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William Potter (1836-1908) at South Melbourne Baptist Church (1863- 1875): Questions of Principle, Propriety, Property and Prosperity

ABSTRACT

South Melbourne or Emerald Hill Baptist Church was formed in 1854 at a critical time in the development of the colony of Victoria. After William Potter became pastor in 1863 there was immediate tension, notably between Potter and the founding deacon, William Ferguson. The schism at Emerald Hill in 1865 and the subsequent actions of Potter raised several significant issues for Baptists. The church had been granted a land site by the colonial government even though traditional Baptist polity emphasised voluntarism and was opposed to all forms of State Aid. When State Aid was abolished in 1870 the churches could sell their lands. Potter and his trustees sold the land and most of the money was paid to Potter who insisted that he had not been paid a salary as pastor for many years. This sparked a public controversy in which not only the Baptist Association of Victoria but also the secular press attacked Potter for his actions which he maintained were entirely legal. This sad schism raised several issues for Baptist polity. Could State Aid be justified in any circumstances? How should disputes be settled within a church? What is the role of the pastor, the deacons and the church meeting? What is the function of a wider associational body when the local church refuses to take advice? How should a denomination discipline a pastor whose actions though legal are thought to be immoral?

Another sad story about a bitter schism in a small Baptist church would scarcely seem appealing, but this tale from colonial Victoria raises several tensions about significant principles at the heart of Baptist belief and practice as well as introducing a colourful and

influential character whose career seems to have been unnoticed by Baptist historians.

South Melbourne is, as its name implies, to the south of and immediately across the Yarra River from the Victorian metropolis. The land parish of South Melbourne was proclaimed on 23 March 1840. The area later designated as the City of South Melbourne centred on a grassy and tree-lined hill about half way across the four-kilometre expanse between the Yarra and Hobson's Bay, a cove at the northern end of Port Phillip. This rise was called Emerald Hill from 1845 and was the first suburb to be defined in Victoria in 1854: it was renamed South Melbourne in 1883.¹ South Melbourne developed into one of the city's first industrial suburbs and later underwent a shift from manufacturing to commercial industry after the Second World War and now is a centre of inner city heritage conservation and urban renewal.

The first Baptist church in Melbourne at Collins Street had been founded in 1843 and only a handful of other churches had been established when Emerald Hill Baptists began to meet in the home of William Neale early in 1854.² These were exciting days in Victoria. The discovery of gold in 1851 had brought large numbers of immigrants. By the end of 1854 more than 140,000 had arrived from Britain, another 20,000 from China and other foreign ports and nearly 110,000 from other parts of Australia. The resulting gold-rush inflation was more severe than any later inflation in the nation's history.³ Squatters camped in South Melbourne when they arrived in the fevered days of the Gold Rush and this Canvas Town became a focus for evangelical mission by pioneer Baptists of Melbourne.⁴ By June 1854 the Baptists of Emerald Hill gathered in Mr Bilsborough's small house in York Street which was renovated to facilitate a meeting place.⁵ Land was then leased at another site in York Street

¹ See S. Priestley, *South Melbourne. A History* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1995).

² Details for the early years of South Melbourne are widely scattered but where specific details are cited references are provided. For Neale, see F.J. Wilkin, *Baptists in Victoria* (Melbourne: Baptist Union of Victoria, 1939), 46.

³ G. Blainey, *Our Side of the Country. The Story of Victoria* (North Ryde: Methuen Haynes, 1984), 40.

⁴ K.R. Manley, *From Woolloomooloo to 'Eternity': A History of Australian Baptists* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 59-60.

⁵ C. Daley, *The History of South Melbourne from the Foundation of Settlement at Port Phillip to the Year 1935* (Melbourne: Robertson & Mullins, 1940), 178.

and a simple wooden chapel opened for worship services on 12 November 1854. A church was formed on 20 November with nine members, including William Ferguson who had been a member of a Baptist church in Stirling, Scotland. No official records of the church survive from this period and, apart from a few denominational reports, the main sources for the earliest days are two pamphlets written by opponents during the tensions of 1873-74 – Ferguson and William Potter who became pastor in 1863.⁶

The first pastor was Revd J. Lindsay who supplied the infant church for some months in 1854 and was one of the foundation members.⁷ According to Ferguson, the church was unable to support Lindsay who continued to preach for the church when he was free. Potter claimed that there had been a dispute, that this had led to a decline in numbers and that Lindsay had been summarily dismissed. This charge must be seen as a part of Potter's argument that Ferguson had always been a troublemaker in the church. Ferguson vigorously denied this particular allegation. Potter also claimed that because of the dispute the Baptists nearly lost the York Street chapel as they had a debt of £150. Ferguson replied that when Lindsay was asked to conclude his ministry only four members were still living on the Hill but John Collins, a generous Collins Street Baptist, purchased the chapel although the church now owed Collins for this amount. Ferguson, with a lawyer's precision, quoted Church minutes, includes testimonies from former members and Collins declared that Potter's version was 'false and unfounded'.⁸

Problems of pastoral leadership were almost overwhelming for the small suburban churches of the colony as they were for the two city churches at Collins Street and Albert Street (which had resulted from a division in Collins Street in 1850). Lay preachers kept

⁶ *The Rev W.M. Potter's Reply to the statements made on the 27th September 1873 in the "Age" Newspaper; with which is incorporated the history of the Baptist denomination on Emerald Hill, from the year 1854* (Emerald Hill, 1873); *Mr. W. Ferguson's Reply to the Statements made by Mr. W. Potter in a pamphlet, in which he endeavours to defend his conduct in selling a portion of the Baptist Church Land, Howe Crescent, Emerald Hill, and in mortgaging the Remainder* (Emerald Hill, 1874).

⁷ This may well have been Revd John Welpy Lindsay (1804-69) who served mainly in Tasmania from 1850 but according to family tradition was in Melbourne at about this time: L. Rowston, *Baptists in Van Diemen's Land* (Launceston: Baptist Union of Tasmania, 1985), 64-65; letter from Mr Rowston, 8 February 2007.

⁸ *Potter's Reply*, 9-10; *Ferguson's Reply*, 7-14.

the work going at Emerald Hill during 1855 then 'Mr Sharp' led from December 1855 until March 1857 when he left to commence a boarding school in Brighton. Another lay preacher W.J. Clarke served the church for a few months after which William Gardiner Sprigg (1832-1926) voluntarily supplied the church from October 1857 until December 1861. Potter conceded that Sprigg was 'an educated man and a excellent preacher'.⁹ He was the son of English Baptist pastor Revd J. Sprigg whose family was to play a significant role in colonial affairs.¹⁰ Sprigg proved an able (lay) pastor at Emerald Hill and during 1860 the first baptisms in the church were held when seven were baptised by James Taylor, pastor of Collins Street.¹¹

When Sprigg resolved to visit England, Emerald Hill had to look for another pastor and John Crosby, a young minister - aged 24 - who arrived from England in December 1861 but whose background remains elusive, was immediately appointed. There were further baptismal services during 1862 but Crosby had come to the colony in poor health and his ministry was terminated by his death on 15 December 1862.¹² Potter claimed that Ferguson and his 'clique' had treated Crosby badly and sought to have his ministry terminated but again Ferguson cited several witnesses who vigorously rejected Potter's allegation.¹³ Crosby, however, had taken one initiative which was to be central to the later controversy. He had successfully applied to the government for a temporary reservation of land at Howe Crescent and had begun a fund to build a chapel on the site. The church purchased the shell of what had been a United Presbyterian Church building in Clarendon Street and this was placed on the reserve, refitted and opened as a Baptist Church in June 1863. The old property at York Street was retained for a schoolroom and other

⁹ *Potter's Reply*, 9.

¹⁰ W.G. Sprigg's brother was Sir J. Gordon Sprigg who became the Premier of Cape Colony and he himself was Secretary of the Melbourne Tramway Company. Although he was financially ruined by the dramatic economic slump that afflicted Melbourne in 1892 he recovered and died a wealthy man. His nephew W. Gordon Sprigg (1866-1962), whose father had been the curator of the Melbourne Zoo, was active in the Collins Street Church and a leader in several evangelical endeavours including the YMCA and the Temperance Alliance. Obituary for W.G. Sprigg in *Australian Baptist*, 27 July 1926, 3. For his financial troubles, see M. Cannon, *The Land Boomers* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1967), 45.

¹¹ *Australian Evangelist*, 1860: 8, 57, 167; 1861: 176.

¹² *Australian Evangelist*, 1862: 136, 154, 340, 388.

¹³ *Potter's Reply*, 10; *Ferguson's Reply*, 11-14.

church purposes.¹⁴ This development raises the first principle in dispute among Baptists: was it right to receive State Aid in the form of a land grant? There is no evidence that at the time there were any tensions within the congregation over this issue although, as will be discussed, other Baptists in the colony were already bitterly divided over this question.

William Potter preached for the church on 27 December 1862 and began as pastor on 8 February 1863; he was pastor when the Howe Crescent chapel was opened. With his advent the two major protagonists of the dissension in South Melbourne were in place: founding member and deacon William Ferguson and his pastor, Revd William Potter.

Potter was only 26 years old and had very little experience of Baptist churches.¹⁵ He had been born into a farming family in Darlington, County Durham, on 13 April 1836 and as a young boy came with his family to Hobart in 1839. Here he was eventually apprenticed as a compositor, worked for a few months in 1852-53 on the Bendigo goldfields and then was employed back in Tasmania in the printing trade. In 1856 he began to study law having been encouraged by a resolution of his Congregational church that he should study for the ministry. Revd John Martin Strongman, who had come to South Australia with the support of the (Congregationalist) Colonial Missionary Society in 1848 and became headmaster of the Hobart Town High School in 1851, tutored young Potter.¹⁶ When Strongman accepted the pastorate of the Ballarat (Victoria) Congregational Church in 1857 Potter moved with him but as Strongman stayed in Ballarat only a year Potter then transferred to Melbourne and studied at the Carlton College (Congregationalist) and at the University of Melbourne where he completed seven subjects in one year. He was then appointed as pastor and was ordained in 1859 at the Mount Clear Union Church (Baptist and Congregationalist) near Ballarat on the road to Buninyong. He also conducted a small

¹⁴ *Australian Evangelist*, 1863: 200.

¹⁵ The most useful biography of Potter from which the following details are taken is *Cyclopaedia of Victoria* (Melbourne: Cyclopaedia Company, 3 vols, 1903-05), vol 2, 40-42.

¹⁶ For Strongman, see G.L. Lockley (ed. B Upham), *Congregationalism in Australia* (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 2001), 169-71, 194, 197, 289, 293.

day school in the church building.¹⁷ From Mount Clear Potter came to Emerald Hill. His background was largely Congregationalist although (presumably) he had adopted Baptist views to be acceptable to his new church. Potter was also active in journalism and had been editor of the *South Melbourne Standard* from 1862.

Meanwhile, the other Baptist churches in Victoria had formed an association in 1858. This lapsed in 1861 but a fresh start was made in 1862 and by the end of that year some 16 churches with 1,456 members were affiliated with the new Baptist Association of Victoria. These included the Union church at Mount Clear and Emerald Hill.¹⁸ Potter was welcomed as a minister by the other churches and their pastors and was often present at Association meetings.

Troubles within the South Melbourne Church escalated in the months and years that followed. For the earliest tensions our main sources are the pamphlets published by the two opponents when a later and more substantial issue became a matter of public notoriety and featured prominently in the secular press. In brief, tensions over Potter's ministry resulted in a schism in 1865 and then two rival Baptist churches existed on Emerald Hill. The colonial government resolved in 1870 to cease all further grants to churches, and all lands that had already been given became the property of the receiving churches and could be disposed of if so wished.¹⁹ Potter and the trustees of his church then sold the property and Potter received the bulk of this as he claimed he had not been paid for many years as pastor of the church. Potter and then some time later Ferguson published their accounts of this development and included their differing accounts of the church's history prior to this scandal. Ferguson made use of church records and included numerous letters and statements from former and present members in order to support his version of events which, it must be judged, is the more convincing narrative.

Several issues were raised by the unhappy saga which makes the story of continuing interest. At the heart of wider Baptist concern

¹⁷ Information about Mount Clear kindly supplied by Mr Robert Ashley of Ballarat (email of 21 February 2007) who has a manuscript copy of original reminiscences which detail the beginnings of this work (which was only short lived) and of Potter's ministry there.

¹⁸ B.S. Brown, *Members One of Another* (Melbourne: Baptist Union of Victoria, 1962), 21-36.

¹⁹ See J.S. Gregory, *Church and State* (Melbourne: Cassell Australia, 1973), 103-46.

was the question of differences about State Aid to religion and the South Melbourne land grant was received at precisely the time that the Baptist Association was maintaining a vigorous opposition to such grants. A second principle was a matter of ecclesiology: how should disputes be resolved within a local church? What is the role of the pastor and that of the church meeting? A third issue was the function of the Baptist Association in assisting in such crises. What authority, if any, does it have to resolve such tensions? Then, of course, there was the morality of a pastor receiving the proceeds of a state grant as personal income. Thus questions of principle, propriety and disputes over property were all mingled and the sad results for a church's prosperity when it is involved in such public disputes cannot be minimised.

Tracking the unfortunate developments is complicated but clearly several in the Church quickly reacted against Potter. Ferguson may well have reflected a typical Scotch Baptist suspicion of paid clergy and had a strong belief in the authority of church elders or leaders. Potter was a young man full of confidence and assertive of ministerial authority. At first all went well. The church successfully applied for permanent title of the land and both Potter and Ferguson were listed as trustees, so both supported this procedure. The opening on 21 June 1863 of the new 200-seat chapel at the rather splendid Howe Crescent half-acre site was an encouragement to the congregation and the fledgling denomination. Preachers at the celebration were the Association President, Revd Isaac New of Albert Street, and Revd David Rees an energetic Association activist. A successful bazaar was held later in the year and this raised some £260 which cleared the debt of £180 and helped fund building costs. Among the donors was Henry Hopkins, a well-known philanthropist of Tasmania, and this obviously reflected Potter's connections.²⁰

Not all Baptists approved of raising funds by holding bazaars and preferred freewill offerings for all church work. Although bazaars or sales of work were not uncommon among Baptists this Emerald Hill bazaar illustrates the kind of personal arguments that could be evoked. Whilst this began as a petty 'parish-pump' dispute it revealed deep-rooted tensions and differing views of the role of a minister and the deacons. Potter's judgment was that Ferguson as a senior deacon was always a troublemaker and that his 'love of power in the church was fatal to its continuance and prosperity'. Such power brokers in a congregation are not unknown in Baptist churches, it must be

²⁰ *Australian Evangelist*, 1863: 200, 300.

conceded, but Ferguson listed several tributes which affirmed, as one friend insisted, he had been ‘the main stay (under God) of the little church ... and an ornament to Christian society’. Potter had formed the view that Ferguson and the deacons ‘wished to make the pastorate a mere appanage of the Diaconate’. The bazaar dispute ignited these differing perceptions. At a meeting of the stallholders, according to Potter, the place of honour was unanimously assigned to the pastor’s wife and her ‘coadjutor’ who happened to be ‘one of the wealthiest ladies in the church’. Ferguson was absent at the meeting and called another meeting which proposed ‘to openly insult’ these ladies by altering the position of their stall. The reasons given were: (1) that the church was ‘a thoroughly democratic institution’ in which all were on a common level and no precedent should be given ‘to either social status or wealth’; (2) the bazaar had originated with the Sunday School and that the place of honour should go to the Teachers’ stall. The other deacons agreed but the Superintendent of the Sunday School, a solicitor ‘and consequently a gentleman’, insisted that if this was done he could not remain a member of the church – perhaps the wealthy lady was his wife? Potter drew a moral from this little saga: ‘As far as he was able to judge, the bane of the Baptist Church on Emerald Hill was its ultra democracy. It never had treated its ministers with proper respect, and its little weight in the community was not to be wondered at’. This episode led the deacons to determine on Potter’s removal, he believed. Ferguson dismissed the whole bazaar story as ‘much ado about nothing’ and the central issue was solely about Potter wanting his wife to have the main stall.²¹

So life was far from pleasant in the little congregation. Ferguson claimed that it was soon obvious after Potter’s arrival that he was not qualified ‘either by nature or grace’ to be a minister of the gospel and evidences of disquiet were reported to the deacons.²² Relationships rapidly deteriorated even more. Potter resented what he called Ferguson’s *modus operandi*: with his ‘so solemn and pious demeanour’ at the prayer meetings he would appear to be ‘most fervent in petitioning for *more success* to follow the pastor’s labours’ and then bemoan the lack of zeal displayed in the church, walking home afterwards talking about the church to different folk ‘evidently playing the part of Satan in the garden of Eden’.²³

²¹ *Potter’s Reply*, 11-12; *Ferguson’s Reply*, 18.

