thinking theologically is “an exercise in practical reason” (p. 7). The “how” in Hauerwas’ chapter titles indicates that *The Work of Theology* has a “performative character” (p. 4) that is true of the work of theology more generally. Hauerwas hopes that his essays are analogous to Paul’s epistles through their engagement with a concrete time and location, necessitating a theological ‘method’ starting from “the middle,” contrasting with the fabricated timelessness of conventional systematic theologies (pp. 23–34). Consequently, he rejects any “prolegomena for all future theology,” favouring a more performative theological mediums, like “letters, sermons, and essays” (p. 24). Hauerwas has confidence that properly ordered theological speech offers the church a future (pp. 21, 30).

In chapter two Hauerwas answers his accusers and questioners over his sparse pneumatology (p. 32). Although he defensively displays his Trinitarian orthodoxy credentials he admits that until recent years “[he] was unsure how best to say what the Spirit does” (p. 33). Hauerwas explains his reticence to make pneumatological attributions because of appeals to experience making theology “about us and not God” (p. 37). Hauerwas notes that the “Spirit makes us believers...through the witness of the church,” making the Spirit, in turn, “the subject and objection of our faith” (pp. 38–39). Thus, identifying the Spirit as the “animating principle” of the church’s sacraments (p. 39). For the chapter’s remainder, Hauerwas engages with Stephen Pickard, Eugene Rogers, and Claude Welch to consider the Spirit’s divine and human interactions (pp. 38–52). Rogers’ insight on the Spirit’s self-effacing “penchant” for resting on others—namely Jesus and his ecclesial body (pp. 42–43)—leads Hauerwas to articulate an ecclesial pneumatology: “The name of the agency the Holy Spirit enables is ‘church’” (p. 47).

Hauerwas’ reluctance to self-identify as a Protestant Christian ethicist is explored in chapter three. His reasons being his Catholic sympathies and corresponding ambivalence towards Protestantism (p. 53), and the absence of a distinct Protestant ethic, such that Christian academics *alma mater* trumps their denominational affiliation (p. 54). Hauerwas accuses Protestant theologians of disconnecting Protestantism from the reformation, two consequences being an ethics detached from the quotidian existence of Protestant Christians and the rise of denominational proliferation (p. 57). Hauerwas concludes the chapter

with an ‘ecumenical’ dialogue on ethics informed by the best insights of the church catholic (p. 64), for the sake of “[recovering] our distinctive way of speaking to God, and about God, and about the difference God makes for how our lives are lived” (p. 65).

Themes from earlier in Hauerwas’ corpus are reworked in chapter four, “How to Be an Agent,” which answers questions regarding agency, contingency, and narrative. An opening quote from Austin Farrer on the creaturely limitations that create vulnerability and partial dispossession (“not [being] wholly in our acts”) informs Hauerwas’ thematic re-engagement (ps. 70, 71). Unsurprisingly, MacIntyre is mentioned frequently to underpin the necessity of virtue for character formation (pp. 75–82). However, Hauerwas diverges from MacIntyre because of the latter’s lack of a concrete narrative necessary to uphold an account of agency (p. 81). Hauerwas compensates for the shortfall through recounting a thick account of Bonhoeffer’s story (pp. 82–87) to recognise that “our inability to be wholly in our acts...is why we so desperately need to be incorporated into a community of practices that can provide the formation of our agency through a truthful narrative (p. 88).”

In chapter four Hauerwas asserts that the timefulness of the Christian life is conditioned by the past and the future with Jesus being the very fulcrum of God’s created and contingent universe (p. 91). Time’s God-given nature produces the paradox that “[w]e are embedded in histories we have not chosen, but through having our lives storied by God, fate can be transformed into destiny” (pp. 92–93). The ecclesial bodies-in-concert given in worship to God, “the Lord of history”, results in our timeful engagement instead of escapism (p. 94). An examination of Augustine’s *Confessions* leads to the conclusion that time, due to God creating and sustaining it, is a gift that enables our narrational existence (pp. 95–99). Therefore, over a lifetime we learn to be “creatures of time” (p. 102).

Chapter six concerns “The ‘How’ of Theology and Ministry”. The title with its “and” is presumably grudgingly written given Hauerwas’ antipathy to “and” being used in theological sentences because of it creating artificial separations within theology, like ‘theology *and* ethics’ (p. 109, cf. p. 23). Hauerwas laments both the reduction of ministry to another “helping profession” and the reduction in “educated” Christian readers (p. 106). Consequently, Hauerwas finds problematic any modern consciousness that relegates theology to the proverbial ivory tower which impinges on the performative theology of the ecclesial body (p. 107). Accordingly, Hauerwas’ has the pedagogical goal of giving confidence to Christian influencers and leaders to reclaim the efficacy of theological speech in order that the church walks *and* talks Christianly (p. 111). Thus, ministers and theologians are “in the business of word care (p. 115).”

“How to Write a Theological Sentence” – chapter seven – was this work’s first chapter and became for Hauerwas its “prototype” (p. x). Hauerwas argues that theological sentences should not be straightforward for their writers or readers, for effective theological sentences “[make] the familiar strange” (p. 123). As a case study Hauerwas chooses Jenson’s “exemplary” statement, “God is whoever raised Jesus from the dead, having before raised Israel from Egypt” (p. 127). Jenson’s wordcraft is lauded by Hauerwas for its implicit acknowledgement on the primacy of God revealing “whoever” God is and Jenson’s wordplay of “raised” with its Christological priority that implicitly acknowledges the Trinity (pp. 134–36). This chapter later gives theology a clarion call for it to be less focused on secondary sources and more on its source –

God—as Hauerwas pronounces that our theological speech sounds empty because it echoes the state of our lives (p. 123). To write well theologians need faith in God and his church, hence Hauerwas’s church-first, world-second philosophy (p. 124). Consequently, the church is to embody a theological politics under Christ’s lordship that makes the familiar strange to the world (p. 138).

The question of “How to Be Theologically Ironic” occupies chapter eight. Hauerwas’ essential argument is that irony must accompany the truthful performativity of the faith if we are to relearn how to speak Christian during the death-throes of Christendom (p. 148). Irony offers practical reason for the formation of truthful Christians, so they may humbly recognise their paradoxical state of being simultaneously sinners and saints (p. 152). Hauerwas appreciates Kierkegaard candidly admitting the disparity between “who he is and what he writes;” Hauerwas identifies this is an occupational hazard that haunts all theologians (pp. 154–55). *Pace* Rorty and his account of irony, Hauerwas embraces Christian discourse which recognises *and* exceeds life’s contingencies because Christianity’s concomitant convictions offer the infrastructure of practical reason to outwork an ecclesial politics (pp. 156–59). Thus, truth-filled speech with the gospel’s inherent “ironic grammar” is necessary to constitute Christians (pp. 165–67).

Chapter nine reveals Hauerwas’ resistance to being labelled a “political theologian” for reasons similar to his hesitancy to being a “social ethicist” (pp. 170–71). He stresses that theology is always already outworked socially and politically, and chooses to distance himself from political theology until it is disambiguated (p. 171). Accordingly, any discourse that places an “and” between theology and politics has “failed to account for the political reality of the church” (p. 173). Hauerwas retraces his embrace of “Yoder’s ecclesiology,” which he claims, “supplied the politics I needed to make intelligible the stress on the virtues,” to reject anew the normative politics of Reinhold Niebuhr and Rauschenbusch who fixate on democratic nation-states (p. 179). Citing Alex Sider’s scholarship, he concedes that Constantinianism is inescapable (p. 183), however, he endorses James C. Scott’s strategy of “foot-dragging” to stand up against the status quo to induce change (pp. 186–90).

In chapter ten, Hauerwas appraises rights theologically and conditionally affirms the exercising of rights to protect the vulnerable while rejecting notions of inherent rights (ps. 191, 195). But he doubts that any ideology of inherent or inalienable rights can match “first-order moral descriptions” in making satisfactory “moral discriminations” (p. 195). Simone Weil is referenced to challenge how personalism reduces rights to entitlements without considering the common vulnerability that necessitates commitment to goods in commons (pp. 198–202). Hauerwas concludes through utilising Rowan Williams’ work to acknowledge how all God-given bodies are intrinsically social and vulnerable requiring a recognition of our inviolability to inform rights (pp. 203–6). Accordingly, rights must serve as a testament to “the thick moral relationships our bodies make possible and necessary (p. 206).”

In chapter eleven, Hauerwas engages with biblical scholars and political theologians to address both his past silence on the church’s response to poverty *and* appropriations of his ecclesial primacy that frame the world’s problems as peripheral (ps. 9, 209, 225). Hauerwas then challenges the abstraction of “the poor” and certain conceptions of charity (pp. 209–14) before declaring that Christians are “obligated to be charitable” (p. 214). For charity is a duty to the poor *and* to God because these sacrificial acts offer worship

to the God who has a preferential option for the poor (ps. 214–17, 225–27). After offering a fair but critical appraisal of Adam Smith and Niebuhr, Hauerwas challenges conscientious Christians to remember not only structural poverty but also the poor through charity (pp. 219–25).

Chapter thirteen testifies that retirement is unbefitting of Hauerwas who rejects its possibility or desirability for the theologian (pp. 251–52, 257–58). The final chapter confirms Hauerwas' descriptions of the book being "unapologetically self-referential" (p. 2) and "retrospective" while also functioning to correct misconstruals of his work (p. viii). Therefore, his fervour for a performative theology witnessed throughout a career "possessed by what we say, or...should say" (p. 265) is unequivocal.

The post-script offers Hauerwas' response to Nicholas Healy's *Hauerwas: A (Very) Critical Introduction*.³² Hauerwas holds Healy in esteem even though he characterises Healy's critiques of himself as "off the mark" (pp. 10, 266). Consequently, he considers *The Work of Theology* "a response to Healy's criticisms" notwithstanding that it had been mostly written before Hauerwas had read Healy's book (p. 266). This is evident in Hauerwas' choice of "how" for each of his chapter titles. This choice challenges Healy's distinction between the "what" and "how" of theology; between theology proper and theology in practice. The presence of "how" in Hauerwas' titles is intended to emphasise "the essential connection between doctrine and life" (p. 266) that makes "theology...a performative discipline" (p. 271). Hauerwas edgily advances the *ad hominem* that Healy's critiques, such as his claim that Hauerwas has a "thin" (p. 267) and unsystematic theology, signal Healy's indifference to Hauerwas' methodological concerns of theological convictions being "abstracted from how we are to live" (p. 270). Hauerwas unapologetically accepts the accusation of conflating "the logic of belief" with "the logic of living out our beliefs" because, for Hauerwas, "what" we believe is inseparable from "how" we are to live it out (pp. 268–70, 277). However, he refutes Healy's "more fundamental critique" of him conflating "the logic of belief" with "the logic of coming to believe" (pp. 268–269).

But what of Hauerwas' disclosure that his work "[has] *tried to show* that fundamental theological convictions about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are inseparable from the *work they do for* the formation of a people set loose in and for the world" (p. 23, italics mine). Remarks like this raise questions about him instrumentalising the logic of belief. Consequently, I am unconvinced by Hauerwas' rebuttal as Healy rightly claims that Hauerwas does write about God (a logic of belief) but *not without* involving the other two logics. Healy correctly observes that Hauerwas has a logic of coming to believe that provides an apologetic defence of his logic of living out our beliefs.³³ Hauerwas, then, has missed both Healy's point that his conflation of the logic of belief and the logic of living out our beliefs is fundamentally apologetics and Healy's understandable ensuing unease about whether Hauerwas' amalgamation of logics impinges on his logic of belief (ibid. p. 56).

While Hauerwas' *Work of Theology* positively provides a pneumatology, he risks pursuing an ecclesiological pneumatology instead of a pneumatological ecclesiology because of the functional conflation

³² Nicholas M. Healy, *Hauerwas: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).

³³ Ibid., 23, 54–56.

of logics identified by Healy. Given his appreciation for Coakley's third article theology in *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (p. 8),³⁴ Hauerwas should consider an appropriate theological 'method' despite his dislike of methodology (p. 24, cf. pps. 7, 270–71). Greg Liston in *The Anointed Church: Toward a Third Article Ecclesiology*³⁵ identifies Hauerwas' project as being potentially complimentary with third article ecclesiology's adoption of narrative. However, Hauerwas' ecclesio-pneumatological claim that "[t]he name of the agency the Holy Spirit enables is 'church'" (p. 47) would be strongly critiqued by Third Article theologians for permitting the church to set the parameters for the Spirit rather than vice versa. The failure to sufficiently differentiate between divine and human action within the church is the by-product of Hauerwas' conflation of logics. In response to Hauerwas' invitation to the reader to judge for themselves whether this theological move is a "deep mistake" or not (p. 278), this reader thinks it is.

³⁴ Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

³⁵ Gregory J. Liston, *The Anointed Church: Toward a Third Article Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015).

REVIEWS

Lynne Baab, *Nurturing Hope: Christian Pastoral Care in the 21st Century*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018. (192pp.) [ISBN: 9781506434278]

David Bosma
Christchurch, New Zealand

Nurturing Hope is the first in a series of books published by Fortress Press which discuss Christian pastoral care in the modern era. Other books in the series address the practice of pastoral care in the face of specific issues such as unemployment, dementia, and the parenting of children with developmental issues. However, *Nurturing Hope* sits as a theoretical overview of pastoral care in general and offers a framework through which pastoral issues can be approached. Lynne Baab provides a valuable perspective on this topic, based on her own experience as a former Presbyterian Minister, and then Jack Somerville Lecturer in Pastoral Theology at the University of Otago.

Baab contends that the practice of pastoral care has changed in the 21st Century, as both churches and societies have experienced various technological and cultural changes. This then serves as the basis for the rest of the book, as she goes on to outline seven “shifts” in pastoral care patterns, before offering four “skills” that modern pastoral carers can use, to become more effective at offering pastoral care to modern people. However, this justification is somewhat light, and is arguably the weakest part of the book. Baab primarily relies on anecdotes and her own experience in defining the social shift that she is responding to. Likewise, her reasons for choosing the seven shifts and four skills are not made obvious in this introductory chapter. While they are undoubtedly a result of something, most likely Baab’s own experience and research, this connection is not particularly clear.

Yet, the shifts themselves are compelling, each in their own way, and well defended by Baab. She begins by challenging what she sees as a dated model of pastoral care that constructs this practice as primarily occurring between a professional minister and a “troubled person.” This model also assumes that pastoral conversations are about issues of ultimate concern and cannot be about the more mundane facets of life. Baab finds this problematic, arguing that pastoral care can occur amidst more normal and regular life experiences. She also sees modern forms of pastoral care as having shifted into more group-based forms, involving laypeople. This is then explored in greater detail in the second chapter, where the idea of pastoral teams is explored. Here Baab is concerned about how the older model, combined with the organisational pressures faced by many professional ministers today, can lead to unnecessary burnout and stress amongst church leaders. There is also the risk of genuinely gifted and caring laypeople being underutilised within congregations that still apply the older model. A shift to team-based pastoral care is necessary today and has the potential to be a life-giving shift for both congregations and church leaders. Baab then provides some theological justification for this by reflecting on the relational nature of the Trinity and the way in which God can be present in human interaction. While these Trinitarian insights are also identified as a discrete

“shift” in pastoral care, they seem to be more of a “rediscovery,” and less of a direct contrast is made between these theological insights and previous pastoral practices which are now outmoded.

Baab then goes on to talk about pastoral care as needing to shift to a more missional, and multi-cultural, orientation. This is an honest reflection on the state of the church in much of the Western world, where declining levels of religiosity require the church to engage in a mission to members of its own neighbourhood. Increased levels of migration mean that many of these neighbours are likely different to “us.” Baab argues that pastoral care must extend beyond the four walls of the church and be offered to all, including those who are of different ethnicities and religions. She then, in her sixth “shift,” argues for the importance of pastoral care that is empowering. For Baab, “advice giving” is a problematic and limited approach to pastoral care, and she is keen to see it replaced with techniques that focus on reciprocity, independence, and encouraging constructive thinking. Finally, Baab argues that modern pastoral care should consider the web of relationships that surround an individual. This means not only an awareness of the ways in which friends and family can be involved in supporting an individual, but also a consideration of how one’s life and actions might interact with the natural environment, their local neighbourhood, and their economic context. Baab recognises that individual situations cannot be isolated from such contexts and communities, and argues that pastoral carers today need to consider how such connections might impact individuals, and what they can do to improve the nature of these connections.

The latter part of the book sees Baab focus on four “skills” that she deems important for modern pastoral carers to master. Here Baab’s expertise comes to the fore, and she draws upon some of her own previously published work as she elaborates on these various skills. The first of these skills Baab describes is an ability to understand stress, both one’s own and the stress of those within their care. The second is the skill of listening, a subject that Baab devoted an entire monograph to in 2014. The third skill is the carer’s own engagement with spiritual practices, both for their own nourishment and as a useful tool in pastoral care. Here too Baab works from her own vast level of knowledge about this subject. Finally, Baab’s fourth skill is what she terms “resilience,” although she admits that previously she would have addressed this same subject by talking about “preventing burnout.” Yet, Baab argues that the change of language is important, as it creates a more positive and constructive focus for carers and is less situated around attempting to eliminate a negative state of mind.

Overall, *Nurturing Hope* is the work of an experienced and knowledgeable writer who is more than able to offer meaningful insights into the state of pastoral care today. While she does not do as much as she could to justify the two frameworks she presents in this book, they each contain their own justification, as her points are well defended and the practical implications of each are outlined with clarity.

Avaren Ipsen. *Sex Working and the Bible*. London: Equinox, 2005. 237 pp. [isbn: 13:978-1-84553-333-5]

**Jonathan Robinson
Otago University, Dunedin, NZ.**

This book is not about the historical practice of prostitution and the way understanding that might inform our reading of the Bible. Rather, this book is a powerful example of cultural/ideological criticism from the standpoint of North American sex workers (p. 6). Ipsen's work emerges from a Bible study group formed with ten sex workers all of whom "have an elaborated standpoint and politic" (p6), that is they are also sex work activists. While this makes sense with regards to Ipsen's methodology it does mean that the resulting readings emerge from sex workers who view sex work as a choice and who are engaged in political advocacy. This possibly creates a disconnection with the experience of many contemporary sex workers (those working under compulsion and those without political agency) and certainly creates a disconnection with the experiences of sex workers in ancient times, most of whom were slaves (something Ipsen is aware of, p. 126).

Ipsen's primary targets are liberation and feminist hermeneutics against which she applies Marcella Althaus-Reid's decency/indecency binary. She argues that both discourses have allowed a patriarchal "decency" to exclude sex workers from their liberative programs. A significant second target is the tendency of biblical scholarship to overlook the place of prostitutes in early Christian history (pp. 5–6), to dichotomise the spiritual and the sexual (pp. 43, 159), and to "utterly separate whore metaphors from real prostitutes" (p. 172). Her criticisms are telling and cogently argued throughout the book.

After an introduction (ch. 1) and methodology chapter (ch. 2) the book treats four Biblical texts: Rahab and the Spies (Josh 2; 6:22–25), Solomon and the two prostitutes (1 Kgs 3:16–28), the woman who anointed Jesus/ Mary Magdalene (John 12:1–8; Luke 7:36–50; Mark 14:3–9; Matt 26:6–13), and the whore of Babylon (Rev 17:1–19:10). A concluding chapter suggests amendments to liberation hermeneutics and an appendix contains the discussion questions used in the reading group.

Each exegetical chapter begins with a review of scholarly interpretations of the passage. Ipsen then takes the insights gleaned from the reading group and makes historical and theological arguments for their validity as readings. Ipsen intends "to show how a sex worker standpoint can crack open these texts in a new way" (p. 12). Ipsen then analyses the differences between the readings of the scholars and the sex workers. Finally, a commentary on each passage is produced from verbatim extracts of the reading group. She certainly succeeds in her aim. In particular, the sex workers' readings of the story of Rahab and of Solomon and the two prostitutes clearly expose the extent to which traditional biblical scholarship has sanitised or ignored the presence and implications of the sex workers in these texts.

This is a book that will be hard to read for many people. There is no prudishness or polite academic censoring of the material. Each discussion reveals much about the realities of sex work, especially in relation to their own negative experiences of religious and legal authorities (e.g. pp. 45, 76, 115). The sex workers'

own words are particularly humanising. One recounts how Christian family members were unhappy about her going to a Bible study group (p. 150). This was both illustrative of “decency” in action (the assumption that prostitutes were not clean enough read the Bible) and of the exclusion sex workers experience from the Christian community. Such experiences inevitably lead to responses to the texts which many Christians will find diametrically opposed to their own.

For some of us this is surely where the value of a book like this is found. Although some important insights are produced, most of the scriptural interpretations are not convincing in a historical-critical respect. Indeed, Ipsen takes care to state that she is not claiming to be producing “one correct reading” (p. 7) and neither does the group consistently produce a homogenised reading. Ipsen does not hide the group’s frequently divergent interpretations. Rather the value is in sensitising us to the way that our cherished sacred texts can be received by those with radically different experiences and assumptions to us.

Ipsen argues that many of the injustices that sex workers experience stem from biblical and religious foundations. These readings, then, also invite the church to critique its own teaching and practice around the politics of sex work (legalisation, etc) and its ministry (if any) to sex workers. If our texts can be read in a way that is harmful to sex workers, which Ipsen’s work demonstrates they can, then at the very least we have a responsibility to mitigate that harm when those texts are used in Christian worship and study. It is a powerful reminder that the words and stories of scripture can be interpreted in more ways than one, and that if we are engaging with people from different cultures and life experiences we cannot assume the meaning we intend is the one someone else will receive.

Ipsen writes clearly and presents the sex workers’ voices sympathetically. While the targets of this work are particularly feminist and liberation hermeneutics and biblical scholarship in general, it will also be invaluable for those churches and Christian ministries who connect with sex workers in their communities. Ipsen does not give us a Christian reading of the Bible, but a reading by politically-conscious excluded and oppressed sex workers. In doing so we are challenged about our own blindness to and assumptions regarding sex workers in both the Bible and in our communities. Few other books can offer such an education.

William C. Gaventa, *Disability and Spirituality: Recovering Wholeness*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2018. (338 pp.) [ISBN: 9781481302791]

**Coralie Bridle,
Auckland, NZ.**

William Gaventa’s *Disability and Spirituality: Recovering Wholeness* is a compelling blend of interdisciplinary engagement, robust scholarship and insightful pastoral commentary. Having spent his life in chaplaincy and advocacy roles with disabled people, their families and support workers, Gaventa’s book reflects his commitment to building understanding across the health and human services and navigating fresh ways of reflecting on the lived experience of disabled persons. Whilst not exclusive in nature, there is an underlying

focus on intellectual and developmental disabilities. In particular, this volume challenges the reader/practitioner to re-observe the relationship between the oft-times disconnected notions of “disability” and “spirituality.”

Gaventa proposes that a recovery of how each of these constructs relates to the other will enable a more holistic approach to empowerment of, and ministry with, disabled persons and their wider communities. In other words, social service provision and faith communities that do not engage with the full personhood of disabled people truncate the potential agency and richness of both. The book is therefore a call to cross discipline understanding, respect, and purposeful engagement (p. 61).

The central thesis of the work is that rather than disparate entities, spirituality and disability, understood as both socially constructed worlds and personal story, lead towards each other (p. 60). The notion of spirituality often arises in times of trauma, suffering, limit or vulnerability – thus spirituality leads to a richer understanding of disability. In reverse, a consideration of disability constructs, theories, and service delivery frameworks leads to questions of personhood, identity, meaning, and purpose. Gaventa proposes that consideration of individual spiritual practice and the traditions of faith communities within health and allied service planning would restore a balanced understanding of our diversity and interconnectedness.

The book is structured around five main sections, moving from foundational understandings of disability and spirituality through to closer reflection on spirituality and the individual, spirituality and the family, spirituality and the professional, and then a final section which highlights the nature of our shared humanity, expressed in friendships, relationships, and community. Each section of the book is embedded in the lived experiences of particular individuals or groups of people with whom Gaventa has engaged over his years of interfaith ministry. This is one of the strengths of his approach. Whilst the volume is well researched and academically sound – the theories and proposals are not dissociated from their formative voices, practical implications or social outworking.

In the first section of the book, Gaventa outlines his understanding of disability and spirituality. He presents a “brief history” of the process of naming and defining disability. Then, using a combination of institutional observation and narrative research, he highlights that the “tragedy” of disability is often loneliness, lack of connection and lack of affirmation, embedded in structures and approaches to disability, rather than any actual impairment (p.17). He subsequently reviews diagnostic tools and their implications, arguing that contemporary “quality of life” frameworks, person-centered and human-rights based approaches to disability lead to, “...forms of language and discourse that are fundamentally spiritual” (p. 23). A case in point is the QOL framework from the University of Toronto which describes QOL as, “the degree to which a person enjoys the important possibilities of his or her life” (p. 34). The model utilises the language of being, belonging and becoming – notions that Gaventa highlights as the spiritual dimensions of life.

In regard to spirituality, Gaventa argues that the core values of disability services – independence, productivity, and inclusion, emerge from spiritual notions of personhood and identity (matters of the heart and soul), meaning (what is sacred to and for me?), connection (to self, others, time, and place, the sacred)

and life purpose (vocation, call and being able to contribute) (p. 52). He notes the limits of independence, productivity and inclusion if they are not tethered to a broader understanding of what it means to be human noting, for example, that none of us are truly independent, that productivity easily slides towards utilitarianism, and that inclusion falls short of friendship and belonging (p. 272).

In the second section of the book, Gaventa reviews various “abstract” faith development models and then considers “formation” as a key framework for understanding spiritual development. Essential to this process is the notion of rituals, symbols, stories, friendships, and relationships that form us as people (p. 90-99). The third section of the book, which references the broader family “adjustment” experience and presents frameworks for supporting family members, also highlights the construct of “respite care,” understood as a Sabbath rest for caregivers. Gaventa reviews the developments taking place in respite care and notes the potential for faith communities to provide creative forms of respite (pp. 167-172). In the fourth section of his book Gaventa addresses the complexity of professional integrity, avoiding proselytising and government funding issues (p. 178.). Later in the section he discusses tools such as the FICA spiritual history tool (developed by Dr Christina Puchalski) that enable professionals to address issues of spirituality across diverse traditions (p. 181). Whichever tools are utilised, coming to know the “spirit” of a person, Gaventa cautions, takes time, trust, and patience (p. 185).