²² *Ferguson’s Reply*, 14.

²³ *Potter’s Reply*, 12.

The deacons interviewed Potter in June 1864 and asked him to resign which he refused to do and he then suggested Ferguson should move to another church. Two competing views of the role of the pastor and the church members emerged. Potter wrote that Ferguson's 'love of power in the church was fatal to its continued prosperity'. He challenged Ferguson that if the church was not more prosperous after a year he would then retire. Growth in numbers and finances was thus thought to be sufficient vindication of the righteousness of Potter's cause. Why should he leave 'to gratify the ambition of one man, who saw that every addition made to the membership augmented the influence of the minister and made his less felt'? He had accepted the pastorate as a permanent one unless he acted immorally or taught heresy: 'This was the good old-fashioned view of the Baptist body in which he had been trained'. (His training was in Congregational circles, as noted above.) Ferguson, argued Potter, looked upon the pastor as 'the mere employee', the servant of the church who could be removed at leisure, without the assignment of any cause other than the vote of a majority of the church.²⁴ Ferguson for his part replied that no other minister in the colony would stay in a church when the majority were opposed to him and that Potter 'ignored one of the fundamental principles of Congregational churches, and of every well regulated society, that the majority should settle every question that is brought before it'.²⁵ Thus, both Potter and Ferguson appealed to Baptist and Congregational principles to support their positions. How can a 'high' view of the ministry relate to a strong view of congregational government? Once goodwill fades and dominant personalities differ the problems can be immense. How can differences be reconciled? The role of the larger fellowship - an association or a union - becomes significant at least in an advisory capacity. But what happens when one party refuses to accept the association's advice? South Melbourne's experience provides an unhappy example of some difficulties which can arise in Baptist life.

A letter of 1 October 1864 signed by 24 people, or three quarters of the congregation, asked Potter to resign due to 'the prevailing dissatisfaction which exists under your pastorate'. Potter refused to comply and on 28 October Ferguson again wrote and asked Potter to let the dispute be settled by arbitration with the Baptist Association. Even though the church offered three months

²⁴ *Potter's Reply*, 12

²⁵ *Ferguson's Reply*, 16.

collections or £50 Potter declined to accept this challenge.²⁶ Finally, Ferguson wrote to the Executive of the Baptist Association and at a meeting on 5 December 1864 (at which Potter was present as a member of the Executive) it was recommended that Potter 'both for his own comfort and usefulness ... comply with the requisition presented to him by his church'.²⁷ Potter was unmoved by this resolution and finally on 28 December 1865, in order to prevent Potter 'from completely bringing the church to ruin', the church meeting resolved to depose him as pastor. Thirty members were present and only seven including Potter and his family opposed the vote. Potter then obtained the key to the chapel, changed the locks, had bolts put on, took his bedding and slept in the chapel. 'From his experience at Mount Clear, he knew that possession was nine points of the law, he therefore took full possession of the chapel, and when any of us wanted admission, he would either open the door himself or would send someone to do so, and would lock it after we had left'. What had happened at Mount Clear is unknown but this insulting treatment of church members - who were in the majority - was extraordinary if not without precedent.²⁸ Potter had refused to serve Ferguson the bread at communion and other members then rose and left the service. Things became so heated that Potter went to the police station and requested that a constable be sent to keep the peace at Howe Crescent although Ferguson denied that this had been necessary and that Potter had 'painted up these scenes'.

Clearly any semblance of church order was destroyed and on 20 February 1865 the church agreed to divide. The Howe Crescent Church adopted a trust deed for the property. Twenty members withdrew to form a new fellowship - five men, eleven married or widowed women and four single women. The departing members were granted use of the York Street property and Ferguson was given

²⁶ *Ferguson's Reply*, 15-16.

²⁷ Association Executive Minutes (Baptist Union of Victoria archives), 5 December 1864. (Association Executive minutes note that on 23 January 1865 [when Potter was present] a notice of motion regarding Potter [not recorded elsewhere] lapsed but the thrust of this is unknown.)

²⁸ John McKaeg, the first Baptist minister to come to Australia, had acted in this way during his troubled ministry at Bingley, Yorkshire, and B.G. Wilson, the pioneer pastor at Wharf Street in Brisbane had acted similarly after a dispute in his church: Manley, *From Woolloomooloo*, 20, 90.

half of the church fittings including a pulpit stand, a Bible and half a communion service. This last was a sad symbol of disunity.²⁹

The York Street property was reopened on 26 March and on 10 April 1865 the Baptist Association recognised the new Emerald Hill Church.³⁰ Having two churches in the one suburb was unfortunate to say the least. James Taylor commented in the *Australian Evangelist*: 'While we cannot but regret that it has been deemed necessary to commence a second congregation in the place, we wish our brethren success, and trust that out of seeming evil, God will bring glory to Himself and good to many'.³¹ Revd James Moss (1831-1900), a graduate of Regent's Park College who had been at Tenterden in Kent since 1857 and had recently arrived in the colony, began preaching at the new church in 1865 and eventually became pastor.³² The church grew and later moved to the hall of the Mechanics' Institute. Potter claimed that Ferguson soon fell out with Moss who threatened to take a group with him and then there would have been three Baptist churches on Emerald Hill!³³ This was avoided though Moss was pastor for only three years.

Meanwhile, on 30 October 1865 Potter and the Howe Crescent Baptist Church were received into the Association (by a narrow vote of eight for and seven against) and it appears that Potter had previously been suspended although records are unclear. A full report of the anniversary meetings in January 1866 at Howe Crescent was featured in the *Australian Evangelist*. The tea meeting was held in the church which was 'tastefully decorated with evergreens and flags' and a large banner displayed the motto, 'O Lord, send us prosperity'. This theme doubtless reflected Potter's challenge to Ferguson that after a year the church would be in a healthier state or else he would leave. In his annual report Potter referred to 'the storm which at the commencement of last year threatened our destruction' but insisted that now 'peace and concord' reigned. A manse had been built for the pastor on the (Crown granted) ground adjoining the church for a cost of £200. Receipts for the year were more than one-third higher than the previous year. As to membership 38 names had been removed: 20 to York Street, 14 to other churches, three were 'removed at a

²⁹ *Potter's Reply*, 14-17; *Ferguson's Reply*, 15-18.

³⁰ Association Minutes, 10 April 1865.

³¹ *Australian Evangelist*, 1865: 105.

³² (English) *Freeman*, 18 Jan 1865, 22 March 1865; obituary in *New South Wales Baptist*, 1 June 1900, 8.

³³ *Ferguson's Reply*, 16-17.

distance' and one had died: but the remaining number was not given. A pious exhortation concluded the report; 'Let not the painful experience of the past year be without its fruits unto righteousness [in] this one'.³⁴

A greater concern to the Association at this time, however, was the whole question of State Aid. David Rees (1804-85), a strong Dissenter who had led in campaigns against the compulsory payment of church rates in England, led the Association in June 1863 – just as the Howe Crescent Church was confirming its grant and opening its building – to emphasise Baptist commitment to voluntarism through these motions:

1. That believing that in matters of religion, whether in direct worship of the Almighty, or in the support of His cause in the world, man's actions can only be acceptable to God so far as they are influenced by an enlightened regard to the Divine will, this Association is fully convinced that the maintenance and extension of Christian truth should be entrusted to the voluntary efforts of its adherents.

2. That this Association cannot but regard the system which obtains in this Colony of making grants from the public revenue to the ministers of conflicting denominations towards the support of their respective forms of worship as being repugnant to reason and unjust in its operation, that it tends to confound the distinction between truth and error, is utterly at variance with the teaching and genius of the Gospel of Christ, and that it ought to be at once and for ever abolished.³⁵

These motions were the start of a vigorous campaign against all forms of State Aid. In November 1865 W.R. Wade presented a series of resolutions which confirmed the denomination's determination to support agitation for the complete abolition of State Aid and 'to maintain a strict adherence to scriptural and primitive practices'.³⁶ But in 1866 an application was made for land in East Melbourne for 'the Baptist denomination': evidently Collins Street – which had received its own grant of land back in 1845 – had made the request. The Association's executive waited upon the Commissioner of Public Lands and pointed out that the Association was completely opposed

³⁴ *Australian Evangelist*, 1866: 45.

³⁵ Brown, *Members One of Another*, 45-46. For Rees, see B.S. Brown, *A Cloud of Witnesses*, (Hawthorn: Victorian Baptist Historical Society, 1999), 113-14.

³⁶ Brown, *Members One of Another*, 47.

to all grants for religious purposes and a major dispute between the Association and the Collins Street Church was precipitated. Within that congregation opinion was divided but on 19 December the church gave notice of a motion to withdraw from the Association. This was a potential calamity as Collins Street was the largest church and the 'mother' congregation of the denomination. The Executive held anxious conversations with the church during 1867 but on 20 May the church gave its resignation to the Association which duly declined to accept it and struggled to find a solution.³⁷

Ten ministers, including Isaac New, the pastor of Albert Street, produced a pamphlet, *An Address to the Baptists of Victoria* which rehearsed the details of the dispute. A great principle was at stake, it was argued. How could Baptists give positive sanction to error? How could 'the Baptist denomination' support an application when the Association had expressly opposed such an action? 'Why not complete the circle by making a grant to the Chinese for building a Joss House and thus offer a direct insult to Heaven by patronising idolatry?' The writers lamented, 'We feel as if a great calamity had befallen us'.³⁸ The situation was eventually resolved by an even greater disaster which erupted as James Taylor, the Collins Street pastor, was involved in a public scandal about his own sexual immorality. In November 1868 the church withdrew its resignation and indeed the value of an Association's support became obvious and urgent as the church and denomination struggled to face the implications of this latest crisis.³⁹

This was the heated background against which Potter and the Howe Crescent church at Emerald Hill considered the possibilities after the State Aid Abolition Act was passed in 1870 which, as noted, allowed churches which held land grants to dispose of these if they so wished. The denomination through the Association had a very clear mind on the matter. At the 1870 annual meeting in November 'a very animated discussion' was provoked by the actions of 'several of the churches' which had become 'a public notoriety'. They formally disapproved of any church seeking any money from the State.⁴⁰ In the following months the Executive followed up any reports of any church acting against this principle. James Martin, who had succeeded

³⁷ Manley, *From Woolloomooloo*, 70-72.

³⁸ I, New (et al), *An Address to the Baptists in Victoria* (Melbourne: 1867).

³⁹ K.R.Manley, 'A Colonial Evangelical Ministry and a "Clerical Scandal": James Taylor in Melbourne (1857-1868)', *Baptist Quarterly* 39.2 (2001), 56-79.

⁴⁰ Baptist Association Minutes, 30 November 1870.

Taylor at Collins Street, was a keen supporter of the denomination's stance and in September the Executive resolved to see the Colony's Treasurer to protest against any state aid money being applied for by 'Messrs Potter, Turner and Bassett and others applying for it'.⁴¹ Potter was not alone, then, in exploring this possibility. John Turner (1817-94) was the first pastor of the Strict and Particular Baptist Church at Lonsdale Street and had obtained a grant of half an acre of land at the corner of Lonsdale and Stephen Street (now Exhibition Street) in 1850.⁴² James Bassett, recently arrived from Adelaide, was the pastor at the Ebenezer Church, Victoria Parade, another small Particular Baptist church – neither church was a member of the Association.⁴³ At the Executive of 2 October Potter criticised the reasons given by the deputation to the Treasurer but when it was noted that his assertions were being made on the basis of a press report even though no reporters had been present the chairman (James Martin) refused to hear any more from Potter.⁴⁴ The annual meeting of the Association confirmed the action of the Executive and at its meeting on 7 October 1872 the Executive noted that Potter had continued with his application to the Treasurer and his claim that some other churches had joined with him was denied by those churches.⁴⁵ Potter was now alone in pursuing this path and the Association was strongly against him.

Potter's actions soon become a scandal in the colony's press. The question of what to do with granted lands was a neat little conundrum for voluntarist congregations. In 1883 the Congregationalists celebrated the jubilee of their denomination in Australia with an inter-colonial conference in Sydney. Revd E. Day commented on state-aid questions. He noted that 'some few Congregationalists' had accepted grants of land but so far as he knew none had accepted any grants of money for pastoral support, as was allowed by the various Church Acts and as received by several other denominations. A distinction was drawn, suggested Day, by regarding the land as really the property of the colonists of which the

⁴¹ Baptist Association Executive Minutes, 19 September 1871.

⁴² Wilkin, *Baptists in Victoria*, 51-52; *Southern Baptist*, 31 January 1895, 32 is an obituary and claims the land grant had been made; L. Thomson, 'The Rev. John Turner-Particular Baptist Minister' (typescript, 1973, in BUV archives).

⁴³ For Bassett, see (English) Baptist Union Handbook (1872), 193 which lists Bassett at Victoria Parade from 1870 after he had previously been at Brougham Place in North Adelaide; *Earthen Vessel* (1867), 193.

⁴⁴ Baptist Association Minutes, 2 October 1871.

⁴⁵ Baptist Association Minutes, 7 October 1872.

government was only a trustee and that, in taking it, they were only receiving what was really their own. Still, most Congregationalists were opposed to all forms of state aid, including land grants. Indeed, a conference in 1855 had specifically affirmed that any such grant was 'contrary to sound policy, repugnant to the principles of the New Testament and injurious to that cause it professes to aid'. But what to do with lands already granted? The government could not resume the land and abandonment of such land would not be a restoration but the 'giving up of the land to persons called jumpers'. Moreover, thousands of pounds had been invested in buildings on these allotments. 'The only prudent thing now to be done is, apparently, to let the past alone, and be thankful that the State-aid Abolition Acts have been obtained and take care that they be kept intact.'⁴⁶

This was in most cases exactly what Baptists had done as well. The pioneer churches of Bathurst Street in Sydney and Collins Street in Melbourne had been built on land grants. These founding fathers had not believed that by accepting such grants they were compromising their voluntarist heritage. The peculiar nature of the Australian settlements was radically different from Britain and these grants were not thought to be church aid in the sense of one denomination being recognised as an established church but was distributed equitably to all denominations that met the basic requirements. The Hobart church applied for a grant but was unsuccessful. John Saunders of Bathurst Street did apply for salary support but was unsuccessful. Henry Dowling in Tasmania was paid by the colony but he was doing specialised work as a chaplain to convicts and accepted payment for that task.⁴⁷ As we have seen, Emerald Hill had been granted land at Howe Crescent. By this time state aid had become a contentious issue as Dissenters in England opposed any compulsory payment of church rates and the separation of church and state had become an increasingly articulated Baptist principle. What was different about the case of Potter and Howe Crescent was that - almost as soon as they could - they sold the land and took the money and it all seemed to go to Potter, not to the denomination and not to the local church. Other more established Baptist churches such as Collins Street or Bathurst Street simply continued to use their land as the Congregationalists had done.

⁴⁶ *Report of the Intercolonial Conference held in Pitt Street Church, Sydney, May 15th to 23rd, 1883, to celebrate the Jubilee of the Introduction of Congregationalism in Australia* (Sydney, 1883), 255-56.

⁴⁷ For details, see Manley, *From Woolloomooloo*, 25, 36-37.

The crux of the matter was simply this: had Potter acted dishonourably? Here the biased accounts of Potter and Ferguson may be supplemented by vigorous debate in the secular press. After the schism Ferguson was still a trustee of the Howe Crescent property and as he wanted to become a trustee for the York Street Church resigned as trustee for Howe Crescent. Ferguson had observed to Potter that 'many had such a detestation of State Aid, that, even if Mr Potter's Church gave up Howe Crescent, they could not conscientiously worship in its walls'.⁴⁸ New trustees were appointed for Howe Crescent and these obviously were supporters of Potter. Application was then made to sell part of the lands and mortgage the remainder and Potter received most of the proceeds on the basis that he had not been paid as pastor for many years. There seems little doubt that the procedure was legal since the trustees acted in the name of the church but controversy surrounded the fact that Potter ended up with most of the money.

Public attention was first given to this development when a letter to the *Age* newspaper of 19 September 1873 by 'Alpha' raised the situation at Emerald Hill, claiming that Potter had sold about half of the property with the manse on it for £1150. A small debt was paid off and the balance kept by Potter: 'I do not understand the new law, but it seems strange that a minister should be able to sell the land without consulting the church'. It was rumoured that the balance of the property was for sale for £2500.⁴⁹ This was followed up by two further damaging letters and a leading editorial in the *Age* of Saturday 27 September. One letter was from 'A Baptist' (identified as Albert Hahn by Ferguson) who had been attending Howe Crescent for six years. Earlier in the year he had asked to be received as a member by baptism by Potter but at the following Communion service had not been given the right hand of fellowship which would normally be the way of receiving a new member. When he heard about the sale of the land he went to Potter and asked why there had not been a church meeting to which Potter had replied that he was not a member of the church because he had never received the right hand of fellowship and no one had proposed him as a member. Hahn believed this was in order to prevent him from saying anything about church matters. Potter had told him this was not a Baptist church but a 'Free Church' (certainly Howe Crescent was not listed as a Baptist church in the Association Yearbook for 1874):

⁴⁸ *Potter's Reply*, 18.

⁴⁹ *Age*, 19 September 1873, 3.

What he means by that I cannot say, unless it is that Mr Potter is free to do as he pleases. He was treasurer; he took all the moneys, whether from rents or collections, and I never heard how much was received or how it was expended. He was secretary; he was pastor; he was trustee and now it appears is sole proprietor of the land that was granted to the Baptist denomination on Emerald Hill.

A similar letter from 'Truth' made the same allegation: 'It does not seem a *bone fide* sale'. The *Age* editorial was also highly critical of Potter and indeed the government for allowing it to happen. A number of voluntarists were charged with 'pious fraud' in that after conscientiously refusing to accept state aid they were now rushing to secure a share of 'the lapsed moneys' and conspicuous among these was Potter of Emerald Hill and his dealings were 'fraudulent on the face of it'.⁵⁰

This leader was what prompted Potter to prepare his pamphlet. He did not fail to point out that one of the regular leader writers for the *Age* was Revd William Poole who as it happened was also a Baptist minister and who regularly preached for the Mechanics' Institute congregation (which had moved from York Street) at Emerald Hill. He was also secretary of the Baptist Association. Poole (1830-1913), a Bristol College graduate who had emigrated in 1853 was active in journalism not only in Melbourne but also in Queensland where he moved in 1881.⁵¹ Potter then advanced his argument that only a clear knowledge of a 'long and exceptionally bitter ecclesiastical dispute' could unravel the property mysteries. He included a statement of his understanding of Baptist beliefs about the church:

Other denominations can scarcely conceive it possible that each Baptist congregation is, at law, a Denomination – a separate and distinct religious organization. Yet, such is the fact. We are Congregationalists. There is no Synod, Assembly, or Association that can interfere in any way whatever, either with the internal arrangement or with the property of the

⁵⁰ *Age*, 27 September 1873, 4, 7.

⁵¹ One fellow journalist of the *Courier* later ventured the comment that Poole was 'a better writer than a preacher' although Baptists in both colonies valued Poole's pastoral skills highly. He acquired a certain unwelcome notoriety as one of the few survivors when the *Ljye Moon* ran aground near Eden (NSW) in 1886. An obituary for Poole is in *Australian Baptist*, 25 March 1913, 8-9.

individual churches. ... Each congregation is complete within itself and is independent of all others ... when speaking of the Baptist denomination of Victoria, we simply mean the aggregation of the several Baptist Churches throughout the country, each Church being entirely independent of all others as regards its property and government.⁵²

Such an extreme version of Baptist independency reveals that Potter was out of step with the current efforts among the Baptists of Victoria to demonstrate that the values of an Association were integral to Baptist ecclesiology. David Rees had written in 1864 a defence of the Association's rationale. Whilst he accepted 'the entire independency of each individual church', he stressed the advantages of a 'more extended association': 'It is a grievous abuse of our principles when churches evince a reluctance to seek and receive advice from neighbouring brethren in cases of perplexity'.⁵³ The unhappy Potter affair can only have emphasised the value of such a view.

After giving a rather tendentious account of Ferguson's role and the disputes in the church, Potter then simply traced how he believed the trustees had acted legally. He cited a resolution of the church on 5 October 1873 supporting the trustees.⁵⁴

The legalities are difficult to unravel but the suspicion of having immorally acquired personal benefits stayed with Potter and many Baptists believed that he had betrayed the denomination's principles. The *Argus* of 27 December 1873 criticised Potter and the *Age* on 29 December rejected the charge that the editor of the *Age* was in conspiracy with Ferguson and the rival Baptist church and lambasted Potter:

Persons of the Potter stamp ... preach morality, but heaven help the world if the morals of its inhabitants were regulated by such men. ... Mr Potter has effectually prevented the congregation getting rid of him. The land and the church buildings are his own, and his salary is paid in advance until the end of 1879. If this be not fraud on a congregation, on the policy of the Abolition of the State Aid Act, and on the

⁵² *Potter's Reply*, vii-viii.

⁵³ Brown, *Members One of Another*, 35.

⁵⁴ *Potter's Reply*, 21-35.

Government, then the English language is destitute of a term to express dishonesty.⁵⁵

The *Australasian* of 3 January 1874 observed that such transactions as Potter's 'degrade religion in the eyes of the world'.⁵⁶

The suburban press bought into the dispute. Potter had been an editor of the *South Melbourne Standard* since 1862 but the rival *Emerald Hill Record* published letters and an editorial on the controversy. The leader of 12 February took up an even stance, regretting that the Baptists had been washing their dirty linen in public. They believed that the charges against Potter had not been proven and that the pamphlets and other publicity had brought the Baptists into 'unenviable notoriety and its principle [sic] leaders into some amount of disrepute with other denominations. ... We regret it in the interests of the Baptist Denomination on Emerald Hill, which has received a damage it will take a long time to repair'.⁵⁷

That was perhaps the most accurate observation about the whole sorry mess. Yet both the South Melbourne Church and Potter found a measure of prosperity in the ensuing years. Potter's church seems to have disbanded in the aftermath of the controversy but the Mechanics' Institute church built a new brick chapel of 'early Norman style' in Dorcas Street in 1877, seating six hundred at a cost of £3700.⁵⁸ The pastor from 1875 was William Poole. Revd F.G. Buckingham from Spurgeon's College succeeded Poole for the next ten years and during his ministry the church attained its largest size with some 240 members and a Sunday School of 400.⁵⁹ Following the collapse of the land boom in the 1890s the South Melbourne Church declined in numbers though a succession of capable ministers served the church across the decades. The families of Ferguson, Youl and other pioneers retained association with the church for many years. Reflecting the decline of the district, South Melbourne Baptist Church was finally dissolved in 1950 and the property was sold to the Lutheran Church for a sum of about £4,000 and this money was used by the Baptist Union to help other Baptist work such as the church at

⁵⁵ *Age*, 29 December 1873, 4.

⁵⁶ Cited in *Ferguson's Reply*, 29-30.

⁵⁷ *South Melbourne Record*, 12 February 1874, 2.

⁵⁸ Priestley, *South Melbourne*, 75 reproduces a drawing of the church from the *Illustrated Australian News*, 23 January 1878; by this year the membership of the church was 139.

⁵⁹ Wilkin, *Baptists in Victoria*, 47.

Albert Park and development of the Anglesea Camp site.⁶⁰ No one individual gained financial benefits on this occasion and the Baptist Union was trustee for all church properties.

Potter became a leading activist and an influential figure in Melbourne. According to Ferguson, Potter was determined not to let the Baptists get the Howe Crescent site and said he would apply for a living with the Church of England.⁶¹ The land was sold privately and Potter certainly left the Baptist movement. A contemporary biographer simply observed that 'a difference of opinion on ecclesiastical polity between Mr Potter and his deacons' led to his becoming a member of the Church of England and according to one obituary he was an active evangelical who 'often preached in mission halls'.⁶²

His main fame, however, was outside ecclesiastical circles.⁶³ His public career embraced journalism, beginning with his role as editor of the *South Melbourne Standard* from 1862. In 1881 he purchased the *South Melbourne Record* although in 1889 he sold it to his son William. Potter wrote leaders for the *Herald* in Melbourne from 1867 with special emphasis on educational matters and he was active in 1872 as one of the founders of the Victorian Education League and became its secretary. This League acted to secure 'secular, compulsory and free' education which became the law in Victoria in 1872. In 1875 he was given authority to visit state schools and in June 1879 founded the *Australasian Schoolmaster* which circulated to all colonies and became the leading educationalist publication in the country. He was in touch with leading educationalists throughout the world and was a regular correspondent to the daily press on any educational issue.

In 1872, just as his difficulties with the Baptists were so problematic, Potter was elected a member of the Royal Society of Victoria and in 1878 was elected a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society of England and later as a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society of England. He joined the Australasian Royal Geographical Society in 1885 and was appointed a life member after having helped to organise a number of significant exploration expeditions in New Guinea and Central Australia. He was secretary of the Australasian Antarctic Exploration Committee and was a member of other

⁶⁰ *Baptist Union of Victoria, Handbook for 1950*, 60.

⁶¹ *Ferguson's Reply*, 21.

⁶² *Cyclopaedia of Victoria*, 2, 42; *Melbourne Punch*, 30 April 1908, 622.

⁶³ Details from *Cyclopaedia of Victoria*.

societies devoted to geology and history. He was a close friend of Baron Sir Ferdinand von Mueller (1825-96) who had been appointed the Government Botanist for Victoria in 1853 and was the Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens in Melbourne from 1853 until 1873 when he was controversially replaced.⁶⁴ Potter was appointed Mueller's literary executor, prepared several of Mueller's significant botanical works for publication and helped to have a monument erected on Mueller's grave in St Kilda Cemetery.⁶⁵

William Potter's legacy was not so highly valued among the Baptists of South Melbourne. Indeed, no mention of his name has appeared in the histories of Baptists in Victoria and to reconstruct the confused saga of the schism and the public scandal of the 1870s has been a complex task. Yet his troubled ministry illustrates several features of Baptist ecclesiology ranging across the problems arising from the acceptance of State Aid by a voluntarist denomination, the role of a pastor within a congregationally governed community, the exaggerated autonomy of a local church when it conflicts with all the advice and pressure of an associational body and how to discipline a pastor when deep suspicions of immorality arise. If the plea that prosperity should be the test of an authentic ministry, as Potter evidently proposed, then in the short term his rival church was blessed even as his own work collapsed. Yet in the longer view, South Melbourne - like most other churches - was always subject not only to the faith and human foibles of its members but to varying eras of success and struggle often shaped by the context in which it was placed. This story of a schism and its aftermath invites Baptists to reflect on their theology and practice, certainly at a time when denominations receive so much government support for various ministries. Even though the South Melbourne Baptist Church has

⁶⁴ See E. Kynaston, *A Man on Edge: A life of Baron Sir Ferdinand von Mueller* (London: Allen Lane, 1981); Deirdre Morris, 'Mueller, Sir Ferdinand Jakob Heinrich von [Baron von Mueller] (1825 - 1896)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Online Edition, 2006, Australian National University.

⁶⁵ Potter was engaged in several disputes about Mueller's papers and did not complete a biography he was preparing. His activities on behalf of the Antarctic Expedition found him moving in high political and social circles. Fellow Baptist, politician Robert Reid, gave £1,000 to the project. See R.W. Home, A.M. Lucas, S. Maroska, D.M. Sinkora and J.H. Voight (eds), *Regards Yours. Selected Correspondence of Ferdinand Von Mueller* (New York: Peter Lang, 3 vols, 1998-2006), pp. 40-42, 44, 359, 422, 715-16, 630-32, 766, 771,

long since disappeared the witness of a faithful and fallible community across almost a hundred years is worth recalling.

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Heads in the Sand: New Zealand Baptists and the Tour Debate

ABSTRACT

This essay traces the contribution of Baptists to the public debate in New Zealand regarding rugby tours to and from South Africa. First, it outlines 'official' Baptist discourse: statements by the Baptist Public Questions Committee (PQC) and formal resolutions by the annual Baptist Assembly. These will be compared briefly with statements by the New Zealand Presbyterian Church to provide a sense of the trajectory of Baptist discourse at this level.¹ The second part of the paper examines the 'unofficial' discourse carried by editorials, articles and letters in the denominational magazine, the *New Zealand Baptist*, to identify why Baptists in New Zealand took the course that they did.²

In February 1985 a frustrated correspondent wrote to the editor of the *New Zealand Baptist* complaining that the annual Assembly had once again sidestepped the issue of apartheid:

¹ No attempt is made to draw significant conclusions about the Presbyterian Church. That church's discourse on the tours is noted for comparative purposes only.

² For this approach of dividing Baptist public discourse into 'official' and 'unofficial' I am indebted to Andrew Picard, who adopts a similar approach in his study of Baptist discourse on the Vietnam War. A number of connections can be drawn between Baptist engagement with both debates. See A. Picard, 'A Conflict of Ideologies: New Zealand Baptist Public Discourse on the Vietnam War', *Pacific Journal of Baptist Research* 1:1 (October 2006): 53-70.

So we are at it again. Good old head-in-the-sand Baptists. At Assembly we move on to other business, leaving apartheid, one of the major issues facing the world community, buried in procedural nonsense. When will we learn that a world that increasingly sees the church as an irrelevant pimple on the rump of life, has this opinion strengthened and solidified by the actions of a denomination that will not exercise the one prophetic ministry with which those outside its doors can identify?³

The question of apartheid and sports contact with South Africa was one of the major issues dividing New Zealand during the 1970s and 1980s but, as the writer indicated, Baptists in New Zealand struggled to speak clearly and prophetically on the issue. Indeed it appears that the denomination was deeply divided over the very essence of the Christian gospel and Baptist identity. During the seventies and eighties that fault line opened up increasingly under the pressure of broader cultural and theological shifts within New Zealand society. Under these circumstances, the ecclesiological bedrock of the Baptist church proved to be an unstable foundation upon which to build a significant contribution to the tour debate.

Public debate in New Zealand on rugby tours to and from South Africa evolved roughly in three stages. Until the mid sixties the question was whether Maoris should be able to play against South Africa. Since 1928 All Black tours to South Africa were 'all white' in deference to racialist attitudes in South Africa. The exclusion of Maori players from such tours was never popular, but it was not until the 1960 tour that a sustained nation-wide debate emerged. The focus of that debate is evident in a resolution passed by the 1958 Baptist Assembly opposing the tour on the grounds that Maori were excluded. It states: 'We are of this conviction because of our deep desire for preserving and deepening the happy relationship between, and essential unity of, Maori and European people as fellow citizens of this country, a unity essential to the welfare of our nation.'⁴ During the mid to late sixties, the focus of debate shifted from the

³ *New Zealand Baptist* (hereafter *NZB*), February 1985, 2.

⁴ Public Questions Committee Papers 1990-1994, New Zealand Baptist Historical Society Archives (NZBHSA): File A/N 1254, MS No. 1005979. In 1959 the Baptist Assembly again passed a resolution protesting against the exclusion of Maoris from the tour. See *NZB*, January 1960, 12.

treatment of New Zealand Maori to the treatment of South African blacks, and whether South Africa should be forced to field a racially integrated team. So in 1964 the Baptist PQC was starting to think about 'the attitude we should have towards sports teams visiting New Zealand whose so-called representative teams are not chosen solely on the grounds of skill.'⁵ But from the late 1960s or early 1970s the focus shifted again, from the composition of South African teams to the configuration of South African society, and whether it was right to have any sports contact at all with a state that supported apartheid.

This was a much more controversial – and divisive – question. Rugby was the national sport of New Zealand and South Africa. It was followed religiously by large sections of both countries. A blanket ban on all tests between these two leading rugby playing nations was unthinkable for many New Zealanders, especially as a number of them remained unconvinced about the evils of apartheid. And for those who were convinced, it did not necessarily follow that sports boycotts were the best response. An alternative and, for many, equally legitimate Christian response, was to build bridges rather than shut doors, and undermine apartheid by positive example. Some pointed to the inconsistency of New Zealand cutting sports ties with South Africa while it maintained economic relations with that country. Others argued that it was unfair to subject South Africa to special treatment without examining our relationship with other countries with records of human rights violations.⁶ The people of New Zealand were deeply divided over the issue.⁷

This level of controversy was reflected in the official Baptist response to the issue during the 1970s and 80s. While earlier Assemblies had debated and passed resolutions on tours to South Africa, in 1969, with another All Black tour to South Africa looming, the Baptist PQC chose not to raise the issue at the annual Assembly. In 1972, with a Springbok tour to New Zealand scheduled for the following year, the PQC declined to participate in a protest led by the

⁵ New Zealand Baptist Union Yearbook, 1964-5.