In his conclusion, Gaventa notes that all people and perspectives contain both limits and gifts. Whilst scientific and social models of disability have demonstrated reluctance to include spirituality, he notes that recent theological scholarship reflects serious attempts to address unhelpful religious responses to disability (e.g. blame, abuse, rejection, justification of separation). The challenge is that variations of these unhelpful responses remain. In my opinion it is a point of painful irony that those called to love without limit, live as one body, and embrace the marginalised have perhaps witnessed their inadequacy in the spotlight of what might be regarded as largely secular disability rights initiatives of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

William Gaventa’s work is a prophetic call to refrain from attitudes and practices that silo both people and systems of knowledge (p. 268). Dialogue across disciplines enables a wholeness to emerge that is universally beneficial. An overarching strength of this volume is its gracious tone. Gaventa does not point fingers – he constructs bridges and invites informed conversation. As such, his work is broadly accessible and is, I would suggest, essential reading for disabled people and their families, professionals and service providers, along with faith communities seeking to redress the ultimately unhelpful separation of disability and spirituality.

Mark J. Keown, *Jesus in a World of Colliding Empires: Mark's Jesus from the Perspective of Power and Expectations*. 2 vols. Eugene, Or: Wipf & Stock, 2018. Vol. 1: Introduction and Mark 1:1–8:29. (255 pp.) [ISBN: 9781532641336]; Vol. 2: Mark 8:30–16:8 and Implications. (306 pp.) [ISBN: 9781532643842]

Karen Nelson

In this two-volume work, Mark Keown views Jesus in Mark's Gospel from the perspective of power patterns in the ancient world and expectations about an anticipated intervention from God or his agent. This work was inspired by Keown's experience of teaching the subject of Mark's Gospel, his work on an EEC commentary about Philippians, and especially his "time thinking about Philippians 2:6-8" (vol. 1, p. 1). Reflecting on the common problem of people vying for position, Keown asserts that the global church needs to rediscover the Jesus who showed what true life looks like; that is, living, not out of coercive force and violence, but "out of love seen in sacrifice, self-denial, selflessness, service, and suffering to the point at which it hurts" (p. 5). Keown highlights the uniqueness of Jesus and urges readers to embrace Jesus' compelling vision of the kingdom of God, as portrayed in Mark's Gospel.

Both volumes are packed with information. Volume One comprises an Introduction and six chapters. Volume Two comprises an Introduction and ten chapters. In Chapter 1, Keown presents the background of Mark's Gospel – its setting and importance. In Chapters 2 and 3, he examines the colliding empires that had affected Israel up to the time of Mark's account, and those beyond the Roman Empire in the known world at the time of Christ, respectively. In Chapter 4, Keown discusses "Israel's story" in the midst of this clashing world, as presented in the Old Testament. In Chapter 5, he focuses on the hopeful expectation of a deliverer (labelled "Theo" = "The Expected One") within that story. Keown summarises ideas about the agent of God's intervention from the Old Testament, and also from the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, Philo, Josephus, the Rabbis, and the New Testament. The "flawed but prevalent idea" was "that God would come in violent force to resolve Israel's problems" (p. 140). These first five chapters prepare readers thoroughly for the exegetical material that follows and eventually for understanding why Jesus' disciples did not comprehend what it meant for Jesus to be the messiah.

Keown spends the next ten chapters (6-15) reading Mark "against the backdrop of the pattern of a warrior-king and a military/religious empire" (p. 5). This reading reveals deep irony in the story. In Chapter 6, Keown considers the account of Jesus in Mark 1:1–8:29 from the perspective of those swept up in expectations of rising and falling power, brought about through war and violence. This chapter and the whole first volume conclude appropriately at the point where Keown deals with Mark's account of Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ/Messiah. The sections of text explored in Chapters 7–15 are shorter. Among other issues, Keown highlights the call to follow the pattern of Jesus' own life (Mark 8:34–9:1), the emphasis on greatness found in service rather than military and political glory (9:2-50), the calls to fidelity, making children a priority, and giving to the poor (10:17–31), the contrast between James and John's arrogant request for power and Bartimaeus' insightful request for healing (10:35–52), Jesus' challenge to the

Temple system in Jerusalem (11:1-26), how Jesus confounded the leaders in public debate (11:27–12:37), Jesus' final teaching including the commendation of an "unlikely heroine of the ideals of discipleship" (12:35–13:37), the plan to destroy Jesus and the disciples' incomprehension of Jesus (14:1–15:47) (vol. 2, pp. xvii–xviii).

Chapter 16 includes the author's conclusions and some implications of his exploration for reading the Old Testament, for Christian leadership, for various other aspects of Christian life, for being male, and for the Second Coming. For example, with respect to Christian leadership, Keown commends the "Jesus way" of being a leader—service (p. 239).

Key strengths of *Jesus in a World of Colliding Empires* include the consistent focus on the title theme and thorough development of the author's argument. Keown presents a generous amount of evidence to indicate that Mark's Jesus is not the sort of messiah that God's people had been expecting. On the other hand, the singular focus has led to some over-simplified distinctions between the Old and New Testament portrayals of God (Warrior and Judge vs. non-violent, loving servant-leader) that could be balanced by including such incidents as God demonstrating his concern for repentant Nineveh (Jonah 3:10; 4:11) and God's severe punishment of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). Furthermore, I suggest that the complex and perplexing issue of how to deal with the Old Testament today warrants more rigorous treatment. Surely promoting the task of "recognizing where God is to be seen" in Israel's story also endorses subjective selectivity (pp. 234–35).

Keown has chosen to write "a book that an educated Christian can understand" (vol. 1, p. 11), rather than an academic work. To this end, he supports readers in their processing of new material by introductory and summary sections that revise the argument and/or state the new focus, and concluding comments that anticipate upcoming chapters. For the most part, Keown addresses the targeted audience, with appropriate use of extensive vocabulary on the one hand, and scaffolding for specialised concepts (e.g. explanations of theological terminology) on the other. Keown also lightens the tone of his writing by weaving phrases from "modern vernacular" (e.g. Jesus "said zilch") and illustrations from contemporary culture (e.g. "Empire strikes back") into his explanations about the ancient texts. A future revision of the volumes could focus on some proofreading details, a slight reorganisation of some introductory sections, and the addition of further scaffolding for those without a theological education and parallel timelines for the historical background.

Overall, Keown's two-volume work presents a thorough exploration of how Mark's Jesus turns people's expectations for the Messiah upside down, along with an earnest plea to pursue Jesus' vision of the kingdom of God.

Kandy Queen-Sutherland, *Ruth and Esther*. Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2016. (517 pp.) [ISBN: 9781573128919]

Tekweni Chataira
Laidlaw College, Auckland

This volume which Queen-Sutherland describes as having been “a lifetime in the making” (p. xiii) is an excellent commentary offering multi-layered insights into the only two books in the Hebrew Bible named after women, Ruth and Esther (p. 5). It is one of the many volumes constituting the *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary* series. The commentary aims to be an insightful resource for interpreting the books of Ruth and Esther for a wide range of readers, be it in a church setting or a seminary. In analysing these two books Sutherland, like all the other Smyth and Helwys authors, divides the volume into ‘*Commentary*’ and ‘*Connections*’ sections. The commentary focuses on the Biblical text and the theological issues raised in a passage. The ‘connections’ section highlights possible approaches to preaching on relevant issues and themes. Sutherland starts with a thoughtful and comprehensive introduction to the books of Ruth and Esther, highlighting the relationship between them regarding their canonicity both as part of the ‘Five Scrolls’ or the *Megillot*, and as part of the *Ketuvim* or Writings section of the Hebrew Bible (pp. 1–5). As far as the concept of being a ‘foreigner’ or the ‘other’ is concerned, Ruth and Esther are like the two sides of a coin, in the sense that Ruth’s story is that of a foreigner among the Jews, whereas Esther’s story is that of a Jewish woman living in a foreign land. Both stories chronicle the challenges these women face as they each try to survive as the ‘other.’ The difference between the two is that Ruth’s ethnicity is mentioned several times in the text, whereas Esther must initially hide hers to survive (pp. 5–7).

Queen-Sutherland begins with a detailed introduction of the Book of Ruth outlining not only its place in the canon but also its liturgical use during *Shavuot* or the Feast of Weeks. In the commentary, Queen-Sutherland outlines the book’s literary framework by identifying a chiasmic structure given the story begins with the death of three male members of Naomi’s family, but there is reversal as the book ends with the birth of Obed and the list of subsequent generations up to king David (pp. 31–32). As to authorship, Queen-Sutherland is of the view that the unknown author penned this story before Israel had the kingship system since the book ends with David’s genealogy. Queen-Sutherland dates the book in the late Persian period (p. 34). She considers the central theme to be *hesed*: “the deepest level of covenantal commitment in Yahwism” (p. 37). Queen-Sutherland shows Ruth’s *hesed* towards Naomi, her widowed mother-in-law, as she insisted on accompanying her back to Bethlehem following her own husband’s death. Subsequently, Naomi and Boaz also show *hesed* towards Ruth by ensuring Ruth’s redemption. Sutherland also acknowledges that some contemporary readings suspect that Naomi might have had mixed motives in her dealings with Ruth (p. 35–38). Along the way, Queen-Sutherland’s study touches on the other essential and sometimes sensitive issues raised in the narrative. These include issues around the patriarchal ancient Israel culture, levirate marriage, treatment of foreigners and some of the customs around these issues. Throughout the commentary, Sutherland draws from a wide range of scholarship including lesbian (p. 62), indigenous (p. 17, 19, 134) and

other kinds of readings. The work, while broad is not comprehensive, however. She has not addressed some important debates in Ruth such as those around Ruth 4:14 -whether Boaz or the child Obed is the *goel*, or whose name will be renowned—the child's or YHWH. Despite such omissions, the Ruth commentary provides many excellent insights.

In her introduction to Esther, Queen-Sutherland details the different views on the importance of the book of Esther to the Jewish canon. Some consider Esther to be Scripture while others do not, mainly because the Hebrew text does not mention God. However, in the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Bibles God is present (pp. 188–96). She describes the Greek additions to the book of Esther that are not in the Hebrew Text in the introduction and throughout the commentary (p. 192–93). As for the authorship of the book of Esther, Queen-Sutherland says it is unknown. She similarly argues that the story was initially communicated orally (p. 196). While there is no conclusive evidence, Queen-Sutherland accepts the date of composition to be most likely to be during the Hellenistic period rather than the Persian period. She bases this on the fact that Persians are believed to have been more open to ethnic diversity whereas the Hellenistic period had antagonism towards Jews and their practices (pp. 196–202). Queen-Sutherland discusses at length the plight of women in the Esther narrative. From the banishment of Queen Vashti to the roundup of the virgins and the new rule forcing women to submit to their husbands all at the hands of the powerful (pp. 238–270). She makes connections between the experiences of the women in the Esther story with those of modern-day girls and women, be it the Filipino women abducted into sex slavery during World War II or the Nigerian girls kidnapped by Boko Haram (pp. 266–67). Through most of her commentary on Esther, the theme of power and its (mis)use keeps resurfacing.

There are constant comparisons and connections between the stories of Ruth and Esther (p. 93, 125, 422), and intertextuality with other books of the Hebrew Bible such as the Wisdom writings and the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife in Genesis (p. 20, 278, 290). Queen-Sutherland's volume considers the latest scholarly literature from various fields such as ancient history, sociology, linguistics, and anthropology to illuminate the realities of what life might have been like in Ruth and Esther's time. Her attention to the transliterated Hebrew language throughout the commentary is unintimidating to the non-Hebraist. However, those desiring to analyse the intricacies of the Hebrew text will find this volume lightweight, as much of the information in the language hyperlinks are mainly word studies. Nevertheless, this user-friendly volume is replete with many lists of handy resources for those who wish to gain further in-depth knowledge of select scripture texts and other topics (p. 492–494). The accompanying CD containing the volume's digital version also provides excellent searching functionality. Overall this volume is a suitable resource for seminary students, small group Bible study groups and any general reader interested in the books of Ruth and Esther.

Peter J. Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?* Wheaton: Crossway, 2018. (140 pp.) [ISBN: 1433552957]

**Clark Bates
St. Louis, Missouri**

Can We Trust the Gospels is a concise, compelling and erudite compilation of multiple lines of evidence intended to demonstrate the reliability of the four New Testament Gospels, and ultimately, the rationality of the Christian faith. At a brief 140 pages, the text can be read relatively quickly while also refusing to weigh the reader down with an excess of information. Williams' writing style, like his presentation style, is witty, intelligent and scholarly.

Divided into 8 chapters, the book begins with attestation from non-Christian sources, followed by internal evidence to the reliability of the gospels, and closing with a brief discussion of the miraculous and its effect on trusting what is contained within the New Testament witnesses. While many scholars prior to Williams have prepared information similar to this work, several of which are credited throughout the book, none have done so with his sense of brevity. Addressing the non-Christian sources that support the historicity of the gospel accounts, Williams cites only 3, and in so doing, allows only the strongest arguments to be placed at the forefront, providing higher retention for the reader. The strongest point made in the author's opening chapter concerns the rapid spread of Christianity throughout Rome and the challenge this presents to those appealing to a gradual evolution of Christian belief (p. 28). It is also here that Williams begins the repeated refrain of the book that the simplest view of the evidence is more likely than the elaborate alternatives that must be developed by detractors (p. 29).