⁶ See, for example, *NZB*, February 1981, 6.

⁷ For example, a Heylen poll conducted in May 1981 revealed that 51% of the population were opposed to the tour taking place. Tom Newnham, *By Batons and Barbed Wire: a Response to the 1981 Springbok Tour of New Zealand* (Auckland: Real Pictures, 1981), 7.

Methodist Church.⁸ It decided instead to release a bland statement ‘outlining the issues to be considered, but leaving people to decide from the information given what they feel the Christian attitude should be.’ The Committee was actually empowered to speak in its own name, but it declined to do so because, it claimed, ‘The view of Baptists as a whole on such a matter may be expressed only by Assembly, which has not considered the tour question.’ So, the Committee ‘did not feel able to present one Baptist opinion about the tour.’⁹ In fact, the draft statement acknowledges that the Committee very much doubted that such a unified opinion existed.¹⁰ The members of the Committee realised that any statement they made was bound to be highly unpopular and divisive. So the Committee passed the buck – or the ball – to Assembly.

After a ‘vigorous debate’ on an anti-tour resolution, the 1972 Assembly chose, because of ‘the very wide division of opinion’, not to take a vote but simply to move on to the next business.¹¹ That appears to have included motions calling on Baptists to lead lives of personal righteousness and sexual purity. By contrast, these motions were passed with ease.¹² As Andrew Picard has observed in his study of New Zealand Baptist discourse on the Vietnam War, ‘Baptists could be generally assured of denominational unity on issues of personal morality’, like sex, but ‘such harmony collapsed when it came to volatile issues of systemic morality’, like apartheid.¹³ So while Baptists could speak out loudly on the declining standards of personal morality, they fell silent when it came to broader social issues.

Throughout the 1970s the tour debate became increasingly politicised. After the Kirk Labour government forced the cancellation of the 1973 tour, Muldoon and the National Party campaigned in the 1975 election on a pro-tour platform. The increasing radicalism of protest groups like Halt All Racist Tours (HART), regarded by some as left-leaning ‘Marxists’, and labelled by the government as ‘traitors’,¹⁴ made it ever more difficult for conservative churches to align themselves with the no-tour cause. This was clearly the case

⁸ Minutes of PQC meeting, 14 March 1972, Vivienne Boyd Papers: NZBHSA, File A/N 1552.

⁹ NZB, May 1972, 14.

¹⁰ Draft statement: Vivienne Boyd Papers, NZBHSA, File A/N 1552.

¹¹ NZB, May 1973, 7.

¹² NZB, December 1972, 12.

¹³ Picard, ‘A Conflict of Ideologies’, 53.

¹⁴ *New Zealand Herald*, 4 August 1978, section 1, page 5.

with the Baptist Church, which tended towards the conservative end of the political spectrum.¹⁵ Before the 1976 tour, the only statement its annual Assembly made in regards to apartheid was to criticise the National Council of Churches (NCC) for making token grants to activist organisations like HART and CARE (Citizens' Association for Racial Equality). This was followed up by the President of the Baptist Union attacking those organisations for what he called their 'negative' approach to apartheid in South Africa.¹⁶ The tour itself was ignored. Despite this, there were more liberal elements within the Baptist church, especially among the leadership. During this period, for example, the Baptist Union Council was chaired by the Rev Angus MacLeod, General Secretary of the NCC, and a determined leader of the anti-tour movement.¹⁷ Under his leadership, but at the eleventh hour – reluctantly, it seems – the Union Council eventually issued a statement opposing the tour.¹⁸ But overall, the tone of Baptist discourse could not be described as daring or radical. Preaching the Union Sermon at Assembly later that year, the Rev Barry Denholm confessed in regards the tour debate: 'You can't say our denomination has given much of a lead. ... We've let some individuals and some groups fight issues which we should have been leading'.¹⁹

The mainline Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church tended to provide a stronger lead. By mid-1980, these churches had all come out against the forthcoming Springbok tour.²⁰ In July the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches invited the Baptist PQC to distribute literature opposing the tour. The offer, however,

¹⁵ Paul Reynolds, 'Religion and Politics in Auckland: A Study of the Socio-Economic Composition, Voting and Religious and Political Attitudes of Activists in a Sample of Auckland Nonconformist Churches' (M.A. thesis, University of Auckland, 1970), 50-52.

¹⁶ NZB, April 1976, 13.

¹⁷ The Executive of the Council also included the Rev Barry Hibbert, Rev Tom Cadman and Rev Dr Stan Edgar, all of whom were of a more liberal persuasion.

¹⁸ NZB, July 1976, 7.

¹⁹ NZB, February 1977, 1-2.

²⁰ Christopher Nichol and Jim Veitch, 'Rucking for Justice: Apartheid, the Churches, and the 1981 Springbok Tour', in *Religion in New Zealand*, ed. C. Nichol and J. Veitch (Wellington: Tertiary Christian Studies Programme, 2nd ed 1983), 287-312, 299.

was declined.²¹ The Committee said it was divided as to ‘whether we have the right to try and influence South African internal politics, and whether we should support Christian leaders who have been imprisoned for what may be seen by some as political involvements rather than spiritual matters’.²² These were questions the mainstream and more liberal churches appear to have resolved some time ago. But by November a majority of the Committee had come to the conclusion that the church needed to make a decision one way or the other and urged the annual Assembly to pass a resolution. It called on the New Zealand Rugby Union (NZRU) ‘to withdraw its invitation to the Springboks as an expression of opposition to apartheid and of solidarity with oppressed people in South Africa’ and urged the government ‘to take more active steps to discourage the tour’.²³ The resolution did not go as far as the statements of some other churches in actually calling on the government to force the cancellation of the tour by withholding visas for the tour.²⁴ But it was a clear and decisive motion and, somewhat remarkably, it was carried. It appears that the Assembly delegates were profoundly stirred by a visiting black South African, Mr Ramsamy, who set out the implications of the tour for his people and pleaded for isolation of South Africa as the only effective instrument for changing apartheid.²⁵

This was the high point of official Baptist discourse on the tour issue. It was the only tour resolution that Assembly passed in the 1970s or 1980s. As Laurie Guy observes, ‘Baptist heart was probably not in the stop-the-tour campaign’.²⁶ This is borne out by subsequent events. In 1984, the Baptist Union Council decided to oppose the tour planned for the following year because, it said, ‘in the current

²¹ Letter Rev Gordon Duncan to Rev John Murray dated 29 July 1980: NZBHSA, MA701, File B1/88.

²² Minutes of the PQC, 16 July 1980: NZBHSA, MA 701, File B9/86.

²³ See paper entitled ‘Responsibilities to South Africa’s Oppressed’: NZBHSA, MA701, File B1/88. On the basis of this resolution, a strong letter was sent to the Prime Minister urging him to stop the tour a few months before it was due to start. See *NZB*, July 1981, 1.

²⁴ See, for example, the statement by Anglican Archbishop Paul Reeves in the NCC Special News Supplement, May 1981: NZBHSA, MA701, File B1/88.

²⁵ *NZB*, December 1980, 8.

²⁶ Laurie Guy, *Baptists in Twentieth Century New Zealand: Documents Illustrating Baptist Life And Development* (Auckland: NZ Baptist Research & Historical Society, 2005), 136-138.

climate any tour will be seen as support for apartheid.²⁷ But at Assembly the delegates declined, once again, to vote on a motion opposing the tour. Instead, they passed two other resolutions about South Africa, one condemning apartheid in principle, the other congratulating Bishop Tutu for his Nobel Peace Prize. This was clearly an attempt to register Baptist opposition to apartheid without addressing the forthcoming tour and offending those Baptists who supported it. It was a compromise designed to preserve denominational harmony. But the result, according to one of the delegates, was a couple of ‘meaningless, marshmallow resolutions’ that effectively said nothing.²⁸ Indeed, it earned the following headline in the *Waikato Times*: ‘Baptists Sidestep Rugby Tour Issue’.²⁹ So while official Baptist discourse on the tour question may have preserved a false kind of unity at the denominational level, it came at the cost of preventing Baptists from exercising a truly prophetic ministry in regards the issue.

Before the 1983 Assembly, the editor of the *New Zealand Baptist* made a plea for debate, even disagreement, at Assembly. He wrote:

Assembly is ... a laboratory of the Spirit. In any growing and diverse community there inevitably arises tensions, disagreements, different understandings of the Christian faith and life and even radically different approaches to our understanding of the church, life in the community and our response as Christians to the great issues bedevilling mankind. In the Assembly we have an opportunity to distil from such diverse elements, wisdom for living in the church and the world and to share that wisdom with one another.³⁰

In Baptist tradition the gathered church is the site of Christ’s presence and the means of discerning his will.³¹ It is ‘in the midst of a believing, praying people’ that his Spirit’s guidance can be most

²⁷ NZBA, A/N 1611, MS No. 1006272.

²⁸ Rev Paul Tonson, *NZB*, December 1984, 2.

²⁹ Quoted in *NZB*, December 1984, 2.

³⁰ *NZB*, November 1983, 2.

³¹ Paul Fiddes, *A Leading Question: The Structure and Authority of Leadership in the Local Church* (London: Baptist Publications, nd.), 50. See also Martin Sutherland, ‘On Method: A Baptist *Tikanga*’, in *Talking Theology: 2001-2002 Proceedings*, ed. Martin Sutherland, 120-129 (Auckland: Carey Baptist College, 2003), 127. Sutherland goes so far as to suggest that in Baptist tradition ‘there is only one true sacrament: the sacrament of gathering’.

clearly known.³² In this sense, a gathering like Assembly is the 'laboratory of the Spirit'. So refusal by consecutive Assemblies to tackle the tour issue and endure disharmony deprived Baptists of a forum in which to express their views and so discern among themselves the Spirit's leading. According to the PQC it 'left our people unprepared for the decisions which were so recently forced upon them.'³³

By contrast, the official discourse of the New Zealand Presbyterian Church was much more detailed and definitive. Its Assemblies debated and passed increasingly forceful resolutions on every tour from 1970 onwards.³⁴ Its PQC was proactive and decisive. As early as 1972 it was arguing that the time had come to 'demonstrate in some tangible and unequivocal way our objection to the principle of apartheid and our concern for and support of the non-white population in South Africa.'³⁵ And the Church's moderators issued a number of very direct anti-tour statements. In 1981, for example, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church urged his members 'to express opposition to the Tour in the hope that it may yet be called off; and to avoid involvement with it of any kind, whether by participation or by following the games on TV or radio should it take place.'³⁶ Compared to its Baptist cousin, the Presbyterian Church spoke with much greater clarity and conviction. Why was that?

Insofar as the Baptist Church is concerned, the 'unofficial' tour discourse running through the pages of the denominational magazine, the *New Zealand Baptist*, offers some answers. The magazine's editors encouraged debate on the respective tours, particularly Rev H.E. Whitten. As early as 1970 he took a strikingly radical anti-tour position. In February 1970, annoyed at Assembly's silence on the issue, Whitten declared that, 'All sporting ties between this country and South Africa should be broken. This is not to mix sport with

³² Report by Rev. L.A. North in the *Year Book of the New Zealand Baptist Union for 1964-5*, 28. See also Gene Bartlett, 'Shall We Speak Out On Social Issues?', NZB, February 1976, 1.

³³ Paper by Rev Dr Stan Edgar, 'Following the Springbok Tour', 21 September 1981: NZBHSA, MA701, File B1/88.

³⁴ *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand*, 1969, 116; 1972, 143; 1975, 107; 1980, 126; 1984, 126.

³⁵ *Proceedings*, 1972, 135.

³⁶ NCC Special News Supplement, May 1981: NZBHSA, MA701, File B1/88.

politics. It is not a matter of politics at all. It is simply to refuse to let this country's participation in sport be interpreted as an endorsement of that shocking negation of human rights which is apartheid.³⁷ This attempt to rouse the Baptist social conscience drew no response. But an even more forthright editorial in June³⁸ elicited two letters of criticism.³⁹ In 1972 Whitten responded to the news of a planned Springbok tour by criticising the Government for its Pilate-like hand-washing attitude, the NZRU for making a god of their game at the expense of human rights, and the silent majority of New Zealanders who, he said, 'obviously don't care a damn about anything that doesn't affect them personally.'⁴⁰ This generated four letters: one in support of Whitten, two in defence of apartheid, and one protesting the use of a four-letter word.⁴¹ The intensity of debate was surely, if slowly, increasing.

When the Baptist PQC published its bland statement on the proposed 1973 tour, one irritated correspondent observed that New Zealand Baptists seem to have an eleventh commandment: 'Thou shall not rock the boat'.⁴² This accusation surfaced again when the Assembly chose not to make a pronouncement on the tour by passing on to other business. The columnist, 'Boanerges', castigated the delegates for resorting to dubious debating tactics 'simply to avoid upheaval, a bad image in the press or a poor report on television.' Public Questions, he said, 'are always controversial things, but then controversy is the child of truth.'⁴³ The March 1973 *Baptist* devoted its front page to the upcoming tour, with a picture of a rugby scrum and the heading, 'A Matter of Christian Concern.' The feature article quoted Dante: 'The hottest places in Hell are reserved for those who, in a time of great moral crisis, maintain their neutrality,' and argued

³⁷ NZB, January 1970, 2; June 1970, 2.

³⁸ Whitten insisted that the forthcoming tour 'will demonstrate clearly to the world in general that, for the NZRU and its supporters, rugby is more important than human rights' and that 'in this country self-interest takes precedence over any real sense of responsibility towards others. It will convince other peoples that, in spite of our repeated boasting to the contrary, we have no real concern about racial discrimination. They will see this tour as deliberate political support for the apartheid policies of the South African and Rhodesian governments.' NZB, June 1970, 2.

³⁹ NZB, August 1970, 4-5.

⁴⁰ NZB, April 1972, 5.

⁴¹ NZB, June 1972, 6-7.

⁴² NZB, October 1972, 7.

⁴³ NZB, December 1972, 28.

that the moral position was that of boycotts not bridges.⁴⁴ Whitten's editorial called on pusillanimous Baptists to 'stand up and be counted on the side of righteousness and love and abhorrence of anything that helps us to perpetuate the crime of apartheid.'⁴⁵

Responses to this provocative edition of the *Baptist* revealed just how divided its readers were. One disappointed correspondent, for example, wrote, 'The church would be better to confine its appeal to strictly spiritual issues on which she is better informed and on which she is entitled to speak with more authority.'⁴⁶ This was a common cry.⁴⁷ But another correspondent replied that that 'is simply twentieth century monasticism and it indicates a thinking about the Church which does not square with that which we are given in the New Testament. Here we are told quite clearly that we *are* in the world'.⁴⁸ James Belich has argued generally that the two sides of the tour debate were basically defending two different definitions of a New Zealand identity that seemed under threat.⁴⁹ Baptists, for their part, were contesting two very different definitions of the gospel and Christian identity. For some, talk about the tour was a vital expression of the gospel. For others, it was a tragic betrayal of the gospel. The debate exposed a deep theological fault line running through the denomination in regards the essence of the Christian message. It became increasingly apparent that the collision of these two perspectives was something that many preferred to avoid. For them 'the *pax ecclesiae* [was] more important than justice at ecclesiastical cost'.⁵⁰ As Angus MacLeod recalls, for Baptists the 'fear of dividing a very small denomination was always a very strong thing.'⁵¹

⁴⁴ NZB, March 1973, 14-15.

⁴⁵ NZB, March 1973, 4.

⁴⁶ NZB, May 1973, 7.

⁴⁷ One correspondent expressed his 'distaste for the moral indecision of Assembly in refusing to come to terms with the South African tour question' in the following terms: 'These are much bigger questions really than the so-called crisis of Sunday sport of a few years ago, yet our denomination which found plenty to say on that topic at that time, can now dismiss these ones as irrelevant... I am extremely disappointed.' NZB, February 1973, 7.

⁴⁸ NZB, July 1973, 6.

⁴⁹ James Belich. *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000* (Auckland: Penguin, 2001), 518.

⁵⁰ Nichol and Veitch, 'Rucking for Justice', 306.

⁵¹ Angus MacLeod, interview by author, digital recording, Auckland, 13 August 2007.

But the division was not just theological. In 1976, astonished that Assembly would again fail to address the tour issue, an angry correspondent wrote to the *Baptist*: 'When was the Baptist voice last raised on behalf of the oppressed peoples of the world for whom Jesus died ... [such as] the oppressed black majorities in Rhodesia and South Africa?'⁵² This drew a sharp and interesting response from someone arguing that the black majority in Rhodesia and South Africa were not being oppressed. But, he said, 'Let us not be in a hurry to abandon Rhodesia and South Africa to the control of atheistic communism. If that ever happens, oppression will be the right word to use.'⁵³ This concern about the influence of 'atheistic' communism protrudes several times in the debate.⁵⁴ The linking of atheism with communism and Christianity with the democratic west exposes unspoken assumptions that were fundamental to people's worldviews and perspectives on South African apartheid. The tour debate revealed that Baptists were fundamentally divided by ideological, as well as theological, fault lines. As with Vietnam, beneath the war of words was a war of ideologies.⁵⁵

But these theological and ideological divisions were not unique to Baptists. Articles and letters in the *Outlook*, the denominational magazine of the New Zealand Presbyterian Church, reveal that the Presbyterians also faced considerable internal disharmony over the issue. Fraser Paterson observes that attitudes hardened into 'something of a wartime mentality' as time progressed.⁵⁶ In the end, 'people on both sides were claiming that they were ashamed to be Presbyterians: one group because the Church hadn't done enough, the other because it had done too much.'⁵⁷ Some even threatened to leave the Church because they were disgusted with its anti-tour attitude, and a number probably did.⁵⁸ Yet, at the official level,

⁵² NZB, April 1976, 13.

⁵³ NZB, June 1976, 4.

⁵⁴ One reader, for example, expressed the concern that, 'South Africa's mineral wealth is worth manipulating for [sic] and if the communists control all the sea routes how far will the oil travel? A very easy way to cripple the western world?' NZB, February 1981, 6.

⁵⁵ Picard, 'A Conflict of Ideologies', 66-67.

⁵⁶ J.F. Paterson, 'An Historical Analysis of Issues within the Presbyterian Church, 1945-1985' (M.Th. thesis, University of Otago, 1985), 163-4.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 165. See *Outlook*, September 1981, 3; October 1981, 27; November 1981, 3.

⁵⁸ *Outlook*, May 1981, 11, 16; June 1981, 4; September 1981, 3; November 1981, 4.

Presbyterian leaders spoke with much greater clarity and conviction than did Baptists. There were clearly other forces at work.

In the 1970s and 80s the tremors of the charismatic movement were felt throughout the church in New Zealand. The Baptist denomination was no exception. It has been claimed that by the middle of the 1970s 25 percent of all Baptist ministers had been 'baptised in the Spirit', and that the majority of Baptist theological students were products of the renewal.⁵⁹ One report indicates that by 1975 as many as 50 percent of the younger generation of Baptists were 'charismatic'.⁶⁰ By 1989 69 percent of Baptist churches identified with the charismatic movement.⁶¹ So Elaine Bolitho claims, 'Despite initial misgivings and often strong opposition, there is no doubt that the church influenced the most by the charismatic movement was the Baptist church.'⁶² This may be an overstatement, but the Baptist church was clearly impacted more than most.

This is significant. Several commentators have observed that the charismatic movement tended to foster a 'pietistic individualised spirituality'.⁶³ This is evident in the pages of the *New Zealand Baptist* during this period. In 1973 Rev Gordon Hambly criticised the charismatic renewal for generating 'an un-Biblical other-worldliness'. 'Many,' he said, 'make the elaborate effort to create their own world

⁵⁹ Colin Brown, *Forty Years On: A History of the National Council of Churches in New Zealand 1941-1981* (Christchurch: National Council of Churches, 1981), 177. A paper presented by Mr G.E. Lee to the Baptist Union Council on 18 June 1975 stated that the student body of the Baptist Theological College 'shows a strong leaning in this direction.' Union Council Minutes, June 1975 - November 1978: NZBHSA, MA385.

⁶⁰ Rev Dr R.J. Thompson, 'A New Image for New Zealand Baptists?', a paper presented to the Baptist Union Council on 18 June 1975. Union Council Minutes, June 1975 - November 1978: NZBHSA, MA385.

⁶¹ E.E. Bolitho, *Meet the Baptists: Post-war Personalities and Perspectives* (Wellington: Christian Research Association, 1993), 37.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ A.K. Davidson, *Christianity in Aotearoa: A History of Church and Society in New Zealand* (Wellington: Education for Ministry, 1991), 173. C. Brown, 'How Significant is the Charismatic Movement,' in *Religion in New Zealand Society*, 2nd ed., ed. Brian Colless and Peter Donovan (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1985), 107. See also Peter Lineham, 'The Voice of Inspiration? Religious Contributions to Social Policy,' in *Past Judgement: Social Policy in New Zealand History*, ed. B. Dalley and M. Tennant (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2004), 57-73, 69.

instead of living in the real world as it is, painful as that may be.⁶⁴ In a 1978 editorial, Rev Barry Hibbert commented: 'Most of my charismatic friends get full marks for brightness, but don't score so well when it comes to breadth. ... If anything, they tend to be more inward looking, more restricted, more world-denying.'⁶⁵ Then again, in 1983, Rev Walter Lang lamented that, "So often renewed churches have become introverted and could be described as "bless me clubs" where the emphasis is exclusively on the individual's spiritual growth and enjoyment of worship, instead of leading to evangelism and social concern...'⁶⁶ Whatever else it achieved, the charismatic movement served to lift the conservative side of the Baptist church into ascendancy. It pushed the Baptist denomination as a whole in a more pietistic direction and away from social issues like apartheid.

But there were broader sociological forces impacting the Baptist church during this period. These decades witnessed the breakdown of values that had existed for a century or more.⁶⁷ In this period New Zealand 'passed, like Alice slipping through the looking glass, into a new world'.⁶⁸ One outcome of these shifting beliefs and values was a huge decline in church membership and attendance. Presbyterian church attendance, for example, collapsed from 119,041 per week in 1960 to 55,062 in 1988, while in the same period its Sunday school roll went from 76,030 to 10,983.⁶⁹ From the 1960s there was an increasing sense that Christianity was losing its influence on society. According to Michael Hill there were two main responses from the church: the 'minority' response, where people kept their beliefs intact by walling themselves off from a hostile society, and the

⁶⁴ NZB, September 1973, 16-17.

⁶⁵ NZB, June 1978, 2.

⁶⁶ NZB, November 1983, 5.

⁶⁷ James Belich, 'Presenting Past', a paper for the Knowledge Wave Conference (2001). Quoted in Kevin Ward, 'Losing my Religion? An Examination of Church Decline, Growth and Change in New Zealand 1960 to 1999, with Particular Reference to Christchurch' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Otago, 2003), 252.

⁶⁸ Walter Anderson, *Reality Isn't What it Used to Be* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 3.

⁶⁹ Jim Veitch, '1961-1990: Towards the Church for a New Era', in *Presbyterians in Aotearoa, 1840-1990*, ed. D. McEldowney (Wellington: The Presbyterian Church in New Zealand, 1990), 151; quoted in Laurie Guy, 'Between a Hard Rock and Shifting Sands: Churches and the Issue of Homosexuality in New Zealand, 1960-1986', *Journal of Religious History* 30:1 (2006): 61-76, 70.

‘mainstream’ response, where a church chose to modify its beliefs to maintain resonance with broader social patterns and expectations.⁷⁰ This meant shifting from a more ‘vertical’ view of religion (focusing on God and the unseen world) to a more ‘horizontal’ view of religion (focusing on humanity and the needs of this world).⁷¹

Lloyd Geering, principal of Knox College, the theological college of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, epitomised this second approach in the 1960s. He argued that ‘the Christian faith must be radically reoriented and concern itself not with an unseen world but with this world...’⁷² For Geering this meant that there was no longer any ‘infallible source of knowledge’ and one could ‘no longer draw a clear line between what is orthodox and what is not’.⁷³ Indeed, God himself had no relevance in the modern world: God was ‘dead’. Geering was simply echoing international shifts and the ‘death of God’ theology, which involved a turning away from transcendence towards the renewing of this world.⁷⁴ But, as the pages of the *New Zealand Baptist* testify, this neo-liberalism provoked a fierce reaction from theological conservatives in defence of traditional formulations of the Christian faith.⁷⁵ So the 1960s and 70s witnessed ‘a much greater liberal-conservative ecclesiastical divide, leading to a ‘collapse of the theological middle’.⁷⁶ As a result, New Zealand Baptists were ‘more retreatist, more pietistic and more narrow in their understanding of the gospel’.⁷⁷ This is evident in Baptist discourse on the tour. After the Baptist Assembly voted to oppose the 1981 tour, one correspondent to the *New Zealand Baptist* wrote that he was deeply concerned:

⁷⁰ Michael Hill, ‘Religion and Society: Cement or Ferment?’ in *Religion in New Zealand*, ed. C. Nichol and J. Veitch (Wellington: Victoria University of Wellington, 1980), 209.

⁷¹ Hill ‘Religion and Society’, 205-9.

⁷² L. Guy, *Worlds in Collision: The Gay Debate in New Zealand 1960-1986* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2002), 63-4.

⁷³ J. Veitch, ‘A Controversy Revisited: 1966-70 and All That’, *Forum*, XXXVII 3 (April 1984), 3-8, 4.

⁷⁴ Guy, *Worlds in Collision*, 64.

⁷⁵ See, for example, the correspondence in NZB, December 1966, 318-9. One of Geering’s most prominent public opponents was the leading Baptist layman and Professor of Classics at Auckland University, E.M. Blaiklock, who responded with a *Layman’s Answer: An Examination of the New Theology* (London: Hodder & Soughton, 1968).

⁷⁶ Guy, *Worlds in Collision*, 62

⁷⁷ Guy, *Baptists in Twentieth Century New Zealand*, xiv.

at our denomination going the same liberal socio-political road as one Church where I was actively engaged for over twenty years. Once it was spiritually virile, but now it is scrambling for Union with anyone, just to survive. ... May we not conform to that which the world would have us be: a political WCC-type organisation, forgetting our Lord's commission to preach, and teach a spiritual Gospel to all the world.⁷⁸

In the minds of many Baptists, the socio-political action of mainstream Protestant churches was associated with the liberal theology and the numerical decline of those same churches. The influx of conservative refugees from those more liberal mainline churches served only to strengthen that conviction.

The volume of unofficial tour discourse in the *Baptist* magazine peaked in the winter of 1981. When the July issue of the magazine came out, with its front page carrying the text of a letter from the Baptist Union calling on the Prime Minister to force the tour's cancellation, it triggered a number of angry responses. One correspondent protested that the letter did 'not necessarily represent the feelings at 'grass root' level. Before such letters are sent on behalf of the denomination on a matter which so deeply affects our nation, a referendum of members should be held.'⁷⁹ Another expressed 'moral outrage' that the Baptist Union executive should 'take the liberty to write this letter on behalf of Baptist people and churches within the union', and declared, 'Please do not write any more letters on my behalf on the subject of Apartheid or anything else in the future without my prior instruction.'⁸⁰ These correspondents were simply articulating basic Baptist ecclesiology. The principles of freedom of conscience, congregational government, and the autonomy of the local church meant that the denomination's leaders could not speak on behalf of their people without clear majority support expressed in a church meeting or assembly. The problem was that such support was a long time coming, and difficult to prove – short of a referendum of members. A radically flat participatory church polity made it much harder for Baptist leaders to contribute to the tour debate than for the leaders of churches with more hierarchical structures, such as the Presbyterian Church.

⁷⁸ NZB, February 1981, 6.

⁷⁹ NZB, September 1981, 6.

⁸⁰ NZB, November 1981, 6.

By comparison, official Baptist discourse on the question of rugby relations with South Africa was muted. Baptists could speak out boldly on issues of personal morality, like sex or Sunday sport, but they were deeply divided over issues of systemic morality. For Baptists, the debate about apartheid exposed much deeper divisions about the nature of the Gospel, the mission of the church, and the ideology of communism. So like tectonic plates, the two sides of the church collided over the issue. To avoid dividing the denomination, the Baptist PQC and Assembly delegates chose mostly to plaster over the cracks by sidestepping the tour debate altogether or producing compromise resolutions that said nothing. While this may have preserved the appearance of denominational unity, it deprived Baptists of a forum in which to express their views to one another, gain a sense of Christ's mind among the gathered community, and speak confidently and clearly on its behalf. In the vacuum, the *New Zealand Baptist* magazine provided something of a forum for unofficial discourse on apartheid and the tour. Its pages reveal that broad theological shifts occurring during the period of this debate tended to lift the conservative side of the Baptist church into a position of ascendancy. The charismatic renewal movement and the growing liberal-conservative ecclesiastical divide served to move the Baptists as a whole in a pietistic direction. Given the radically flat shape of Baptist ecclesiology, this was significant. The result was that, on issues like apartheid, the New Zealand Baptist Church did appear to be 'head-in-the-sand' – either unwilling or unable to make its voice heard.

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Gathering, Sacrament and Baptist Theological Method

ABSTRACT

This essay explores aspects of baptist theological method. These set it apart from the Great Tradition, which has claimed (or has been conceded) the right to define the shape of theological discourse. What emerges is an approach which eschews a linear progression of ideas, especially those driven by philosophical imperatives. At the heart of this 'Baptist way' is the dynamic presence of Christ in the gathered community. Doctrines emerge in centrifugal relation to that centre. Related understandings of sacrament and theological discourse are proposed. The event of gathering is advanced as the primary sacramental moment. The notion of 'consonance' with the Christ story is proposed as a means of evaluating the truth claims of theology.

Paul Fiddes describes baptist¹ theology in terms of 'tracks' and 'traces'. 'Tracks' are those well-formed, discernable lines tramped down through agreed use and delineating the journeys of the past. Of these traditions there are relatively few in Baptist theology. More important are the vaguer, less certain 'traces' which 'evoke the picture of a shadowy after-image, or a scarcely worked-out trajectory; [hinting] at uncertainty, at ambiguity in both knowledge and direction.'² Any student of the shifting sands of Baptist theological discourse over four centuries will recognize the usefulness of this second category. Our ability to morph the shape and emphasis of our witness has accorded us the potential to adapt quickly and respond authentically to changing contexts. Yet this has, arguably, been at the

¹ I follow the convention of using 'baptist' with a small 'b' to denote baptistic movements not limited to those who self-consciously claim the tag.

² P. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003), 1.

cost of an obviously coherent theological voice. It is thus no mystery that anabaptist/baptist theology has struggled to maintain meaningful conversation in the theological mainstream. Indeed, there is a perception (often meekly shared by baptists themselves) that this line of radical Protestantism has produced few significant theologians with which to talk in the first place!

Baptists are found in all regions where there is a significant Christian population. We are numerically one of the largest communions in the world. We have achieved a certain profile, not to say notoriety, of which we are not always proud. In some places we have entered the folklore of hypocrisy, of puritanical attitudes and demanding moral codes. More positively, we have often exemplified an impressive activism. Who can describe the modern missionary movement without reference to William Carey? How may we ignore Charles Spurgeon, who sits at the centre of a web of Victorian developments which influence the Church today? No study of public religion in the United States can disregard the Southern Baptist Convention – effectively the established Church of the South.

Yet this vibrant, energetic communion *is* virtually ignored in the history of theology. If informed students are asked to rank the top one hundred theologians since the Reformation, it is very likely that not a single baptist would make the list. Baptists themselves have rarely demurred at the relegation. Keith Jones, although an enthusiast for the recovery of Anabaptist insights, is ready to concede:

We have no great patterns or guides, nor many examples of baptistic groupings working at these issues in a systematic theological way. Unlike other parts of the Christian world family we appear not to have been good at systematic theology.³

Even such a significant thinker as James McClendon opens his three volume *Systematic Theology* with an analysis entitled ‘Why baptists have produced so little theology.’⁴

Understood in conventional ways, there are undeniable limitations to baptist thought. Why might this be? There are some obvious historical reasons. As heirs to the radical reformation baptists

³ K.G. Jones, *A believing church: learning from some contemporary Anabaptist and Baptist perspectives* (Didcot, UK: Baptist Union, 1998) 51.

⁴ J.W. McClendon, *Systematic Theology I: Ethics* (Nashville, Abingdon, 1986), 20-27.

in both Europe and Great Britain were, at least until the mid-nineteenth century, an oppressed minority. They were executed for their views by both Protestants and Catholics alike in the 16th century. In Britain, with other Nonconformists they were denied some civil rights, excluded from the Universities of England, their ministry ruled invalid. In such an environment, it is hardly surprising that baptist thinkers have not been admitted to the elite theological circles – nor, conversely, is it a mystery that many have declined to seek such status. The popular piety of baptists has been and remains frequently anti-intellectual, suspicious of learning.