The author briefly addresses the issue of the Synoptic problem, offering just enough information regarding the nature of Q, unique material to Matthew and Luke, and the possible resolutions to these issues to give the reader a basic understanding of the vast corpus of scholarly material on the matter. A helpful comparison is made between the four Gospels and the main sources of information regarding Tiberius Caesar (p. 40), presumably to counter skeptical assertions that only 4 existing historical accounts of someone as notable as Jesus of Nazareth is suspiciously minute. Given that Tiberius Caesar, an undoubtedly real historical figure, is also only discussed in 4 historical sources, the author provides a much needed, and often neglected, perspective: "the amount of text we have about Jesus is good relative to one of the best-known figures of antiquity." (p. 42)

The bulk of the text that follows concerns the accuracy of reporting within the four Gospels, leaning heavily on the research of Richard Bauckham's *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, the work of Cambridge theologian John James Blunt and Lydia McGrew concerning "undesigned coincidences", and responds to the tension of Jesus' words being recorded in Greek, when he likely spoke Aramaic. It is on this last discussion that Williams again demonstrates an uncommon ability to condense highly diverse opinions into approachable segments for the lay reader. While acknowledging that Aramaic was likely the primary language of Christ, the author clarifies the need of a working knowledge of Greek for survival in the 1st century and provides

several indications that Jesus may have spoken Greek at certain points recorded in both Matthew (p. 108) and John (p. 109).

It is no surprise that, with the increase of attention being paid to the study of textual criticism, this text would devote a chapter to the manuscript evidence of the Gospels. What is refreshing about Williams' approach to the material is that, rather than regurgitating the statistical data provided in most apologetic writings, the argument is focused uniquely on the work of the Renaissance humanist, Desiderius Erasmus (p. 112). Instead of using the material evidence of the gospels to bolster modern translations over those of the *Textus Receptus*, Williams recognizes that Erasmus was able to identify many of the same questionable Gospel passages as modern textual critics and ultimately produced a Greek New Testament largely compatible with anything produced in modern times (p. 114). The author closes the work with a brief discussion of supposed contradictions in the Gospel of John, citing the use of a literary paradox on the part of Jesus as a simple, but reasonable, solution. For Williams, the appearance of these "deliberate formal contradictions" "show that the author is more interested in encouraging people to read deeply than in satisfying those who want to find fault." (p. 127)

There is much to be praised about this book. Some may object to specific approaches made by the author, especially in regard to his use of Richard Swinburne's *Simplicity as Evidence for Truth* as a fallback defense, but this approach is not irrational in and of itself. Additionally, with the number of supposed contradictions in the corpus of the New Testament, Williams' selection of contradictions only from the Gospel of John may be seen as self-serving, rather than an honest attempt at discussing contradictions found elsewhere. It seems questionable that the explanation of "deliberate formal contradictions" could be applied to every Gospel author.

Most respectable of *Can We Trust the Gospels* is the measured restraint with which it presents each position. This work is not designed to prove that the spiritual message of the Gospels is true, rather it is designed to demonstrate the information contained within them is reliable and trustworthy, and it does this effectively. The author deftly builds his case for reliability with each chapter in such a way as to make the cumulative weight of the data more than a simple refutation which any single point can endure. While this text is not directed at the scholar, it is clearly written from a scholarly mind, presented in an approachable manner to the layperson, and this is its greatest strength. Rather than writing an 800-page tome for researchers, Williams has written a selectively specific survey for the layman, and in so doing, he has filled a hole in the Christian community that has been empty for far too long.

Murray A. Rae, *Architecture and Theology: The Art of Place*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017. (288 pp.) [ISBN: 9781481307635]

**Sara E. Evans
Dunedin, New Zealand**

The title of Murray Rae's award-winning *Architecture and Theology: The Art of Place* might suggest a simple survey of built environments within the church, or perhaps a theology of architecture. Rae does indeed survey a remarkable number of architectural concepts, models for urban development, and spans the history of architecture from classical Greece to the still incomplete Sagrada Família Basilica. That he does so without overwhelming the architectural novice is noteworthy; that he can simultaneously offer a thorough and thoughtful engagement with theology, ethics, and postmodern philosophy is nothing short of remarkable.

Despite its unassuming title, Rae's book offers something more than a mere consideration of the built environment. Instead, it is an exploration of how architecture nourishes, shapes, and gives meaning to our lives as embodied creatures. To do justice to every topic covered is impossible, I've chosen to highlight three, where Rae examines how architecture speaks to our views on freedom in daily life, offers a vision of public discipleship in city planning, and finally how architecture might open our eyes to the transcendent and coming Christ. Throughout these discussions and others, Rae implicitly suggests that the architect has as much to say about the faith as the theologian.

In his third chapter, Rae addresses the postmodern belief that restraint and law is opposed to human freedom and that it "stifles all creativity" (p. 45). Without explicitly condemning this view, Rae considers several examples of Greek architecture used, both in classical works and in the Renaissance, to demonstrate that rules may be applied with "creativity and imagination," even applied "*inventively* to a particular context" (p. 47). Far from destroying creativity, rules and structure provide the parameters for creative endeavors. This applies beyond architecture and in Christianity where Rae discusses the relationship between Jewish and Christian views of freedom and Torah. The central law, to love God and one's neighbor, serves to counter radical, individualized, and isolated views of freedom. Indeed, the enduring significance of Jewish law among Christians, Rae suggests, lies in the law's ability to order a life "free from bondage" placing constraint "not upon freedom, but upon chaos," (p. 62) just as architectural rules enable creative, sustainable building.

Rae's chapter "A Foretaste of Heaven," offers a vision of a public Christian discipleship. Here, Rae shifts to a broader focus on urban planning and renewal, and public ethics by examining the medieval world's architecture and urban structure. He does so through an extended foray into medieval Rome, describing various features that pilgrims and inhabitants encountered in their travels and daily lives. Rome developed shared public spaces to invite inclusion public (religious) acts, maintained a focus on community needs rather than obsessive privatization, and honoured the poor and needy by providing spaces for their benefit. Rae's survey culminates in the suggestion that through these and other features, medieval Rome provides an example of "Christian discipleship as a form of life to be lived in the public realm" (p. 125). He

notes further that God is not merely concerned with the sanctification of individual souls but an entire earthly existence, something which the Roman *urbanis* attempted to facilitate. Rae's consistent rebuke of modern excess, privatization, and unsustainable practices is held in contrast to the medieval emphasis on Christian ethics displayed in thoughtful, generous architecture and city planning.

Finally, the third chapter I wish to feature is Rae's work in chapter seven, where he develops an inaugurated eschatology by discussing indwelling, presence, and absence in architecture. Utilizing the Rufer House, which lacks an explicit hearth or anchoring object, Rae considers how something without concrete presence may still reveal itself to us. In the Rufer House, this occurs through functionality. Here, what "takes place through the architectural form is obedient to the [intangible] order" (p. 194). That is to say, one may *know* the intangible by living within the *sense* of the space. A home is a reality crafted around a specific vision of life, and one must indwell the space to know it, just as Christianity is a faith known by being lived. Further, architecture may enable us to look from what *has* made itself apparent, from that which has penetrated reality, towards that which is beyond. As the Apostles Creed opens up a new vista, a new way of seeing, architecture may "locate us within a wider landscape" so that we may look beyond the immediate towards to the transcendent, towards that which is to come.

Rae provides many other remarkable and insightful examples of how the architect may speak to theology. His work canvases a wide array of architectural success and failures, their driving philosophies, and the way they can inform our sense of being in the world as Christians.

Architecture and Theology is a reminder that we are embodied creatures, meant to know and see God through not only our minds but our senses. The way in which we inhabit the world shapes not only what we say about ourselves and God, but our very knowledge of him. What Murray Rae has offered us, then, is an invitation to see and inhabit the world differently, so as to know God more fully.

Jason S. Sexton, Paul Weston, eds. *The End of Theology: Shaping Theology for the Sake of Mission*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006. (299 pp). [ISBN: 9781606405919]

**Kate Tyler
Nelson, New Zealand**

A biblical scholar, a missiologist, and a systematic theologian walked into a room. While this sounds like the beginning of a bad dad joke, it was the premise for *The End of Theology: Shaping Theology for the Sake of Mission*. This work collates the proceedings of the 2014 Tyndale Fellowship Christine Doctrine symposium, a collaborative gathering which brought together theologians, missiologists and practitioners to address questions about the relationship of theology and mission. Prompted by shifts in the demographic dominance of Christianity from the global North to the global South, as well as the rapid changes caused by secularisation, pluralisation, and globalisation, the essays contained within "address essential missiological questions for developing the kind of theology that will fuel Christian mission," (p. xxiii) emerging from a commitment to "*do theology* for the sake of mission" (p. xxii). A comprehensive range of perspectives and

issues are addressed – not all essays will be of equal interest to every reader, but sufficient variety ensures that every reader will find something relevant to their context.

The first section approaches different methodological aspects of the theological-missiological dialogue, dealing with Scripture, theology and culture in turn. Opening up is Michael Goheen who takes on biblical interpretation, arguing that mission is “an indispensable lens for reading the whole” of Scripture (p. 10), to which Justin Stratis gently pushes back with the outlook that it is more appropriate to read Scripture as a grand narrative which focuses first on the identity of God as Creator, and places mission as part of the wider framework of “creaturely obedience before the Creator” (p. 22). Next up is Bradley Green on the uneasy relationship of Protestantism to Christian tradition. Because *Sola Scriptura* does not have to mean rejecting all tradition, Green encourages Protestants to engage with the history of tradition, particularly the history of biblical interpretation. Tradition can be appreciated without giving it the same authority as Scripture – instead, Protestants should recognise that “to be reformed is to be, at times, correcting the past and, at times, affirming the past” (p. 55). Paul Weston’s response essay moves with and beyond Green’s contribution, arguing that Scripture, theology, and the missional task are so integrated that every theological tradition must wrestle with being part of a bigger story. The final essay pairing deals with culture; Kirsteen Kim presents an excellent historical overview of how the idea of ‘culture’ has been used in differing ways in diverse theological contexts since Edinburgh 1910. This will be particularly relevant for those working at the intersection of gospel and culture. Kim unpacks how theology—particularly theologies of mission—have appropriated the concept of culture, the limitations of this appropriation, and the need for caution in doing so. Daniel Strange responds with a more theological take on Kim’s historical retelling, highlighting the importance of maintaining a redemptive vision for the transformation of culture.

The second section of the collection is comprised of four standalone essays assessing both the history and current shape of existing theological-missiological dialogue. Mark Elliott offers a survey of perspectives on the relationship between the Bible, theology and mission, inserting some ideas that are dissonant to the general theme of the book—for example, arguing that Israel was not intended by God to have a missionary vocation, stating, “I do not see it in the Old Testament” (p. 123). Brian Stanley offers a historical summary of the status of missiology as an academic discipline, noting that it has flourished in North American contexts but has lapsed in the British academy. Observing that missiology is generally replaced by intercultural studies, or World Christianity chairs, he critiques these fields as being so full of historians and social scientists rather than theologians that there is a “regrettable theological lacuna at the heart of the field” (p. 134). Pete Ward explores the tension between the Church as the place of God’s divine work, and also a social and historic place. Naming the theologian’s task as articulating what God is doing in the world, Ward’s invitation to consider the relationships between the theology demonstrated through our practices, the theology which is voiced within a fellowship, socially normative theology, and formal academic theology, is particularly useful (pp. 161–69). Jason Sexton’s chapter rounds off the second section of the book. He works through the nature of public spaces, the importance of Christian theology being confessable in these public spaces, and the potential for Christian witness to touch every sphere of society with concrete hope. Identifying the challenge of living out a public theology in Western spaces—which are themselves constantly

evolving—Sexton suggests that “the church remains the most significant actor in the public square” (p. 189).

The final four standalone essays offer practical examples of theological-missiological practice, beginning with Kirkpatrick’s exploration of the eclectic global influences which shaped C. René Padilla’s emphasis on integral mission. Andrew Marin draws from his experience of the church working with the LGBTQ+ community in Chicago, and argues for the necessity of embodiment in the journey towards healing; rather than forcing reconciliation out of political necessity, space must be made for experienced trauma to be integrated into one’s identity before forgiveness may also become part of that identity. Jonny Baker offers some insightful reflections ‘from the field’ in reflecting on CMS’s training programmes for pioneers – those with a vocation to reach beyond the existing boundaries of the church. His point that formation needs to not only shape inward Christlikeness, but also form each individual to be an agent of Christ’s transformation in the world, is well made (pp. 237–38). The final contribution is from Krish Kandiah, who suggests that the theological paradigm of adoption leads to a more integrated understanding of mission as something that flows from our identity as children of God. Kandiah outlines his work with Home for Good, an effort encouraging British Christians to foster and adopt those children that are considered hard to place, and outlines theologically why this should be considered missional.

As a systematic theologian with an interest in missiology, stand-out chapters included Goheen’s proposal for a missional hermeneutic, Sexton’s observations about the role of the church in communicating theology in public spaces, Baker’s practical observations about the process of forming missional pioneers, and Kirkpatrick’s survey of Padilla’s theological journey. *The End of Theology* does not set out to provide the definitive answers about how the relationship between theologians, missiologists, and missionaries should be shaped in the future. Instead its aim is to provide a collection of essays which provoke further thought about the need for such dialogue, which it does admirably.

David W. Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries: A History of a Global People*. 2nd edn. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2018. (371 pp.) [ISBN 9781602582040]

**Laurie Guy
Auckland, New Zealand**

Four hundred years of Baptist history; scores and scores of countries with a Baptist presence; competing versions of ‘Baptist’ in many of the countries: how can one successfully write a global history in such circumstances?

Bebbington has wisely opted not to comprehensively include all branches of the Baptist church in all countries in facing this challenge. Thus New Zealand Baptists get very little coverage. The material on India focuses on Nagaland: “the most solidly Baptist area on earth” (p. 333). However, Baptist churches in many other parts of India get no coverage. Thus it has no mention of the 90,000 Baptists in Tripura, a main focus of New Zealand Baptist missionary endeavour in the middle decades of the twentieth century.

Essentially Bebbington has opted not to use an open-cast mining technique to deal with the totality of Baptist history. Rather he has put down mineshafts into the larger material, opting to explore major themes and developments of the Baptist story, highlighting exemplars of that total story.

Bebbington locates the Baptist narrative within the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation with its Church of England expression and its Separatist splinter. This context was the matrix for the emergence of distinct Baptist beliefs, practices and identity. Separatist connection in Netherlands exile led to the birth of the Baptist movement in 1609. How much influence did the Waterland Mennonite Anabaptists have in the birth of the Baptists? Here Bebbington well-marshals his evidence, concluding stronger Waterlander influence than some have conceded in the past.

Although Bebbington indicated at the outset that his book would be studying problems rather than periods (p. 4), chapter four essentially explores General (Arminian) and Particular (Calvinist) Baptists in the seventeenth century. He highlights the lack of mutual recognition between the two bodies: “When an adherent of the Calvinist body transferred to the General Baptists, the person had to be baptized for a second time, ‘*Because (said they) You were baptized into the wrong Faith, and so into another Gospel.*’” Did this indicate initial, excessive, doctrinal, Baptist fussiness, stemming from a reliance on an over-literalistic and narrow reading of scripture?

Conversely Bebbington notes strong connection between seventeenth-century General Baptists and their Quaker counterparts. The fact that Baptists of that time wrote significantly against the Quakers suggests that at grassroots level Baptists were vulnerable to Quaker recruiting. Bebbington seems to take this one step further: “There was a tendency among General Baptists . . . to rely on impulse and so to exalt the Spirit above the written word” (p. 56). This needs further evidence than Bebbington provides. Given the later General Baptist drift in a rationalistic Socinian direction (the opposite of Quaker subjectivism), the evidence suggests a certain instability amongst early Baptists as they struggled to interpret their foundational Bible. The lure of Quakerism was probably more to rank-and-file Baptists rather than to the movement as a whole.

Treatment of initial Baptist beginnings in America from 1639 is contrastingly brief (p. 49). Baptists remained a small body there until transfused by the eighteenth and nineteenth century evangelical revivals. Bebbington’s exploring together Baptist developments on both sides of the Atlantic at this time highlights the influence this extra-Baptist development had on Baptist life generally.

Baptists seem frequently to have been prone to divide. A rigorously Word-centred approach, which still always needs human interpretation, likely fuels this problem. In chapter six Bebbington notes divisions among Baptists in the nineteenth century. Here he emphasises interconnection of currents in America and Britain. Is this altogether helpful? America was so torn over the slavery issue and the subsequent Civil War, that its dividing into Northern (later American) and Southern Baptists seems almost inevitable. However, in Britain, despite minor splits, the trend seems rather towards unification of the two main Baptist bodies as high Calvinism had reduced emphasis.

However, another split was potentially in the making, between the conservative and broad ends of the Baptist movement. This took acute form in America in the 1920s' fundamentalist-modernist split, which Bebbington deals with pretty fair-mindedly in chapter seven.

This cleavage lay over the place of scripture and its relation to the contemporary world. Several chapters – on the social gospel, on race, and on women – explore differences, particularly among Baptists in America, on these issues. One disturbing, long-lasting aspect was that only 11 percent of Southern Baptist churches admitted African Americans to membership as late as 1968 (p. 150). Bebbington notes, however, a Southern Baptist apology in 1995 for its earlier racism (p. 154), and the election of an African American as president of the Southern Baptist Convention in 2012–2014 (p. 155). Yet despite a western trend towards equality for women, Southern Baptists have taken a stance rejecting the ordination of women and restricting their areas of ministry (p. 174). That would, however, match parts of the non-western world, though Bebbington does not discuss this.

Bebbington explores church, ministry and sacraments among Baptists in chapter 11, arguing for an initial, fairly high sacramental position, with this lessening in more recent times. Though others have argued similarly, I rather see diversity of evidence on these matters.

Baptists have often trumpeted their consistent affirmation of religious freedom. The plea for tolerance of Thomas Helwys, co-founder of the General Baptists, even for “heretiks, Turcks [and] Jews” is celebrated. While Bebbington notes the strand of liberty in Baptist history, he indicates that Baptists have not always lived by that principle (p. 213). While not discussed by Bebbington, the fact that that in earlier centuries Baptists in England might be put out of their church if they married someone outside of their faith-body supports Bebbington's caution. Is liberty a fundamental Baptist principle or is it simply freedom of worship?

Baptist pride is better focused on Baptist influence on world missionary endeavour. This began with the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society in England in 1792. Bebbington discusses this missionary outreach and the consequent global spread of Baptists in chapters 13 and 14. In 1800 Baptist presence was essentially confined to the British Isles and North America. Today there are major Baptist communities around the globe, with very large numbers in countries such as India, China, Brazil, Nigeria and the Congo (p. 232)—something indeed to celebrate.

Global expansion leads to three new chapters in the second edition of Bebbington's book. These chapters focus on Baptists in Latin America, Nigeria, and Nagaland (India). This global focus highlights the varying contexts and variety of Baptists today. Bebbington's Latin America chapter spotlights the problems of the rich-poor divide, with key Baptist voices (Orlando Costas, Samuel Escobar and René Padilla) urging a holistic gospel that focuses on justice as well as evangelism, in the context of moderate liberation theology (pp. 263–69).

The chapter on Nigeria and its five million Baptists is welcome – the second largest grouping of Baptists in the world. The influence of charismatic renewal along with cultural influences far removed from western perspectives creates a very different, but much more authentically African, Baptist church.

The Nagaland chapter cannot pretend to summarise the variety of Indian Baptist life. But it does highlight issues facing Baptist life in a fringe, tribal area of India, where Baptists are an overwhelming majority of the population. Searching for a right balance between faith, culture and justice has led a minority to create a militant blend of Maoist Christianity. Good Baptist theology? No—but a common issue for young churches seeking to make sense of their new Christianity and its relationship to their old culture and current context.

Bebbington then discusses the issue of Baptist identity against the backdrop of cleavage in the largest Baptist denomination, the Southern Baptists, with conservatives (fundamentalists in many cases) stressing an inerrant Bible, and moderates (liberals in some cases) stressing freedom. The outcome in recent decades has been a hardening of conservatism in the Southern Baptists and their increasing alienation from Baptists in the wider world. This alienation eventually led to the Southern Baptists withdrawing from the Baptist World Alliance in 2003—interesting to note parallels with Trumpist America today.

Bebbington finally notes seven forms of Baptist life today (1) liberal Baptists (a small minority) (2) classic Evangelicals (3) premillennial Fundamentalists (4) charismatic-renewal Baptists (5) Calvinist Baptists (6) Baptists drawn to Anabaptist emphases (7) High Church Baptists.

Given the diversity of such emphases, is there such a thing as Baptist identity today? This is Bebbington's final question. Noting, too, other traditions that also embrace believers' baptism, Bebbington gives an uncertain answer: "In the end, therefore, the Baptist identity, a phenomenon of the flux of history, may elude definition" (p. 338).

In the reviewer's New Zealand the question has particular pertinence, given the great deal of commonality of Baptists with progressive Open Brethren churches. Are they Baptist? After all, they are closer in perspective and practice to mainstream Baptists than are some Baptist churches more to the edge of the Baptist movement. The question also has pertinence because, as with many countries in the world, many ethnically-based Baptist churches have emerged, which, while affiliated with the Baptist Union, have great divergence of practice and lesser fellowship connection with the mainstream of European-background Baptist churches.

So who is a Baptist? My answer (not Bebbington's) is those who practise believers' baptism and self-identify as Baptist.

I have enjoyed the stimulation of Bebbington's book. Thoughtful laypeople and beginning theology students will find Bebbington's book a very good starting place to wrestle with what is now a globally focused question, "Who are the Baptists?"

Michael F. Bird, *Jesus the Eternal Son: Answering Adoptionist Christology*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017. (xvi + 155 pp.) [ISBN 9780802875068]

**Jonathan R. Robinson
University of Otago, Dunedin, NZ.**

Michael Bird, a lecturer at Ridley College in Melbourne, Australia, is well known as an evangelical scholar of the New Testament. In *Jesus the Eternal Son* he argues against the view that “the earliest retrievable Christology was adoptionist” by making two claims: that “the first Christologies were hastily devised veneration of Jesus as a divine figure” and that “adoptionism originated as a particular second-century phenomenon” (p. 9). The book is intended to be a “short, sharp, and provocative volume” (p. xi). Bird finds the significance of Christology for the New Testament communities was that Jesus’ nature directly impinged upon soteriology and ecclesiology. A different Jesus would lead to a different salvation and a different understanding of Christian identity (p. 4). While Bird rightly accepts that early Christian Christology was not monolithic he also argues that Christologies that were incongruent with apostolic witness and the scriptures, or had dubious ethical outcomes, were pushed to the margins and thus became considered “heresies” (p. 5–6).

After the introductory chapter Bird turns his attention to the texts that are often held by scholars to suggest a “primitive” Christology where Jesus was first appointed the Son of God at the resurrection, that is, Romans 1:3–4 and the sermons in Acts. For Bird, Rom 1:3–4, “appointed the son of God in power,” does not describe an initial bestowal but “a transition from one state of divine sonship to another state of divine sonship” (p. 15). Among other arguments, he reasonably argues that Paul would not have used the creedal fragment if he had understood it to be affirming something different to the pre-existence and incarnation of Jesus that he affirms elsewhere (eg. Rom 8:3; Phil 2:6–7). Bird then examines Acts 2:36; 5:31 and 13:33 (p. 24–25). These texts have often been argued to suggest Jesus only became the son of God at the resurrection. Central to his argument is that such a reading is atomistic, ignoring the wider context of Luke/Acts and the immediate context of the sermons of which the texts are a part (p. 26–27).

Chapter three addresses the topic of Greco-Roman beliefs in humans that became gods upon their death or through great virtue. In particular, Bird relates these beliefs to early Christian views of Jesus and whether those Greco-Roman beliefs were the source for the Christology of Mark’s Gospel. Bird surveys Greco-Roman heroes and emperors who became gods or had divine honours bestowed upon them. Primarily he summarises the data, although he does refer frequently to the primary literature. This allows him to cover a great deal of ground. He concludes that divinity was “relative rather than absolute” (p. 40), “not primarily about essence but about honour, status, and power” (p. 41); divinised humans were ranked below the traditional gods (p. 47); and that Greco-Roman divinisation was contested and even mocked by both Greek and Jewish writers (p. 49). Bird then juxtaposes his account of Jewish monotheism, which “includes an absolute distinction between God and humanity that could not be traversed” (p. 57). Importantly, for Bird, Jesus “was not given his own shrine next to Yahweh like Augustus was slotted next

to Roma or Jupiter . . . worship of Jesus necessarily involved worship of God the Father” (p. 62). Thus Greco-Roman divine humans are not a legitimate model for Jesus’ divinity in Mark or early Christian thought. The issue of early Jewish monotheism is still contentious one, and those not already persuaded by the theses of Richard Bauckham and Larry Hurtado, etc, may not find Bird’s logic compelling.

Chapter four aims to be a “close reading of Mark’s Gospel” to “contend against an adoptionist reading” and argue for a divine identity Christology in Mark (p. 64). However, Bird first launches into a ten page refutation of Michael Peppard’s *The Son of God in the Roman World* (Oxford University Press, 2011) which argues that the baptism of Jesus in Mark 1:9–11 would be interpreted in the light of Roman adoption practices and the imperial cults (p. 66–76). Bird then discusses a number of reasons why Mark’s baptism account is not adoptionist, including fine points of grammar, the recognition of Jesus by demons, and the use of sonship language at the transfiguration and crucifixion (p. 76–81). Bird goes on to consider “evidence from the wider Markan narrative that . . . ascribes transcendent qualities and a divine identity to Jesus” (p. 81). In some detail, he examines Mark’s *kyrios* (Lord) language for Jesus, Jesus’ prerogative in forgiving sins, the water miracles and Transfiguration as “Theophanies”, and Jesus’ authority (p. 81–101). He concludes that Jesus is a pre-existent heavenly being. Usefully, albeit briefly, Bird then also examines the use of some early Jewish sources as proof-texts to argue that Mark’s portrayal of Jesus is parallel to that of human agents of God portrayed in other early Jewish literature. He concludes, “Mark, as the Jewish monotheist he was, would find it singularly difficult to imagine a human being elevated to divine status and power.”

Bird’s argument in chapters 2–4 is thorough and builds a wide and consistent case. However, while he is successful in showing the so called “adoptionist” passages of the NT *can* be read as consistent with a belief in the pre-existence of Jesus, he has not shown they *must*. The nature of the collected evidence is uniformly indirect and inferential and thus open to alternative interpretations. Especially uncertain is the heavy lifting done by assumptions about what Mark could or could not believe and the assumption that Mark, Paul and Luke would have been conscious of these Christological concerns as they wrote. The question arises, if Mark, Paul and Luke were so alert to finer points of Christology why are their texts not more direct on these matters? Of course the same critique applies *mutatis mutandis* to those arguing for NT adoptionism, and this is something Bird’s work clearly reveals.