These are undoubtedly important factors. Yet to understand baptist theology only in such terms would be subtly to reinforce the prejudices of the past. Is there not something beyond mere circumstance, something natural to baptist method which adds another level of explanation to the apparent primitiveness of baptist theology? I suggest that, rather than baptist theology ‘failing’ to reach the highest levels of Christian thought, it is actually a distinct *way* of doing theology; and that, when it is true to its own lights, this way generates its own articulation of the faith. This articulation does not, perhaps, always adhere to the ‘rules’. But then, those are other people’s rules.

McClendon, who made more effort than most to address the nature of baptist method, put the problem this way.

The truth, I believe, is this; The baptists in all their variety and disunity failed to see in their own heritage, their own way of using Scripture, their own communal practices and patterns, *their own guiding vision*, a resource for theology unlike the prevailing scholasticism round about them. Some were attracted to current fashions and tried theologizing in those fashions. The results were seldom good, and the consequence was further distrust of theology in baptist ranks.⁵ (emphasis original)

What McClendon in his generalization refers to as ‘scholasticism’ – and what I (in equally sweeping terms) name the ‘Great Tradition’- is a dominant model of theological method that sets up a series of expectations by which baptists have often been found wanting. This tradition, representing the mainstream of ‘orthodoxy’ for centuries, found a natural conversation partner in philosophy. Metaphysical problems are the expected foundational

⁵ McClendon I, 26.

elements in the theological discourse. It has often been just those questions which baptist theologians have ignored or treated lightly – not always, I suggest, because they couldn't cope with them, but principally because these are *not* key questions in a baptist theology.

Augustus Strong at the turn of the twentieth century and Stanley Grenz at the turn of the twenty-first were baptists who produced significant systematic theologies. But they are exceptions which tend to prove the rule. Whilst they maintain standard baptist views on church government and baptism etc, their method is not distinctly baptist at all. This is particularly evident in Grenz. Although he spent the better part of his career at baptist institutions, Grenz primarily addressed the questions of *evangelical* theology, rather than baptist thought. Although it is certainly arguable that Grenz had an understanding of and vision for evangelicalism which reflected his baptist assumptions, his principal methodological interest was the search for ways in which evangelical theology might be 're-visioned' in a postmodern age.⁶

Where then might we look for an authentically baptist style of theology? I suggest that, rather than the paradoxes of metaphysics, the beating heart of baptist theology is heard in our views of church and sacrament.

Ecclesiology can be seen to underlie what are sometimes described as the 'pillars' of baptist theology. There have been numerous attempts to define 'being baptist' in terms of content - to suggest that there are a number of 'baptist distinctives' which uniquely combine to build the baptist vision. Among the main candidates are

1. Baptism of believers only
2. Congregational responsibility
3. Separation of Church and State
4. Freedom of conscience (or 'soul competency' in American baptist parlance)

⁶ This is most acutely demonstrated in Grenz' essay 'Conversing in Christian Style: Toward a Baptist Theological Method for the Postmodern Context'. (*Baptist History and Heritage*, Vol. XXXV, Winter 2000, No.1., 82-103). The title clearly contains some promise. In fact, however, the essay makes virtually no comment on 'Baptist ... method', being primarily interested in the 'postmodern context'.

The last is problematical. It is derivative of the other three, with the addition of enlightenment ideas of the autonomy of the individual. It is, as such, an unfortunate distortion of the baptist way. As for the first three, each may be seen to be an ecclesiological position – determining in turn, membership of the body, relationships to other parts of the body and the relationship of the body to civil authorities. These key stances on the nature of the church are obviously fundamental to baptist communities. I contend, however, that their significance for baptist theological method lies in what they *signal*, rather than what they contain.

So what is the *guiding vision* that is signaled? What is the essence of a baptist way? McClendon identifies it as a sense of immediacy – the sense that the church now *is* the primitive church – it is being created anew in every moment, that each generation stands with the apostles at the dawn of the new day. It is a vision ‘neither developmental nor successionist, but mystical and immediate...better understood by the artist and poet than by the metaphysician and dogmatist.’⁷

Underlying traditional baptist distinctives, then, is an understanding of the dynamics of being church, or, better, the dynamics of *becoming* church. The essence of the baptist theological style is to be found at this level. I intend to enter it through a theological reflection on Matthew 18.

Theologians from all traditions have acknowledged Matt 18:20 to be a powerful statement of how and where the church is constituted, but none has placed more importance on it than baptists. Indeed, Miroslav Volf notes that it has ‘shaped the entire free church tradition’.⁸ However the implications for theological style are not so evident. I contend that the dynamics signaled in this key ecclesiological passage both explain and sustain an authentically baptist way of doing theology.

Matthew 18:20 is far too often shorn of its textual context, particularly the preceding verses (15-19) which discuss a case of discipline exercised by the community. Issues of insight, discernment and authority thus lie deep within this portion of scripture. Whatever

⁷ McClendon, I, 33.

⁸ M. Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 135.

its history,⁹ baptists have always cited the first part of the passage as a model of community life in action. The development of ideas is crucial. In vs 15-18 a relational problem is progressively taken to the wider community. This process draws its logic from the extraordinary statement on authority in vs. 19: 'if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.' Crucially, this is not the end of the *pericope*. The promise of divine response to agreed requests is not an indication of any power inherently possessed by the gathered community. Rather, it in turn depends on the familiar words of vs 20. Community discipline may be exercised *because* - 'where two or more are gathered in my name, I am there among them.'

'I am there among them.' The authority is Christ's authority, discerned and made visible in the gathered church. Christ's presence constitutes the church. This much we have always recognized in the verse, a view we share with other traditions. But the presence of Christ at this moment of gathering also gives form to the church's community life and self understanding. As Fiddes suggests, 'human authority consists in the responsibility of all the church members, gathered in church meeting, to find, to find the mind and purpose of Christ for their life and mission.'¹⁰ The mystical presence of Christ in the gathered community generates the church's theologising.

In order fully to appreciate this dynamic we must wrestle with our understanding of sacrament. Indeed I suggest that sacramentality lies at the heart of Matthew 18:20. In the event of gathering in his name, Christ is present. There is surely no greater promise of grace than that. And of this grace the gathering itself is the visible sign.

As Paul Fiddes in another place, discipline, discernment and sacrament often come together at the centre of baptist church life.

In [the Church] meeting, members of the church gather together to find the mind of Christ. They vote on issues, not to impose a majority view but to find the purpose of the risen

⁹ There are notable historical/critical issues surrounding this passage in Matthew, particularly the use of *ecclesia* in vs 17. For the purposes of this discussion it is immaterial whether Jesus himself spoke these words or if they reveal an early self-understanding of the church.

¹⁰ Paul S. Fiddes, 'Baptism and Creation' in Fiddes (ed) *Reflections on the Water: Understanding God and the World through the Baptism of Believers* (Regent's Study Guides, 4; Oxford: Regent's Park College/Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1996), 47-67, 63.

Lord for their life and mission. Because Christ is embodied among them through the meeting of their bodies, they expect to be able to discern his mind for them. In the seventeenth century it was common practice for members to hold the church meeting either immediately before or after the Lord's supper. So the church book, which recorded the names of the members, the church covenant and all the decisions taken in the church meeting, was kept in a drawer in the bench behind the Lord's table, or in the 'table pew'.¹¹

The gathering is thus both the occasion of Christ's presence and the means of discerning his will. The life of the congregation is the visible centre of the faith. Moreover the gathering itself must be seen as the key sacramental moment.

Baptists have been somewhat uneasy about sacraments, historically being reluctant to too closely define the field. Despite his high place for experience, the liberal American baptist William Newton Clarke (1841–1912) does not deal with sacraments at all in his influential *Outline of Christian Theology* (1898).¹² A generation later, the Southern Baptist E.Y. Mullins (1860-1928) did not leave such an obvious gap. However, he was uncompromisingly direct in his view that Baptism and the 'Lord's supper' 'are not sacraments but ordinances; they do not confer or communicate or impart grace in and of themselves.'¹³

In Britain in the twentieth century an interesting story unfolded.¹⁴ H. Wheeler Robinson, Neville Clark, and George Beasley-Murray called for a greater emphasis on sacramentality built on a reexamination of key New Testament texts. In 1959 Clark asserted that 'Baptism in this normative period, implies, embodies and effects forgiveness of sin, initiation into the church and the gift of the Holy

¹¹ P. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000) 283.

¹² W.N. Clarke, *An Outline of Christian Theology* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898).

¹³ E.Y. Mullins, *Baptist Beliefs* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1925) 67.

¹⁴ Much of what follows in this paragraph is derived from Stan Fowler's analysis of British sacramental developments in relation to Baptism. See Stanley K. Fowler, *More than a Symbol: The British Recovery of Baptismal Sacramentalism*, (Carlisle, Paternoster, 2002). See also Anthony Cross 'Baptists and Baptism – A British Perspective' *Baptist History and Heritage* 35, no.1 (Winter 2000: 107) and Cross, *Baptism and the Baptists* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000).

Spirit'.¹⁵ This vigorous, New Testament-inspired sacramentalism – interpreted by some as tantamount to baptismal regeneration – was highly provocative. It is worth noting however, that although in baptist terms Clark and Beasley-Murray in particular represented a shift in a sacramental direction, the focus of this new thought was never on the physical elements, water, bread and wine. Consistently the debate was cast in terms of trying to understand (particularly baptism) as a graced *event*. Robert Walton added a crucial ecclesiological connection. The sacramentality of baptism attends on its role as initiation into the Church. The Spirit is 'the gift...to the Christian community, in which a man shares because he has entered that community through baptism.'¹⁶

More recently, baptist discussion of sacraments has flourished.¹⁷ Among the most interesting contributions is the work of John Colwell of Spurgeon's college in London.¹⁸ At the heart of Colwell's view of the sacraments is his insistence on the personhood of the Spirit – a personhood which he sees downgraded in Augustine's famous description of the Godhead as lover, beloved and love. 'Lover' and 'beloved' – Father and Son – have personhood inherently inferred; 'love' does not.

One realizes that what has been deduced is a duality or 'binity' rather than a Trinity; there are but two 'persons' here; the Spirit, as love, has been depersonalized. And in this implicit depersonalization of the Spirit, one suspects, lies the root of much that has proved problematic in Western theology.¹⁹

Rather than *deducing* the Trinity from the proposition 'God is love' (as he suggests Augustine does) Colwell calls for us to travel in the opposite direction, that is: to *infer* that God is love 'from the Trinitarian shape of the Gospel story.'²⁰ Picking up on ideas from

¹⁵ N. Clark in A. Gilmore ed. *Christian Baptism: A Fresh Attempt to Understand the Rite in Terms of Scripture, History and Theology* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1959) 308.

¹⁶ Robert C. Walton, *The Gathered Community* (London: Carey Press, 1946) 30.

¹⁷ See particularly Fiddes (ed) *Reflections on the Water* and A.R. Cross and P.E. Thompson (eds) *Baptist Sacramentalism* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003).

¹⁸ J.E. Colwell, *Promise and Presence: An Exploration of Sacramental Theology*, (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2005).

¹⁹ Colwell, 21.

²⁰ Colwell, 22.

Jurgen Moltmann and Tom Smail, as well as from the Puritans John Owen and Richard Sibbes, Colwell holds that the gospel story narrates ‘not just the story of Jesus, but rather the story of his relatedness to the Father through the Spirit and of the Father’s relatedness to the Son through that same Spirit.’²¹ Thus ‘in every respect and in every instance the relatedness of the Father to the Son and the relatedness of the Son to the Father as narrated in the gospel story is a mediated relatedness; it is never unmediated.’²²

If as Colwell (following such as Rahner, Barth, and Moltmann) affirms, the very structure of the gospel story is revelatory of God in eternity (accepting Rahner’s influential maxim that ‘the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity’) then mediation lies in the very nature of the Godhead and this in turn preserves the true personhood of the Spirit.

It is not sufficient...to refer to the Spirit as the (impersonal) love uniting Father and Son; he is rather the (personal) mediator of that love; he is the one who mediates the love of the Father to the Son and love of the Son to the Father....Moreover...it is only because this absolute love and self-giving is mediated, rather than unmediated, that the persons of the Trinity remain distinct, that the Trinity does not collapse into an indistinct monad.²³

This trinitarian insight provides the foundation of Colwell’s view of sacrament. Mediation – in particular the Spirit’s mediatory role - lies in the very Divine nature. Moreover, as with the Divine nature, so with God’s relatedness to creation. Colwell goes on to discuss the Spirit’s role in creation, asserting it to be entirely continuous with the gospel insight into the nature of the Trinity. Following Irenaeus, he emphasizes the teleological and mediated nature of divine engagement with the world.

There is...no unmediated presence or action of God within or towards creation; the relatedness of God to creation is mediated in the Son and through the Spirit... God relates to creation as the One that he is, as the Father, the Son and the

²¹ Colwell, 37.

²² Colwell, 38-39.

²³ Colwell, 39.

Spirit, as the One whose free, loving relatedness is itself mediated.²⁴

Such divine action is continuous and teleological. ‘Christ is the source, goal and therefore the ultimate significance of every particular of creation.’²⁵ Moreover, this relational, trinitarian vision forbids any mechanistic account of the universe. Colwell here takes up the ideas of Jonathan Edwards and George Berkeley (he might also have engaged William Temple²⁶) which ground all reality in the ‘perception’ of God. This is not a mere ‘watching’ of course. ‘Divine perception is both active and creative’.²⁷

This is the crucial sacramental point in Colwell’s approach: we too may perceive. Humans also may glimpse the *telos*, meet Christ in creation. ‘Truly to know any particular [of creation] is to know that particular in relation to the Son as its source and goal, is to know that particular as that which is loved in the Son by the Father.’²⁸ This of course, is not our own native ability, but a gift. By the action of the Spirit we may participate in God’s perception. To perceive in this way is both to know and be changed. In this understanding, Colwell argues, all particulars of creation are potentially sacramental – from Moses’ burning bush to Leonardo Boff’s father’s cigarette butt – but this should not be taken to posit a sacramental universe as such. Sharing in the divine perception is not automatic. It is gift, mediated in the sovereign action of the Spirit. To make all things signs would be to make nothing significant.²⁹

Here Colwell turns to a classic reformed definition of sacramental signs, introducing the necessary aspect of promise. The Spirit can bestow sacramental perception of any particular of creation but *promises* to do so only in some special cases – those things traditionally called ‘the sacraments’.

Whilst there are clearly helpful elements in Colwell’s argument, I contend there is a more natural and useful ‘baptist’ application

²⁴ Colwell, 48.

²⁵ Colwell, 56.

²⁶ See Temple’s discussion of “The Immanence of the Transcendent” in *Nature Man and God* (London: Macmillan, 1934), esp. Lectures XI, XII and XIX.

²⁷ Colwell, 52.

²⁸ Colwell, 54.

²⁹ Colwell, 55.

which may be made, one which has profound implications for baptist theological method.

In Colwell's schema, the following logic seems to apply.

- Mediation lies at the heart of the Divine nature.
- This same trinitarian mediation constitutes the relation of God to creation.
- Mediating in this way, the Spirit may give insight into the *telos*, the purpose and goal of creation through the particulars of creation. Such are sacramental moments.

It is in this third aspect that questions arise. Colwell has not allowed a strong enough link between the mediatory nature of the Divine life and the granting of perception, the sacramental moment. If the trinitarian model Colwell posits is helpful, it is so to the extent that it establishes mediation through *persons*, rather than objects. (Indeed Colwell would argue that personhood itself is bound up with mediation.) This is not to deny that sacramental perception of objects may be given by the Spirit but it does in my view suggest that the most essential glimpses of the *telos* will be in the particulars of creation called 'person' - quintessentially in Christ, the God/Man, the 'total person', but derivatively in humans and particularly in the Church.

Interestingly, Colwell's first chapter after establishing his theory is on 'the sacramentality of the church'. However, he is uncomfortable with the inherently 'localising' tendency of a gathered ecclesiology, which he sees as undermining catholicity. He is also concerned at the potential vagueness of the concept of 'church', especially as developed by that closet baptist Karl Barth. 'An unmediated act of the Spirit is, by definition, invisible and indeterminate. A church constituted by such an unmediated act would consequently be invisible and indeterminate.'³⁰ (72) The church must take visible form - a form, for Colwell, defined by the presence and exercise of the traditional sacraments.

It is precisely at this point that I want to depart from Colwell, suggesting a reconsideration of two crucial aspects of the gathered ecclesiology he questions.