In the fifth chapter the book’s pace quickens considerably. Having argued that the New Testament does not contain adoptionism Bird works through the “likely suspects” (p. 107) of the post-New Testament era to find the first true adoptionists. The fifth parable of the Shepherd of Hermas, although often considered adoptionistic, is, Bird argues, better understood as “complicated and incoherent” Christology, closer to angel-Christology than adoptionism (p. 111–112). He argues that “the old and repeated claim that the Ebionites were a single Jewish Christian group with an adoptionist Christology is patently false” (p. 120). Instead they should be understood as a diverse grouping of Jewish Christians resistant to incarnational Christology and generally holding to a possession Christology. Finally, he concludes the first true adoptionists were some of the followers of Theodotus of Byzantium sometime from 190 to early 200s AD., although Theodotus himself was not an adoptionist. “One group of the Theodotians, who held that Jesus

was deified after his resurrection, were the first, true, authentic, and genuine adoptionists, as far as definitions and evidence go” (p. 122).

The final chapter is a brief discussion of modern theology and adoptionism. John Knox and John Macquarrie, among others, are given as examples of recent adoptionist theology. He also argues that some advocates of Spirit-Christology, David Coffey and Ralph Del Colle, leave themselves open to the charge of adoptionism because they are not explicit as to whether Jesus was divine before receiving the Spirit at his baptism. Bird briefly argues against them all concluding, “A Christology that presents us with a mere man who bids us to earn our salvation is an impoverished alternative to the God of Grace and mercy who took on our flesh and ‘became sin’ so that we might become the ‘righteousness of God’” (p. 130).

Overall this is a highly stimulating and readable book. Use of Greek alphabet rather than transliteration might hinder non-academic readers, although there is not a lot of it. Equally, explanation of some terms (e.g. angel- and possession Christology which are introduced without explanation) would improve accessibility for a general audience. From a scholarly perspective Bird engages impressively with the secondary literature, with some very useful footnotes. The brevity of the book and amount covered means more time spent at the theoretical level than the exegetical. Occasionally this means some arguments appear a little thin. In particular his argument for the pre-existence of Christ in Mark’s Gospel would need a much fuller treatment if it were to be convincing to a sceptical reader. Likewise, his criticisms of modern adoptionists in chapter 6 is so brief it is in danger of being perfunctory. Notwithstanding, Bird has succeeded in creating a short, readable and provocative book which both serves as a useful summary of the state of the discussion and forcefully throws down the gauntlet to those who argue for an adoptionist Christology in the New Testament.

Alexandra Radcliff. *The Claim of Humanity in Christ: Salvation and Sanctification in the Theology of T. F. and J. B. Torrance*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2017. (208 pp.) [ISBN: 9781498230193]

**Timothy Jacomb
Wellington, New Zealand**

Radcliff’s book is based on her doctoral studies where, as intimated by the title, she focused upon the twin themes of salvation and sanctification in the work of Scottish reformed theologians and brothers, James B. and Thomas F. Torrance.

Masterfully written, the book follows a two-part chiasmic structure (A-B-C C-B-A). The first section (A-B-C) is headed up under the heading *The Triune God of Salvation*. Here Radcliff deals with the Torrance’s soteriology. Radcliff argues that salvation is a Trinitarian event; *from the Father* (covenant over contract, or filial over federal Ch. 1), *through the Son* (achieved ontologically through Christ’s vicarious humanity rather than some external benefit Ch. 2), and *by the Holy Spirit* (applied subjectively to us by the Spirit based upon the objective union achieved in Christ Ch. 3). Within this filial, ontological, and objectively grounded

understanding of salvation, Radcliff consistently argues that salvation is entirely something God achieves but achieves *in* humanity because it occurs *in Christ*. Those familiar with the Torrance's soteriology will be unsurprised that the telos or goal of this soteriological vision is *theosis*—the personal, relation, ontological participation of humanity in God's life because of our participation in Christ's life (p. 119).

The second half of Radcliff's work is headed up *Sanctification and Human Participation*. Here Radcliff, still following the chiasmic structure (but now C-B-A), starts her discussion on sanctification by considering it from its objective grounding as something already accomplished in Christ (p. 125). In Radcliff's sights here is the faulty view of sanctification as the human work of 'making one's self more like Christ,' as is sometimes the case in the more introspective, legalistic streams of puritan theology. In opposition to this, Radcliff argues for a vision of sanctification as something *already achieved in Christ*, but to be realized in our lives as "free and joyful participation by the Spirit in what God has already accomplished" (p. 141). Moving on from this objective basis, Radcliff turns her attention to the ontological aspect of sanctification as growing up into what we already are *in Christ* (Ch. 6). While retaining something of the Torrance's eschatological reserve in regard to an over realized understanding of sanctification in this present life, this ontologically grounded vision of sanctification is again understood as something that really has happened *'in Christ.'* Christians are therefore to be viewed as "saints that sin, rather than sinners who are saved" (p. 155). Radcliff finishes the second half of her work by returning to the theme with which she opened; a filial understanding of participation as the key to understanding both salvation and sanctification, for both are nothing other than the free gift of God opened up by God's own act of covenantal, unconditional love in Christ.

Throughout the two parts, Radcliff states in a variety of ways that "salvation and sanctification are not burdensome endeavors but the *free gift of enjoying communion with the triune God of grace*" (p. 188). This central, consistent theme runs throughout her work. That is, in Christ, by the Spirit humanity has been drawn into the life of love and fellowship that the Father shared with Spirit and Son from before the world began. Both salvation and sanctification can only be understood for Radcliff as something occurring *in Christ*.

Radcliff's work is a most welcome addition to the steadily growing body of Torrance scholarship, and to the wider genre of pastoral theology. This is so for several reasons. First, the Torrances' work remains inaccessible to most because of their technical and dense writing. Radcliff's work breaks down some of that barrier by providing a constructive point of entry into Torrance scholarship without becoming a simple readers guide or summary. Second, and perhaps more importantly, Radcliff places some of the most complicated academic theology of the 20th Century into explicit dialogue with pastoral concerns. While her work remains principally concerned with the *theological* contours of such pastoral practice, it does at incisive points indicate, and constructively so, what such a christologically conditioned, Trinitarian view of salvation and sanctification could, or perhaps should, entail for pastoral practice. The one critique is that very few lived examples or real life illustrations find their way into the book. For a work on pastoral theology, example and illustration from lived practice would have been a welcomed addition. But, perhaps that is asking too much from a single volume. Taking everything into account, Radcliff's work is a wonderful gift for both church and Academy alike.

Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation: Cosmos, Creatures, and the Wise and Good Creator*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017. (372 pp.) [ISBN: 9780801030994]

Elliot Rice
Christchurch, New Zealand

At a time when concern for our ecological environment has come to the fore of Pacific and global concern, Catholic theologian Matthew Levering's *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation* is a timely, thorough, and creative theological interaction with some of our deepest questions about God and creation. The third volume in his "Engaging the Doctrine of" series, his goal here is to listen carefully to the challenges mounted by the developing ecological crisis and by modern science against the Bible's creation account, particularly as it is expressed in Genesis 1-3, and to respond with a nuanced affirmation of traditional theological convictions—particularly those articulated by medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas.

In the two opening chapters, his argument begins with the wise and good Creator who has life in himself, and in whom creation has life. Having purposefully limited his discussion to God as Creator, rather than as Trinity (pp. 5–12), Levering expounds this eternal life in God with discussions of "Divine Ideas" (chapter one) and "Divine Simplicity" (chapter two), owing much to the logic of Thomistic philosophical theology. As such, this is a thoroughly Catholic piece of theology that starts with God as Creator, rather than with Jesus Christ the Redeemer of creation, or the Spirit as creation's Perfector. Given the last half-century's eruption of Trinitarian theology, and especially given his previous volume, *Engaging the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, his decision to ground the eternal life of God in these abstract concepts is surprising. Though his engagement of the divine ideas and simplicity is rigorous, it is also, to this reader, tedious. Where a Trinitarian account of God's inner life is demonstrably dynamic, I agree with Levering's interlocutor Gregory Doolan that this "is primarily a philosophical doctrine, rather than a theological doctrine inextricable from the mystery of the Trinity" (p. 66).

If the first two chapters represent the tedium of a First Article Theology, the following four chapters demonstrate its promise with stimulating discussions of "Creatures" (chapter three), "Image of God" (chapter four), God's command to "Be Fruitful and Multiply" (chapter five), and "Original Sin" (chapter six). Each chapter is clearly laid out, beginning with a careful and broad enquiry into the challenges raised by modern scientific accounts of the cosmos and its creatures, which leads Levering to ask insightful questions of the Genesis creation story. For example, in light of the countless species now extinct, "Why would such unfathomable multitude and such strange diversity, seemingly purposeless, absurd, and wasteful, characterize God's plan of creation?" (p. 110). Or given the growing recognition that overpopulation is one of the biggest contributors to the developing environmental crisis, "Does the growth of human population express the wisdom of God in creation?" (p. 196). Each chapter then critically considers alternative Christian responses to these issues, in which Christian scholars have either ceded ground more or less entirely to science, or sought to reassert a form of biblical literalism. Seeking synthesis, Levering then offers a consistently Thomistic theological response, ceding ground to science where reasonable, all the while

enabling the church to hold fast to convictions of theological centrality, albeit with Catholic accents. As he says himself, “I . . . aim to show appreciation for modern science without falling into what David Bradshaw insightfully describes as the erroneous view that ‘science provides the deepest insight into nature.’” (p. 4).

Having affirmed that God has life in himself in the first two chapters, these subsequent chapters express how all creation participates in God’s life. Two chapters deserve special mention. In “Be Fruitful and Multiply,” Levering draws attention to the dangers inherent in an ever-increasing human population consuming resources on a finite planet, and invites us to question the sensibility of God’s command to fill the earth. He considers the perspective of Christian environmentalist Bill McKibben, who promotes single-child households for the sake of reversing population growth (pp. 206–15). Levering’s engagement with the concept is sensitive and willing. Despite affirming McKibben’s emphasis on wise stewardship of earth’s limited resources, he concludes by arguing for the deeper wisdom of creation. “Simply as created, humans participate in the ontological goodness of God: it is good to be. Wondrously, God also calls humans to share in his own happiness, to be God’s friends and to know him as he knows us” (p. 222). While wise stewardship is important, this cannot be undertaken at the cost of welcoming this gift of more humans for life in communion with God.

In “Original Sin,” Levering considers the likelihood of Adam and Eve’s actual existence against scientific opinion “that our genetic variability requires a much larger . . . group of ancestors, perhaps ten thousand and at least a few thousand” (p. 228). Reasoning that all humans must find unity in the first humans to make sense of original justice, original sin, and “Atonement” (chapter seven), he concedes that this unity can be found in both a monogenetic account (following Kenneth Kemp) or a polygenetic account (following Karl Rahner), provided we ascribe some form of priestly representative role to Adam and Eve for original sin. He rejects Peter Enns’ denial of original sin altogether, arguing that if human sinfulness was calibrated into creation, then the Creator God must be unjust. Having established these perimeters, he then offers a constructive account of original sin, communicating the traditional doctrine in conversation with modern sensibilities.

This book is a worthwhile contribution to an often-sidelined doctrine, inviting the church to theological reflection on an increasingly public issue. It is thoroughly ecumenical in its scope and robustly Catholic in its conclusions. There is particular benefit in Levering’s careful interaction with issues around evolution and the relationship of science and faith. This book serves as an invitation to pastors, theologians, and Christians engaged in science to wade beyond schismatic arguments into liberating theological reflections on the wonder of creation.

Douglas W. Kennard, *Epistemology and Logic in the New Testament: Early Jewish Context and Biblical Theology Mechanism that Fit Within Some Contemporary Ways of Knowing*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016. (vii + 270 pp.) [ISBN 9781532608155]

**Jonathan R. Robinson
University of Otago, Dunedin, NZ.**

Douglas Kennard is a professor at the Houston Graduate School of Theology and has written several books within the subjects of biblical studies, epistemology and theology. This book comes at a time when the study of the epistemology of the biblical authors is at an early stage and promises to contribute much to scholarly debate around issues like genre, Christology, apocalyptic and hermeneutics. Kennard writes in order to introduce philosophers to the riches of New Testament epistemology. One would also expect such a book to contribute to, or at least introduce the current scholarship on New Testament epistemology.

The first chapter introduces the author and his approach, situating Kennard as an evangelical New Testament scholar and philosopher of religion. He argues that previous works in this area have emphasised either “exegetical or philosophical awareness but do not show the [sic] familiarity or interact with the other discipline sufficiently” (p. 3). The chapter lacks any systematic introduction to the key epistemological terms that Kennard uses or their definitions. It is thus unclear how Kennard expects terms such as “language games”, “the thought forms of William Alston”, “mystical”, “Wittgensteinian communal language”, “Plantinga properly basic communal faith system”, “non-foundational realism”, or “Lockean epistemology” to be understood. These terms reoccur throughout the book, and are not always used consistently.

Chapter two argues that Matthew’s Jesus reflects early Jewish rabbinic teaching. At 75 pages long (pp. 10–85) it is the longest chapter of the book. The chapter is generally a fair introduction to the Jewish background of Matthew’s Gospel. Kennard argues that Jesus is distinctive against the background of early rabbinic teaching in his emphasis on, “Himself as the authoritative scribe to settle all kingdom ethical and spiritual issues” (p. 10). Periodically sentences in italics alert the reader to a statement about epistemology. Although the chapter focusses on Matthew, use is made of the other canonical Gospels to round out a picture of Jesus’ teaching and its epistemological underpinnings.

Chapter three (pp. 86–127) argues that Luke-Acts used Greco-Roman rhetoric to engage its audience and present virtues to imitate. This is not a controversial conclusion. However, on p. 88 Kennard discusses the manuscript tradition of Acts and states that the differences between the Western and Alexandrian texts of Acts “corroborate the historical events through textual criticism as substantially providing multiple attestation.” This argument is hard to follow. It would normally be understood that the two text forms only attest to the text of Acts not the events Acts describe.

On the next page Kennard categorically states that “Greco-Roman historical narrative did not permit the use of mythology” citing Dionysius, *Thucydides*. Then he states, “Greco-Roman historical accounts utilized supernatural miracles as an apologetic role demonstrating the hero’s superiority” (p. 99). Kennard argues that because one Greco-Roman historian said he rejected myths therefore all Greco-Roman

historiography, including the accounts of the supernatural, are reliable reports of events. For Kennard this argument supports the historical veracity of Luke-Acts. For this reader the logic of such an argument is problematic at several points and leads to an unnecessarily naïve approach to the claims of ancient texts.

A similar problem is apparent in his approach to the (now outdated) form criticism of Rudolf Bultmann. Kennard clearly feels challenged by Bultmann and returns to him several times in order to argue that Bultmann's theories about the influence of Hellenistic mythology on the New Testament are disproven by 1 Tim 1:4 and 2 Pet 1:6 and their repudiation of "myth" (e.g. pp. 99, 124, 131). If Bultmann, or one of his followers, was suspicious of the historical claims of the New Testament texts why would he be convinced by the fact they claim to be reliable? Bultmann's theories were overturned decades ago in biblical scholarship, so Kennard's rebuttal seems unnecessary even as it is otherwise unconvincing.

Subsequent chapters discuss 1 & 2 Peter (p. 121), Paul's letters (p. 128), Johannine literature including Revelation (p. 163), James (p. 200), and Hebrews (p. 215). A highlight, for this reader, was the chapter on James which contains an enjoyable discussion of James' relationship to the wisdom literature of the Jewish scriptures and their Ancient Near Eastern context.

In both the chapters on Paul and on Johannine literature Kennard discusses the role of the Spirit in illuminating exegesis (pp. 133–37, 177–81). This is a legitimate question both in regard to the historical epistemology of the New Testament and the present day understanding of the church. Kennard observes "that rather repeatedly *godly commentators disagree* with features which other godly commentators may say are within the meaning of a text" (pp. 135 & 180, emphasis original). Again, the term "godly commentator" is not defined although some examples are given. However, he adds another observation to his argument, "*sometimes non-Christians have produced the best commentaries on a book of the Bible*" (pp. 137 & 180, emphasis original). He goes on to state that the prime example of this is Jacob Milgrom, a Jew, and his commentary on Leviticus. This is confusing to me for several reasons. Firstly, what exactly is "ungodly" about being a Jew? At the least, this is an unfortunate and careless choice of words. Secondly, Daniel Boyarin, also a Jew, was listed among the godly commentators (p. 136). How did Kennard decide one Jew was godly and the other was not? Thirdly, with what criteria did he decide Milgrom's commentary was "best"? Fourthly, the question pertinent to this book is surely the New Testament authors' understanding of inspiration. Thus whoever wrote the "best" modern commentary on Leviticus or the disagreements of contemporary scholars has absolutely no bearing.

The book is generally well referenced with both secondary and primary literature. The book contains an extensive, possibly comprehensive, bibliography and this is very useful for those wishing to study New Testament epistemology. However, the reader may find it frustrating when Kennard references his own unpublished conference papers and amusing when he recounts conversations had with various scholars at those conferences. Don Carson may be surprised to learn that off the cuff comments he made in 2003 at the Southeast (USA) *Evangelical Theological Society* are being refuted in a book 13 years later (p. 172). While a biblical scholar will appreciate the extensive references to Rabbinic sources, Pseudepigrapha, and the Dead Sea Scrolls I do wonder what the book's intended audience (philosophical epistemologists) will be able to

make of them as there is no list of abbreviations and often no explanation as to how those texts substantiate the point referenced.

Sentences are frequently incomplete, use strange and imprecise verbs, and are often unclear in meaning. The quality of prose does vary and some passages are easier to read than others. However, the reader is frequently required to supply meaning or nuance that is not present in the text in order to make sense of the argument. One indication of the unpolished nature of the book is that at several points entire paragraphs are reproduced verbatim (e.g. pp. 86 & 120, 134 & 177, 137 & 180) as well as sentences on the same page (p. 77). The conclusion of the book (pp. 222–24) is mostly identical to the last few pages of the introduction (p. 5–9).

This book represents a huge amount of work and learning. It may be useful to the specialist scholar who wishes to use its bibliography or to help locate important parallels in the rabbinic literature. While its discussion of NT epistemology is not always clear or compelling it may also provide a useful starting point for further studies as long as the reader is highly discerning. The numerous lapses in logical and methodological rigour (examples detailed above) prevent this book from being recommended beyond such limits.

Philip G. Ziegler, *Militant Grace: The Apocalyptic Turn and the Future of Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018. (238 pp.) [ISBN: 9780801098536]

**Stanley S. Maclean
Daegu, Republic of Korea**

The title of this book instantly piqued my interest. The word ‘apocalyptic’ conjures up such images as the stars falling from heaven and the Son of Man coming on the clouds. *Militant Grace*, though, is not about such things. Indeed, it does not even treat the end times or the Bible’s apocalyptic literature. For Ziegler, apocalyptic is a theological method and, in his words, “a discursive idiom uniquely suited to articulate the radicality, sovereignty, and militancy of adventitious divine grace” (p. xvii).

The book harks back to the golden age of eschatology in the last century, when this theological locus became the ‘medium of Christian faith’ (Moltmann) and the ‘mother of all theology’ (Käsemann). The author believes that this repositioning of eschatology was ingredient in that century’s great theological articulations of the gospel, but he is afraid that this theological progress is under threat now from a return of nineteenth-century historicism. “All is history,” is the new motto. With this book, he hopes to stem this new tide and to recover the salutary influence of eschatology on theology. Ziegler is co-chair of the Theology and Apocalyptic Network, which he co-founded in 2009. The book is the fruit of his involvement with this research group.

Militant Grace is an exquisite monograph, but it does not lend itself to a facile review, since it is actually a collection of revised articles that were previously published over a ten-year span. There is naturally a lack of cohesion here, but the author of course tries to persuade us of the book’s unity. “The overarching

argument of this book,” he writes, “is that in the pursuit of renewed accountability to the apocalyptic gospel, theology is required to think again about its own forms, methods, and foci precisely in virtue of its distinctively eschatological content” (p. xv).

The book is divided into three sections: “The Shape and Sources of an Apocalyptic Theology”; “Christ, Spirit, and Salvation in an Apocalyptic Key,” and “Living Faithfully at the Turn of the Ages.” In the first section, Ziegler gives his “three theses” on the role of apocalyptic in theology. First, it should be a Pauline apocalyptic idiom, since it is the one best suited to “announce the full scope, depth, and radicality” of the Gospel, which is about God’s judgement of evil and his merciful, redeeming love for world (p. 26). Second, an apocalyptic theology will be “marked by an intense Christological concentration,” for God’s revelation and redemption in Christ is the ultimate “eschatological act” (p. 26). Third, an apocalyptic theology will underscore the “unexpected, the new, and disjunctive character of the divine work” (p. 27).

The second section is an application of the theses to three theological loci: Christology, pneumatology, and soteriology. This translates into a focus on Christ’s royal office, understood in light of Romans 8:31–39 and Phil 2:5–10. Christ’s kingship is defined equally by his ascension and his humiliation. Thus, Christ reigns as the crucified one, and his kingship is spiritual because it is an “eschatological reality” by the Holy Spirit, who is perfecting the work of Christ in the world (p. 50). Christ’s kingship is eschatological also because it “stakes a full and indissolubly *final* claim on our lives” (p. 48). The Spirit permits us to acknowledge that “Jesus is Lord” because the Spirit is “the present agent and sovereign advocate of the transit of Christ’s reign in the present age” (p. 78). Registering soteriology in the apocalyptic key means understanding God’s last judgement as a judgement to salvation, for it is about seeing Christ’s death and resurrection as proleptic of our resurrection from the dead. “The justifying work of the cross and resurrection is indissolubly and determinatively linked to the substance of and form of the last judgement” (p. 110).

Treating the subjects of law and ethics, the third section seems to be a misfit. However, Ziegler attempts to put these subjects in an apocalyptic register. The second article on natural law is the most germane to the book’s motif. The point made is that apocalyptic theology disqualifies natural law as it is conventionally understood. “The disruption of the categories and strategies of natural law ethics is so thoroughgoing precisely because of the fundamentally cosmological register of Paul’s apocalyptic gospel” (p. 131). The author’s own views in this section are most transparent in the concluding chapter on “Discipleship,” which is described as a life “suffused with and animated by the militancy of the eschatological gospel of God” (p. 193).

Militant Grace is impeccably written, with fresh, invigorating diction. The essays are learned, engaging, and insightful. Ziegler should be commended for recovering Paul’s apocalyptic grammar, and for trying to use it to enrich Christian doctrine and life.

Yet this book might leave many yearning for more from a theology funded by the New Testament apocalyptic. Perhaps apocalyptic eschatology should not be as tightly circumscribed as it is here, to Paul’s idiom and that refracted through modern Protestant theology, if we want to announce the “full scope” of the Gospel. Otherwise, we are left with a rather antiseptic apocalyptic theology.

Ziegler's penchant for apocalyptic is driven by a concern for the "future of theology," but in the Scriptures apocalyptic has to do with the future of the world, even about "things which must shortly come to pass" (Rev 1:1). The preeminent thing is the final advent of Christ, and yet there is scarcely any mention of this aspect of Christology in *Militant Grace*. This is an astonishing omission when you consider that it was faith in the imminent return of Christ that—more than anything—galvanised Paul and the other apostles.

Criticisms aside, *Militant Grace* is an impressive work, and it will surely stimulate discussion on a biblical theme that ought to have a strong bearing on dogmatic theology as well as the church's life and mission.

David Bentley Hart, *The New Testament: A Translation*. Cornwall, UK: Yale University Press, 2017. (577 pp.) [ISBN: 9780300186093]

**Robert Jason Pickard
Dunedin, New Zealand**

David Bentley Hart, a scholar in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, and currently a fellow at the Notre Dame Institute for Advanced Studies, has produced a remarkable translation of the New Testament. Hart's project is intriguing for several reasons. First, it is rare to find a translation of the entire New Testament by a single author. This approach gives the work coherence and a consistency of method and thought—something hard for translations done by committees to achieve at the same level. Second, unlike most modern Bible translations, Hart seeks to provide "an almost pitilessly literal translation" (p. xvii). Hart proceeds in this way, because he believes it will help the church recapture the radical world of New Testament times. Today's church, and the average Christian believer, are out of touch with this radically different way of life that Jesus calls his followers to in the Scriptures. Hart wants to recover this profound reality that the Church lives, already, in the age to come (pp. xvii, xxiv). Yet, behind this laudable goal, lies many of Hart's own presuppositions.

Given that several critical reviews dealing with Hart's work on methodological and literary grounds already exist, in this review I would like to suggest that Hart's own theological presuppositions colour his work in more profound ways than he admits. This approach is warranted because Hart claims that popular Bible translations such as the *New International Version* and the *English Standard Version* are distorted by the translators' "doctrinal or theological or moral ideologies" (p. xv). However, at key points, Hart's translation doesn't escape the doctrinal and ideological driven tendencies Hart finds in today's more popular Bible translations. As much as I admire Hart's work, there seem to be two major presuppositions dominating the work as well. These are his own Eastern tradition, and his understanding of universal salvation.

First, Hart cannot escape working from within his own theological tradition. Of course, Hart knows this (p. xvi), but yet still presents himself as the one who will produce a translation that is free from the translator's own theological commitment. Hart claims that he will avoid ideological driven conclusions due to his ruthless literal approach to translation. Nevertheless, Hart's own theological starting point influences

much of his work. The most obvious place this is seen in is in Hart's footnote at Romans 5:12. This is indeed an important verse, so much so, that Hart believes the Vulgate's corrupt translation led the Western church astray (p. xv). In fact, in his endorsement of this work, John Milbank writes, "Hart has shown, after five hundred years, that the core of Reformation theology is unbiblical and that certain currents of Latin theology are dubious or inadequate" (see the back cover of the book).

The doctrinal issue in question is how we are to understand the referent of the dative singular pronoun, *quō*. Does it refer back to *death* or to *Adam*? If it refers back to *death*, then the meaning of the text would be "that the consequence of death spreading to all human beings is that all became sinners" (p. 296). Hart explains that the Latin Vulgate misses Paul's intended meaning by using the masculine pronoun *quo* and the feminine noun *mors* (p. 296) and thus shifting the referent from death to Adam. This, Hart believes, disproves the Western notion of original sin. Hart argues that death spreading to all because they sin is the more likely way to read the Greek text at this point (the common Western reading that all have sinned in Adam is wrong). In addition, Hart argues that if the Western tradition is right, then Romans 5:14 is unintelligible (p. 297).