Firstly, it is the inevitably local, gathered community which is the focus of the promise Christ makes in Matthew 18:20. The

³⁰ Colwell, 72.

language there attached to gathering is far stronger than any attached in the New Testament to baptism. It is more direct, I would argue, even than the 'this is my body/blood' declarations at the last supper. If 'real presence' is sought then surely it is here, where two or three gather in his name.³¹

Secondly, in the anabaptist/baptist tradition 'gathering' is the highest form of visibility. It is more than coincidental presence together in one place. It is a gathering as a covenanted community in the name of Christ with all that that entails. It is a gathering of disciples who walk the road of suffering. It is an enactment of the Gospel and, in the committed, covenanted relationships of real, named, flesh and blood persons, it is a glimpse of the reconciliation God is bringing about for the universe. In general baptists have been happy to agree with Karl Barth on baptism and Zizioulas on eucharist that these practices are not in themselves sacramental but that they obtain iconic significance as eschatological events in the gathered community.

So, Zizioulas:

The eucharist, as distinct from other expressions of ecclesial life, is unthinkable without the gathering of the whole Church in one place....consequently, it manifests the Church not simply as something instituted, that is, historically *given*, but also something, *con-stituted*, that is, realized as an event of free communion, prefiguring the divine life and the Kingdom to come...In this way the eucharist is not a 'sacrament,' something parallel to the divine word: it is the eschatologization of the historical word, the voice of the historical Christ, the voice of the Holy Scripture which comes to us, no longer simply as 'doctrine' through history, but as life and being through the *eschata*.³²

Robert Walton, mentioned earlier, suggested for Baptism that 'it is an act of God through his Church; it is a sacrament of the community.'³³ This I propose is a 'trace' of an authentically baptist

³¹ Jesus' Matthean promise at 28:20 "I am with you to the end of the age" obviously also implies presence, indeed continuous presence. This too is, arguably, ecclesiological, being linked to the departing commission to make disciples.

³² J.D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and Church* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press) 21-22.

³³ Walton, 167.

sacramentality. The most truly sacramental moment is the gathering itself. It is about persons and it is here that the greatest possibility exists for the perception of the *telos*. “The whole universe is waiting with eager expectation for the unveiling of the Children of God.’, (Romans 8:19). All other rites gain their sense and validity from their exercise in that context, rather than the community gaining its visibility and form from the rites, as in Colwell’s view. Indeed, the gathering *is* the sacrament, the moment of Christ’s presence, the *telos* at once for the church and for the world.

The implications of this understanding are huge. Most importantly, it identifies the life of the congregation as the visible centre of the faith. All theological questions are thus ecclesiological questions. Baptists have little incentive to establish abstract progressions of ideas or to begin their efforts to understand their faith with other people’s issues. Everything derives from the dynamic experience of Christ in the community. Doctrines are of significance only for what they add to or draw from an understanding of that event. Baptist theology is ‘systematic’ only in the sense of being a ‘centred set’ of concepts. Doctrines proceed not by philosophical logic but as radiating spokes from the centre.

So baptist theology will look different. For instance, how life is lived in the Christian community is of great interest. In colonial New Zealand this was certainly the case. The principal questions, debated endlessly through the pages of the *NZ Baptist* in the 1880s and 1890s were ‘How do we organise ourselves? How are we to become church? There were the occasional derived debates over questions current in Britain but even here the interest lay in the effects on evangelism and conversion – securing the future gathering. Something of the like is observable in recent baptist theological expressions. McClendon pioneered the notion of biography as theology. The first instalment of his *Systematic Theology* is a volume on narrative ethics. Doctrine is second and foundational theory is in volume three. Paul Fiddes’ work shows a parallel approach. His 2000 volume on the Trinity is intentionally a ‘*Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity*’. Fiddes, reflecting what I suggest is an authentically baptist method, asserts

this is no new venture, for the doctrine of the Trinity has been a pastoral theology from its formulation. The Christian idea of a personal God begins historically in pastoral experience, that is, in the experience of the Christian congregation.³⁴

³⁴ Fiddes, *Participating in God*, 8.

There are implications, too, for our understanding of the veracity of theology. In what sense can theology be ‘true’? Certainly a simple correspondence theory does not sit comfortably with the dynamic, non-linear picture of baptist theology I propose. That both McClendon and Grenz made significant contributions to post-foundationalist debates is no mystery. But does the usual proffered alternative to correspondence theories, coherence, serve us any better? Are we consigned to a post-Wittgensteinian communitarian relativism? McClendon seems almost to suggest so, defining theology as ‘the discovery, understanding, and transformation of the convictions of a convictional community’.³⁵ Yet there is a crucial qualification to McClendon’s view: his sense of immediate identification with the primitive church. The local ‘convictional community’ is not merely self-referential but is inextricably bound with the first disciples, and, more importantly, with the One they follow. This is already loaded into our key text. Matthew 18:20 denies the local story a primary value in and of itself. The gathering, the local, is valued out of the conviction that Christ is present in the community of those ‘gathered *in his name*’. This essential rider enables us to build a more explicit picture of the baptist theological style.

The church experience is never just local, never just one story. Rather it is the dynamic interplay of *two* stories – the contemporary, local, ‘gathered’ one, and the Christ story as revealed in scripture. These stories are not equal partners. As the church gathers ‘in his name’, it is seeking to align its story with Christ’s story in all its scandalous particularity. Thus, in this dialectic, the Christ story is primary and normative. There are important implications for how we understand the nature of theology and in particular its claims to be ‘true’.

We must assert that absolute truth is not some *thing* that we know, share or experience, but a *person* we meet. Christ is truth. Theology can be ‘true’, but in the sense that a builder’s set square or spirit level, the sights on a rifle, or a compass can be ‘true’ - that is, they indicate a proper alignment, direction or bearing. None of these instruments is ever *perfectly* true, but good ones indicate measurements or bearings within acceptable tolerances. Theology similarly can be better or worse, depending on whether it aligns the church more or less well to the normative Christ story. The truth of theology therefore is not primarily that of correspondence, which arrogantly claims an unmediated grasp of reality. Neither is it merely one of self-

³⁵ McClendon, *Systematic Theology* I, p 23.

referential coherence. Both understandings remain necessary and useful, but closer to the heart of a baptist approach to theology is an understanding of theological truth better described as 'consonance'. In this concept, drawn from music, theology's task is to establish and enable the harmony of the local story with that of Christ, so that the church truly gathers 'in his name'.

Consonance with the Christ story transcends mere imitation. Theology is more than determining 'what would Jesus do?' or simply cataloguing scriptural concepts. The story itself calls us forward and outwards rather than backwards or inwards. The local community is rightly concerned with how it is to live in its real time context. Gathered in Christ's name it seeks to harmonise its own with his story and, thus, with the Kingdom of God. Theology's task is to facilitate this harmonisation, to bring us into consonance with Christ.

In terms of theological method, the role of tradition takes a particular form in this baptistic approach. McClendon's stress on the primitive immediacy of the church's connection to Christ might imply the simple dismissal of tradition as a resource for contemporary theology. Certainly in baptist theology tradition cannot be authoritative. Neither do baptists accept that the Christ story may only be viewed through the infinite interpretative accretions of the intervening centuries. This would be a too linear approach.

Nevertheless we cannot deny the reality of history and its influence on us. A metaphor may be helpful here. In train travel one's vision is generally limited to the scenes to the side of the carriage. When the stretch of track (and hence the train of carriages) is straight, the field of view is surprisingly restricted. One cannot see far ahead or behind. However, when the train enters a sweeping bend in the line, the other carriages, the engine itself (or the rear of the train if one looks behind) become suddenly visible. At such moments, often the most memorable of the journey, the travelers can see where they are going, and where they have been. Other carriages are (albeit briefly) in plain sight. Instead of an envelope of forty or so passengers, one realizes the presence of perhaps hundreds more.

In baptist theology time is similarly to be imagined as curved. Freed from the restricting straight lines of authoritative tradition, baptists claim the right to look across the curve, to look directly to the Christ story for our reference. Just as in the train journey the other carriages swing into view at such moments, earlier generations may be seen more authentically as what they truly are - fellow travelers, fixed to the same engine but not of themselves giving us

either motion or direction. Of course, if not for these carriages our connection to the engine would be threatened. The generations similarly provide continuity and a profundity of experience and discovery from which any contemporary theology constantly draws. They bequeath ‘traces’ of baptist thought. In Fiddes’ terms such ‘traces’ will constantly enrich us, but (acknowledging the potential for confused metaphors) more formed ‘tracks’ will rarely direct us. The reference point remains the vision of Christ himself, forever renewed in his presence among us.

What then of scripture? An exploration of theological method, which centres the truth of theology on the Christ story, must define the role of the normative documents of the faith - the access, after all, to the very story which has formed us. In a consonance approach to theology Scripture is released to be used in genuinely canonical terms - as a measure, enabling our discourse and lives to be ‘true’. Barth’s description of the theological task is apposite.

Dogmatics as such does not ask what the apostles and prophets said but what we must say on the basis on the apostles and prophets....As the church accepts from Scripture, and with divine authority from Scripture alone, the attestation of its own being as the measure of its utterance, it finds itself challenged to know itself, and therefore...to ask...what Christian utterance can and should say today.³⁶

This is potentially problematic. The church’s sense of its identity does not hinge solely on the attestation of scripture, resting more fundamentally on the dynamic presence of Christ. But scripture is indeed properly understood as challenging the church to ‘know itself’ better and to guard its utterance.

And its acts. Kevin Vanhoozer suggests that

the canon’s primary role is to cultivate good theological judgement so that it functions not so much as a script to be memorized and repeated verbatim but as a guide for learning one’s role as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Rethinking doctrine as dramatic direction encourages us to think in terms of *doing* the truth.³⁷

³⁶ Barth *CD* I.1.16. I am indebted to my former Principal Brian Smith for reminding me of this reference.

³⁷ K.J. Vanhoozer, ‘The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology’ in J.G. Stackhouse (ed), *Evangelical*

Grenz, from a different starting point, argues similarly.

Through the Bible, the Spirit orients our present on the basis of the past and in accordance with a vision for the future. The Spirit leads the contemporary hearers to view themselves and their situation in the light of God's past and future and to open themselves and their present to the power of that future, which is already at work in the world. Thereby they are drawn to participate in God's eschatological world. The task of theology in turn, is to assist the people of God in hearing the Spirit's voice speaking through the text so that we can live as God's people – as inhabitants of God's eschatological world – in the present.³⁸

Both Vanhoozer and Grenz are anxious to hold a firm, if redefined, authority of scripture. A baptist theological method will be similarly concerned. However, it will add the sacramental mystery of Christ's presence in the gathered community as the essential concomitant of scriptural reading, however dramatic or Spirit-led. The church, in all its contextual specificity, finds itself above all Christ's story because he is there among them.

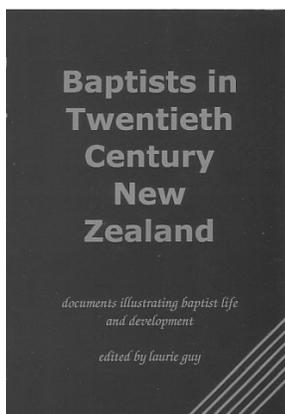
Baptists need confidently to celebrate their own unique theological dynamic. In Aotearoa-New Zealand such identity questions are often explored through the Maori notion of *tikanga*. This rich concept can mean method, custom or approach, but it is broader than those terms imply, encapsulating also senses of 'culture' or 'way'. Neither Catholic nor Protestant, the baptist *tikanga* is a way of its own, a culture of church and theological discourse which looks expectantly to the Spirit's work in creating anew as the body of Christ those who gather in his name.

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Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 61-106, 100-101

³⁸ S.J. Grenz, 'Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic: Theological Method after the Demise of Foundationalism' in J.G. Stackhouse (ed), *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 107-136, 125.

NZ Baptists - in their own words!

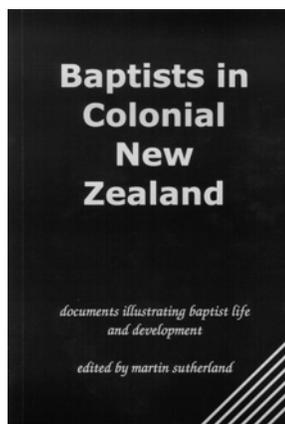


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REVIEWS

Matthias Gockel. *Barth and Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election: A Systematic-Theological Comparison.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. (229 pp.) [ISBN: 0-19-920322-9]

Amongst Barthian scholarship today a battle rages between so-called ‘traditionalists’ and the so-called ‘revisionists’. The former read Barth as consistently maintaining the freedom of the immanent Trinity and thus read his doctrine of the election of Jesus Christ from that perspective. The latter regard the Trinity as coming to be as a result of the election of Jesus Christ. The ‘traditionalists’ are most ably represented by George Hunsinger, Professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, the ‘revisionists’ are most ably represented by Bruce McCormack, also of Princeton Theological Seminary. While this debate may seem very ‘in-house’ and esoteric, it does have significant and important implications. On the one hand, traditionalists would argue the revisionists threaten the freedom of God to be God and independent of his creation, while the revisionists would have us believe the traditionalist view fails to reckon with the Christological implications of the faith and fails to properly discern the nature of God.

The present work is a revised version of Gockel’s PhD thesis completed under the supervision of Bruce McCormack. As such one rightly expects it to echo the thesis McCormack first made in his 1997 work *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, in which he argued that in 1942 Barth’s doctrine of election underwent a wholesale revision in the *Church Dogmatics*. Gockel’s work is a defence of this reading of Barth, as he traces Barth’s doctrine of election through the various phases of (supposed) doctrinal development. In addition, Gockel brings Barth into systematic comparison with the theology of Schleiermacher on election, arguing, against the received tradition, that the two are closer than previously thought. Given this context for writing, Gockel’s work is an important and interesting contribution to the ongoing debate and essential reading for those wanting to enter the discussion.

Gockel highlights how Barth and Schleiermacher are close together in their appeal to a single divine decree, and in other ways, although Gockel is careful not to flatten out the differences that do remain. The essential claim is that Barth's doctrine of election is not yet christocentric: this, argues Gockel, only really comes to light in the exposition of election in the *Church Dogmatics* where,

‘...Barth's approach...at once preserves and christologically sharpens the teleological understanding of reprobation and election in his earlier position. The theocentric emphasis of Schleiermacher's and his own earlier revision of the doctrine is replaced by a christocentric emphasis: Jesus Christ not only reveals but also constitutes God's gracious choice as the self-determination to be God for His people and the determination of humankind to be the people of God’ (p. 169).

Gockel's study is well researched and written and provides a very good overview of the issues from a unique standpoint – Barth's doctrine of election in dialogue with Schleiermacher. As already indicated, the thesis that Barth substantially changed his mind on the doctrine of election is contested but this work provides an indispensable voice in the ongoing debate, one not to be missed when trying to work out for oneself what Barth said, let alone what he meant.

Myk Habets

Steven M Studebaker, editor. *Defining Issues in Pentecostalism: Classical and Emergent*. Eugene, Or.: Pickwick, 2008. (xiv + 207 pp.) [ISBN: 978-1-55635-843-2]

In February, 2007 McMaster Divinity College convened the first Pentecostal Forum, bringing together respected Pentecostal scholars from North America to present papers and engage in critical dialogue. This work represents the published papers of that forum, consisting of an introduction, seven substantial chapters, and an epilogue by Clark Pinnock. Respected heavyweights within Pentecostal scholarship are represented by Frank Macchia, Roger Stronstad and

Martin Mittlestadt, while emerging and younger scholars include Steven Studebaker, Amos Yong, and Andrew Gabriel. One non-Pentecostal, Cynthia Long Westfall is also included. This is an important work from some of the best and most creative Pentecostal scholars working today. For that alone it deserves careful attention.

The seven essays included here are all of an extremely high quality, provide largely original contributions to Pentecostal theology, and each of them is eminently readable. The essays have not been so heavily edited from their oral presentations that they lack the pace and voice of the author. Rather, these are lively pieces, that reflect in scholarly ways some of the Pentecostal spirit for which the movement as a whole is well known. As such this slim volume offers a substantial and enjoyable view of the landscape of current North American Pentecostalism.

Pentecostalism is not, despite its distinguishing features, a monolithic tradition, as this volume highlights. Various contributors take issue with other contributors over some very important issues. For instance, the doctrine of subsequence (that baptism in/with the Spirit is subsequent to conversion) is a staple of Pentecostal theology; in fact it is one of its defining points. However, Macchia (in a summary of his major work *Baptized in the Spirit*) argues it is better to speak of 'Pentecostals' and the doctrine of subsequence is not a *sine quo non*. Roger Stronstad takes exceptions to all such attempts as Macchia's and in a rather trenchant contribution presents a sophisticated exegesis and theology of the doctrine of subsequence in Luke-Acts.