Contra the Western conception of original sin, Hart believes that sin is a disease "contagion" (p. 296) and claims that "the Eastern tradition was spared" from the West's mistake "by its knowledge of Greek" (p. 296). Rhetorically, this claim packs a lot of punch, but the issue is not as simple as knowing Greek or not. Lying behind this claim are two different theological approaches to the doctrine of sin. At this point, Hart's presuppositions are on full display, as are mine, because I write as a committed Reformed Protestant. Exegesis is critically important, yet exegesis of Romans 5 occurs within a canonical and theological context that even a *literal* translation cannot escape. Behind any interpretation of such weighty verses is one's understanding of Adam and Eve and their relationship to the rest of humanity. What does God mean when he promises death, not disease, to Adam and Eve if they eat the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden? Further, Roman 5:14, is clearly intelligible for the Western Christian if Adam and Eve are the first parents of us all. The question of original sin cannot be reduced to a single verse of Scripture, and certainly not the concluding phrase of one difficult verse (Romans 5:12). Rather, one's understanding of sin is more a reflection on their own theological commitments, and, therefore, the Scriptures as a whole. Yes, exegesis drives, or at least should drive, one's theological conclusions, yet no one approaches the text free from pre-commitments and influences. Therefore, even Hart's "pitilessly literal" rendering of Romans 5:12 does not answer all the questions involved when thinking through the problem of sin and how it enters the world. Therefore, in spite of both Hart's and Milbank's claims, the Reformation has not been overthrown—in fact the claim about "knowing Greek" is quite puzzling given that it was precisely the return to the Greek text that led many of the Reformed Protestants to develop their understanding of Adam, original sin, and covenant theology. Furthermore, the insights on sin spreading throughout the world that Hart writes of in this footnote can easily be affirmed by Western Christians alongside their traditional understanding of original sin.

Hart's second presupposition follows on from the first. The translation ends with a "Concluding Scientific Postscript" in which Hart reveals that a major goal of his translation is to rightly understand the concept of punishment and the afterlife. This leads Hart to a long discussion detailing his understanding of αἰώνιος as an indefinite period of time rather than necessarily *eternal*. From here, Hart draws the conclusion that the New Testament is much more universalistic in its claims of each human's destiny than many in the West realize (p. 537). Hart's theological understanding that hell is not eternal but a place for all sin to be purged certainly is a factor in the way he translates words related to the duration of the afterlife (he also devotes a section to the concept of Gehenna and Hades). I say the first presupposition leads into the second because Hart tells us that his thinking is led, at least in part, "by a number of Christian theologians and exegetes (especially such explicit universalists as the great Alexandrian Clement and Origen, the "pillar of orthodoxy" Gregory of Nysaa...as well as other rhetorically reserved universalists, such as Gregory of Nazianzus" (p. 539). Such an admission makes one wonder if exegesis of the Greek text, or the reading of beloved Greek fathers drives such a long defence of Hart's understanding of hell and the afterlife. (And it should be noted that his reception and use of these church fathers is debatable.) In this postscript, Hart clearly favours ancient Eastern theologians and has no time for Augustinian influences, whether from the man himself or his reformed followers such as John Calvin (pp. 548, 551, 554).

In many ways Hart's translation is a remarkable achievement. Scholars and pastors working in the original languages will benefit from consulting Hart's work even when they disagree. The actual translation of the Greek text is helpful at many points. If Hart's goal is to make sure the Scriptures never become too common for those who read them regularly, then he has accomplished his goal. In this review, I have interacted mainly with Hart's introductory and concluding essays, in order to uncover Hart's own presuppositions that filter through the whole work in subtle ways. In my estimation, Hart has not overturned the Reformation with a footnote (in fact his postscript reveals some serious misunderstandings about Protestantism), but has given the serious Christian a wonderful resource. This includes Western, or even Protestants like myself, yet the wise reader will know that no Bible translation is free of the theological commitments of the translator.

Michael J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation and Mission*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2015. (351 pp.) [ISBN: 9780802868848]

**Kenneth M. Keyte
Auckland New Zealand**

Many New Zealand pastors are concerned about why our churches are so ineffective at evangelism. Is it because we are not proclaiming the gospel? Or is it because we are not practicing the gospel by helping people in need? Gorman would answer that effective evangelism is not just about what Christians say or do but is more importantly about what we become. He answers the question with a rigorous explanation of how Paul addresses particular contexts in which the churches he wrote to could become the gospel they

believed in by practicing faith(fullness); love, hope, peace and justice. Gorman contends that, for Paul, the church's life together (centripetal activity) and its witness in the world (centrifugal activity) are integral to their participation in the mission of God (pp. 18–19).

Becoming the Gospel is the third of a “partly accidental trilogy” that explore Paul's theology and spirituality, each book building upon the earlier work (p. 2). Gorman unpacks the thesis of *Becoming the Gospel* in eight chapters that each deal with a particular aspect of the gospel. He does so with a multidisciplinary methodology consisting of: Pauline studies, hermeneutics, and missiology (p. 10). I will examine how these chapters answer the question about what makes for effective evangelism in the church today, since the pastors asking this question are included in the Gorman's targeted audience for this book.

In chapters one and two (*Paul and the Mission of God; Reading Paul Missionally*) Gorman explains his missional hermeneutic as firstly to identify Paul's vision of God's mission in the world and the role the churches were to play in that mission. Secondly, to discern from such a reading, our role in the divine mission today (pp. 21–22). Gorman understands Paul's perception of the mission of God as being to bring salvation to the world through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is the gospel. Salvation is conveyed to the world via the preaching of the good news in word and deed. Consequently, salvation is received through faith that enters into full participation in Christ (p. 23). This is evident in Paul's participatory language for: baptism; faith and justification; in Christ and Christ within; clothed with Christ; *koinonia*; transformation; and the Greek prefix *syn-* (pp. 33–36). Gorman concludes that participation is essential, not only to salvation, ethics, and eschatology, but also to mission (pp. 61–62). Effective evangelism by the church today therefore arises from participation in the life of Christ, according to Gorman's Pauline, missional hermeneutic.

In chapter three (*Becoming the Gospel of faith(fullness), love and hope—1 Thessalonians*) Gorman proceeds to develop an understanding of what participation in the life of Christ involves by examining the common Pauline triad of faith, hope and love found in 1 Thessalonians and other Pauline letters. The various ways and frequency with which Paul uses this triad indicate how essential these theological virtues are to Christian life, identity and praxis (p. 64). Gorman concludes from his exegesis of 1 Thessalonians that Paul is writing a missional exhortation to a missional community encountering persecution as a result of evangelism (pp. 74–75). The Thessalonian church is a missional community of faith(fullness), love and hope displaying these virtues as concrete missional practices embodying the gospel in daily life. Therefore, these practices are “evangelistic” because as the community practices this triad, they bear witness to the gospel they incarnate (p. 89). Effective evangelism by the church today thus arises from participation in the life of Christ via missional practices of faith(fullness), love and hope, according to Gorman's exegesis of 1 Thessalonians.

In chapter four (*Becoming and Telling the Story of Christ—Philippians*) Gorman explores the missional significance of Paul's master story (the Christ hymn) as a narrative of sharing in the mission of the servant of God (Jesus) by practicing the faith, love and hope of his gospel story (Phil 2:6–11). It is a missional Christology for a missional people who must not only believe in the story but also tell it and live it in word and deed (pp. 115–116). The poetic text serves at least three missional functions corresponding to faith, love and hope that are evident as narrative patterns in the text (pp. 121–125).

Gorman's reference to Aristotle and Thomas's insights on virtue - that we become what we practice—is particularly relevant to why evangelism has become ineffective in western contexts today. He warns that since every community needs a master story, whenever the church dispenses with telling the gospel master story, a new one will fill the void, carrying with it a new and most likely alien way of being in the world. “The final consequence of this creedal amnesia will be that the church has nothing left to live for, or, if necessary to die for, that faithfully embodies the story of Jesus.” (p. 130).

However, in Gorman's two prequels to *Becoming the Gospel*, he observes a fourth narrative pattern found in the Christ hymn and other Pauline texts, which is that of paradoxical power in weakness. Presumably, since this falls outside of Paul's triad of faith, love and hope, Gorman has omitted a discussion on this fourth narrative pattern of Phil 2:6–11. An explanation of the omission would have been welcomed, because the missional pattern of power in weakness seems to be a particularly difficult one for the contemporary church to practice. Failure to practice paradoxical power in weakness may also contribute to why the church has become evangelistically ineffective.

Another explanation for Gorman's omission of paradoxical power in weakness could be that in chapters five and six (*Becoming the Gospel of Peace (I) Overview; (II): Ephesians*) he recasts this pattern as becoming the Gospel of peace (*shalom*). He sees Paul's gospel of peace as the missing piece in New Testament studies (pp. 143–59). According to Gorman, pursuing peace and rejecting retaliation is an ecclesial missional practice endorsed by Paul, throughout his letters that involves making peace with God and with people (pp. 159–68). From an overview of Paul's peace vocabulary in Romans (pp. 169–79), Gorman then focuses on Ephesians to develop a deeper understanding of how the church becomes the gospel of peace (pp.186–207). He poses another missional challenge for the contemporary church, “Perhaps the world might actually sit up and take notice of the Christian faith if Christians really did embody the gospel of peace” (p. 180).

Gorman could have remained in Philippians to explore becoming the gospel of peace if he follows recent commentators such as Witherington who interpret Euodia and Syntyche's dispute (Phil 4:2–3) as the key application of the Christ hymn (2:5–11; 4:2). It is disappointing that Gorman does not consider this because Paul's gospel-centric approach to Euodia and Syntyche's disagreement could be a helpful template for responding to co-worker conflict in mission teams today. Poor conflict resolution could well be another contributor to evangelistic ineffectiveness of the church.

In chapter seven (*Becoming the Justice of God—1 & 2 Corinthians*) Gorman considers the final aspect of becoming the gospel as presented by Paul. The Bible presents the justice of God as a “comprehensive, covenantal, relational mandate” (p. 213). Understood this way, justice is about having such a deep communion with God that one takes on God's character by practicing the justice of God. Justice and righteousness are therefore relational terms dealing with human community and wholeness, the setting right of wrongly configured relationships that is closely associated with the biblical vision of *shalom* (pp. 213–15).

Gorman examines Paul's language of justice and justification, with particular emphasis on 1 & 2 Corinthians, to answer the question of whether Paul was only interested in justification or also concerned about practicing the justice of God (pp. 217–57). He concludes that justice for Paul is continuous with the concerns of the prophets yet reshaped by the gospel of Christ crucified. By the power of the Spirit working

in and through the church, the eschatological day of justice has now arrived, even if only partially and proleptically. The church is therefore a community that bears the divine trait of justice as ecclesial practice (p. 257). If, as Gorman proposes, practicing justice is an essential part of becoming the gospel, then whenever the contemporary church fails to act justly or ignores injustice in our local community, we weaken our evangelistic effectiveness.

Gorman's closing chapter (*Becoming the Gospel of God's Justice/Righteousness and Glory: Missional Theosis—Romans*) places a new emphasis on participation in God's righteousness/justice and glory and explores Paul's language of theosis in Romans. He argues that a central theme of the letter is becoming like God by participating in the life of God (theosis) which is inherently missional (p. 261). Accordingly, Gorman rereads Romans as a text on cruciform, missional theosis (pp. 273–93). Paul's goal for the diverse communities of the Roman church is that they become more like the impartial God who justifies ungodly Jews and Gentiles alike to form them into one covenant people (p. 294). Gorman concludes that, "What will make the Roman community truly the antithesis of Romans 1-2, and a credible example of what God intended for humanity, is the community's gathering together in unity, Gentiles and Jews, to glorify God" (p. 293). Gorman proposes that the resultant witness of such racial unity will be the church's most powerful evangelistic tool (p. 293).

At the conclusion of each chapter, Gorman presents an example of a contemporary Christian community practicing the gospel. Practitioners will find these examples particularly helpful for envisaging how the gospel is lived today. However, the most important point Gorman makes about such examples is not that these ministries should be replicated elsewhere but rather, "intentionally practice cruciform faithfulness, love and hope wherever you are- and maybe in places where thus far you have been afraid to go" (p. 105). In my New Zealand Baptist context, we are good at copying ministries working effectively elsewhere, but not so good at recognizing why the ministry is effective. When we fail to recognize the ministry as only the conduit through which a Christian community delivers the gospel in word and deed, we set ourselves up for ineffective mission. Gorman points out that such replication will only be evangelistically effective if it (a) practices the gospel of faith(fullness), love, hope, peace and justice; and (b) does so centripetally with each other and centrifugally with those we minister to.

In Gorman's final reflections on becoming the gospel, he explicitly addresses why the contemporary western church has become so ineffective at evangelism. He believes that "Ultimately, the integrity and the impact of all Christian witness depends on the integration of message and mission" (p. 304). He sees the lack of integrity between preaching and living all of the gospel, and the public criticism of those focusing on different slices of the gospel, as the reasons why evangelism is so ineffective today. "However, as the church, by the power of the Spirit, becomes the gospel in its fullness by participating fully in the life of God manifested in Christ, the church offers an appropriate and credible witness to the gospel" (p. 304). Gorman warns, that this does not guarantee "success", as typically measured by humans. However, such an embodiment of the gospel will increase the likelihood that those who encounter it will meet the living God (p. 304).

Arguably, the biblical rigor that makes this book so credible also renders it less readable for the church practitioners who would greatly benefit from this book. Therefore, I invite Michael Gorman to write a summarized version of *Becoming the Gospel* especially for the pastors and church leaders he also wrote for (p. 10). With the help of the Spirit *Becoming the Gospel* shows the church how to become co-participants in the mission of God and so become effective at evangelism.