Other essays represent directions in which Pentecostal theology is moving. Studebaker offers a constructive theological proposal for Pentecostals which seeks to redress the subordination of the Spirit which he sees evident within traditional theologies, including Pentecostalism. He builds upon the earlier work of David Coffey to develop a Pentecostal theology of trinitarian grace. In doing so he constructs a Spirit-oriented view of the Trinity and a Spirit-Christology to good effect. Amos Yong furthers his long-standing project to construct a theology of religions around the mission of the Spirit and Andrew Gabriel attempts to outline what a theology proper may look like when the Holy Spirit is taken seriously so that the divine attributes are built upon the revelation of God as three persons rather than according to Greek metaphysics.

In a volume such as this one is bound to want more – more detail, more justification, and more substantial engagement with

Scripture and the tradition. But that is a strength, not just a weakness of the work. Pentecostal theology is alive and well and with scholarship such as this, one can be sure that Pentecostal theology has much yet to offer the wider church in many areas, not just in pneumatology. This is an important contribution to contemporary theology and I can think of no better start than this to the McMaster Theological Studies Series.

Myk Habets

Francesca Aran Murphy. *God is Not a Story: Realism Revisited*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. (356 pp.) [ISBN: 978-0-19-921928-5]

This work is a challenging critique of narrative theologies, including the works of George Lindbeck, Robert Jenson, and Herbert McCabe. Murphy argues that the use of the concept of story or narrative in theology is circular and self-referential, and that the widespread notion that the role of the theologian is to 'tell God's story' has not helped theology to advance the reality of its doctrine. As the subtitle indicates – God is not a story. If God is a story, argues Murphy, then he is an idea, a character, and thus utterly dispensable. She believes that God is not a story, he is a reality. Murphy contends that the scriptural revelation on which Christian theology depends is not a story or a plot but a dramatic encounter between mysterious, free, and unpredictable persons. She offers her own alternative approach, making use of cinema and film theory, and engaging in particular in a dialogue with the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar to highlight the weakness of narrative theologies and the superiority of a Christian form of realism.

Murphy (Reader in Systematic Theology, University of Aberdeen) specialises in the relation of aesthetics and the arts to theology. She uses drama, film and literature in her undergraduate teaching on philosophy of religion and contemporary theology and this explains the appeal of film over narrative in this work. Her academic writing has centred on theological aesthetics, especially von Balthasar and Etienne Gilson. Aesthetics is that branch of philosophy which examines the idea and function of beauty. Unfortunately, this

work is not aesthetically pleasing! It is not easy to read, nor is it easy to comprehend what it is Murphy is arguing. This is not a model of aesthetic theology.

One of the major weaknesses of this work is the complicated set of terminology Murphy invents and the ambiguous way she uses it. For example we read about ‘Story Barthians’ (Hans Frei), ‘Grammatical Thomists’ (George Lindbeck), ‘Story Thomists’ (Robert Jenson), ‘Cinematic Modalists’ (Jenson again), ‘postliberals,’ ‘narrative theologians,’ ‘foundationalist fideists,’ and a host of other such titles. And yet, these terms are not clearly defined, and there seems to be considerable overlap in her application of these titles to certain opponents such as Robert Jenson (who may qualify as all of these!).

My own sense is that Murphy is right in her major contention – that certain forms of narrative theology suffer from speaking of God as an idea rather than relating to him as a personal being. I also sense that her critique of so-called ‘Story Barthianism’ and ‘Grammatical Thomism’ is correct and that a form of biblical realism is the antidote. However, the argument was obfuscated by jargon to such an extent that it was lost from sight. This is a shame as a critique along the lines argued here is required, but this work has not yet filled the gap.

Myk Habets

J. Todd Billings. *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. (vii + 218 pp.) [ISBN: 978-0-19-921187-6]

Exponents of Radical Orthodoxy argue that genuine human participation with God in salvation involves a reciprocal relationship in which a gift of grace is both received as a gift but also returned to God through human action. It is returned, as it were, with value added. In justifying such a theology of Gift these writers have taken on Protestant theology at major points in order to overturn long-held views of salvation. In particular the theology of John Calvin has come in for special scrutiny. Exponents of Radical Orthodoxy contend that Calvin establishes such a radical disparity between God and humanity that humanity merely remains passive throughout the process of

salvation. Justification is a divine gift which no human work can merit, sanctification is a divine work which no human synergism can aid, and the work of glorification is equally wholly of God and not of human works.

Into this discussion enters Todd Billings with this work which examines Calvin's doctrine of union with Christ in its catholic and Reformation perspectives, and then brings this theology into dialogue with Radical Orthodoxy; or as he prefers to term them, 'Gift theologians'. Billings' work seeks to counter the claim that Calvin has a negative, merely 'passive' view of humanity and argues that Calvin's theology of participation in Christ is the key to unlocking how he affirms sovereign grace and at the same time opens up the opportunity for humans to genuinely participate by grace in God in grateful service in the church and the world. Through an examination of the differentiated union between God and creation Billings shows how and why the exponents of Radical Orthodoxy have misunderstood Calvin's theology and thus have misrepresented a theology of gift.

In an introductory chapter Billings outlines Calvin's distinctive doctrine of participation and locates this within Calvin studies. We are reminded that Calvin's theology of participation is distinctive, constituted as it is by the *duplex gratia* (double grace), the graces of justification and sanctification. Justification is a forensic act of imputation, however, according to Calvin, it is inextricably tied to union with Christ: believers come to 'possess' Christ and his righteousness. In the second grace of sanctification Calvin draws upon patristic and medieval theologians of participation as impartation. To participate in Christ, for Calvin, involves a grateful fulfilment of the law of love, empowered by the life-giving Spirit.

Billings then provides two chapters in which he expounds Calvin's theology of participation through the various editions of the *Institutes*, commentaries, Tracts and Treatises, and even provides ample illustration of his theology through a selection of Calvin's letters. One of the strengths of Billings' work is the way he shows how Calvin is not a 'man of one book' and how the changing contexts within which Calvin published has a material effect on his theology and should inform our reading of it. Those familiar with accounts of Calvin's life will find much here to interact with; for instance: did Calvin study with John Major while at the College de Montaigu? Was Calvin influenced by Scotistic and Occamist philosophical theology? Billings concludes that Calvin uses

philosophy in an *ad hoc* fashion. He probably did have exposure to the philosophical forms of Scotism and nominalism, but his appropriation of these schools of thought was muted and highly selective.

Then follows a chapter on the activity of believers in prayer and the sacraments and one on the activity of believers in participating in the Law of God. In the first Billings provides an erudite overview of Calvin's Eucharistic theology and highlights the way in which human participation is essential throughout. For those of a baptistic tradition there will be a lot in here to consider. Billings has made standard critiques of Reformed notions of the sacraments that much more difficult. In the chapter on the law, the least interesting of the book, we have some extended debates over the role of natural theology and how church and state relate to one another. Once again Billings highlights the way in which humanity participates in the work of God in the world.

In the final chapter Billings summarises the argument of the book, explicitly addresses some of the concerns of the Gift theologians, and outlines areas for further study. Billings addresses seven 'faulty assumptions' and shows how Calvin's theology of participation in Christ is both not what the Gift theologians accuse it of being, and also shows how it differs from some formulations of post-reformation Reformed theology. This is a helpful outline.

A few weaknesses of the work are evident. This volume marks the beginning of a new series entitled 'Changing Paradigms in Historical and Systematic Theology' in which each volume will tackle a period or key figure whose significance is ripe for reconsideration. The express aim is to bring these periods or figures into critical dialogue with current research. Billings stated goal is to dialogue with Radical Orthodoxy on theologies of Gift. Throughout the work Billings keeps the discussion focussed on grace, participation, and response, which is good, but he only offers tangential interaction directly with Radical Orthodoxy briefly in the introductory and concluding chapters. I would be surprised if exponents of Radical Orthodoxy will be convinced by Billings central arguments. They may have to concede that their reading of Calvin is not correct (no minor achievement), but that may be all. From the introduction I was expecting a more direct and sustained critique of Radical Orthodoxy on this point, but it never came. A second weakness is more idiosyncratic – the discussion of the law was, in contrast to the rest of

the work, rather languid and lacked the theological vigour displayed in the rest of the work.

These minor criticisms aside, with this work Billings has made a major contribution to Calvin studies which will no doubt occasion much response, both positive and negative. This is a work of clarity and sanity, and displays Billings' thorough familiarity with Calvin's context and theology. This is superb work. It offers important insights on the development of Calvin's theology, the sources of his thought, and offers an utterly convincing way to read his theology. Excurses on *theosis*, *unio mystica*, the *mirifica commutatio*, and other staples of trinitarian theology offer rich insights and much food for thought.

Myk Habets

Julia Driver. *Ethics: The Fundamentals*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007. (vi + 186 pp.) [9781405111546]

Up-to-date introductions to ethics are always required because the field of ethics changes so quickly and its practitioners have such varied commitments. Driver has written an introductory textbook which covers ten topics: cultural relativism; God and human nature; utilitarianism; consequentialism; Kantian ethics; social contract theory; intuitionism; virtue ethics, feminist ethics and nihilism. From this outline one can see both the routine and the original in Driver's selection which in itself offers a barometer of current ethical inquiry. What makes Driver's work different from many others in the field is the liveliness of her writing style, her clarity of expression, and the sense of joy with which she writes. These are virtues often lacking in many other introductory texts to ethics.

After dismissing the idea of cultural relativism in chapter one, Driver examines a range of voices on what constitutes a normative ethic and why. Driver's work proves especially useful as the approaches she canvasses are often ones that are initially appealing to many Christians. Divine command theory and natural law are common Christian approaches; while Kantian ethics is perhaps the default setting for many lay Christians. In addition to these, however,

Driver considers intuitionism (or common sense ethics) as well as virtue and feminist ethics. These last few are becoming more prominent within the field of Christian ethics and to have a thoroughly secular account of them proves incredibly helpful.

As Driver has written a secular book one should not expect and will not get a sympathetic account of how God or the Bible fits into the construction of a normative ethic. If Christians only read Christian literature, however, we will be the poorer for it. Such well-written secular surveys as Driver has presented are important for Christians to read. It provides a perspective otherwise missing and rounds out ones study, especially on ethics. There is truth to the adage that 'all truth is God's truth'

Throughout Driver presents clearly defined positions, peppers the work with salient examples, and offers critical yet respectful arguments against a number of ethical positions. This makes the work accessible and useful as an introductory text. Students looking for a readable introduction to ethics will find it here.

Myk Habets

Stanley Hauerwas & Samuel Wells (eds.). *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004, 2006. (xii + 510 pp.) [9781405150514]

Companions, dictionaries, and handbooks have proliferated in recent years in all the major subjects from philosophy to applied sciences. Ethics has not been spared. Many of these companions are little more than historical treatments of well-worn topics and while useful for the beginner or graduate student are little more than annoying to the researcher. Blackwell Publishing has produced a vast number of companions on Judaism, postmodernity, spirituality to the Qur'an. What makes the *Companion to Christian Ethics* unique is that the editors adopt an integrative theme to the work – namely worship – and fit each of the articles into one of five parts: Meeting with God and One Another; Re-encountering the Story; Being Embodied; Re-enacting the Story; and Being Commissioned. Those familiar with the work of Hauerwas and especially Wells will already notice a common theme

here as in their other works, the centrality in ethics of worship and discipleship, and the ecclesial context within which Christian ethics is played out. The Eucharist becomes the lens through which ethical issues are discussed and actually discovered.

The following chapter titles illustrate the unique construction of the *Companion*: Greeting: Beyond Racial Reconciliation; Collecting Praise: Global Culture Industries; Praying: Poverty; Being Baptized: Bodies and Abortion; Breaking Bread: Peace and War; Receiving Communion: Euthanasia, Suicide, and Letting Die; and Eating Together: Friendship and Homosexuality. From these titles alone one can see the unique structure of the work. Prefacing the collecting are four articles co-written by Hauerwas and Wells which provide the conceptual rationale for the *Companion* and establish how ethics may legitimately be studied through the lens of worship. Much of this is a summary of what Wells has developed in his 2006 work *God's Companions*. The articles which follow each tease out the implications of understanding ethics as worship. Contributors are drawn from many Christian traditions, including, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Mennonite, and Pentecostal. The ecumenical range of this work can be seen in the following:

What follows has been inspired by a range of theologians, some indicative, some interrogative, some imperative. In its emphasis on worship, it owes much to the Reformed tradition, though the importance of corporate worship is a more Catholic theme; on friendship, it follows Thomas Aquinas...and before him Aristotle...In its concentration on God as subject, it follows Karl Barth...in its perception of God's abundance in the face of quasi-Stoic scarcity, it follows John Milbank...in its emphasis on tradition and practice, it follows Alasdair MacIntyre...When it comes to seeing the heart of Christianity in corporate discipleship, it is aided by George Lindbeck's...cultural-linguistic proposal; perhaps most of all, its careful delineation of practices is inspired by John Howard Yoder...In its portrayal of exile, it follows Tom Wright...in its perception of God's commitment to the poor, it follows Gustavo Gutierrez...In its attempt to see the practices of the local church put under proper theological scrutiny it follows the invitation of Nicholas Healy...and its confidence that they will meet the challenge is encouraged by William Cavanaugh' (pp. 13-14).

Of the four introductory essays chapters 3 and 4 are the most important. In chapter three, 'Why Christian Ethics Was Invented', the authors clearly present how their vision of ethics as worship formed by the Eucharistic practices is superior to contemporary modern forms of ethics as a distinct subject of rational enquiry. In distinguishing their own work from that of Kant, Troeltsch, and H. Richard Niebuhr, the authors accept Yoder's critique that "'Christian ethics' has become – indeed, for the 200 years of its life has, perhaps, always been – the story of how the Church has set aside its practice and adopted a Kantian epistemology in an effort to secure relevance and consensus' (p. 33). Hauerwas and Wells are attempting to place ethics back within the sphere of theology, but not the theologian's guild. Rather, ethics is 'not primarily to be found in statements or debates or arguments, but in particular practices, commitments, and habits. Christianity is not principally something people think or feel or say – it is something people *do*' (p. 37). Thus ethics are the practices of the Church not the dogmas of the theologians. In 'How the Church Managed Before There Was Ethics' the communal ethic of the early Church is recommended. In this way the authors establish a meta-ethic under which the subsequent entries of the *Companion* flesh out and develop as they focus on specific issues (practices).

The thirty-two essays which make up the *Companion* are of a high standard, and each provides a select bibliography. Well known scholars such as Kevin Vanhoozer rub shoulders with high profile clergymen like Archbishop Rowan Williams, and they in turn share the bill with those less known to the west such as Emmanuel Katongale. Each essay is relatively short and lively, and presents theological reflections on ethical issues. None of the essays really covers the sort of ground Hauerwas and Wells cover in the introductory essays, but in an edited work of this nature this is to be expected.

Several essays deserve specific mention. Starting from his own experience Emmanuel Katongale (chap. 6 'Greeting: Beyond Racial Reconciliation') describes his awareness of being black in the summer of 1991 and how this forced upon him a rather profound exploration of his own racial identity (a black Ugandan) and his determined effort to recover a vision and way of life beyond such an identity. A similar argument from experience is given by Amy Laura Hall (chap. 7 'Naming the Risen Lord: Embodied Discipleship and masculinity') in which she meditates on what it means to embody the reality of the risen Christ. Kelly Johnson's essay on 'Praying: Poverty' makes the parallel between what we acknowledge theologically in intercessory

prayer and what we live in reality. To pray is to accept we have nothing and must ask God for all. In the same way we are to respond to the poverty around us and as people who know how to ask and receive we become people who also know how to give and to trust. Other essays, like that of Frederick Bauerschmidt ("Being Baptized: Bodies and Abortion") offer a more direct discussion of an ethical issue. Moving away from 'rights' language, Bauerschmidt offers a reflection on baptism and what this Christian practice says about being human in God's image. Through baptism the individual becomes 'one' with the body of Christ. With this perspective the issue of abortion is placed outside of an individual dilemma of competing human rights and into the social space of a body politic.

As the reader may perceive, the essays in this *Companion* are broad ranging, creative explorations written with literary expertise and creativity. Each one contributes to a basic ethical approach which may be characterized as virtue or character ethics. This means that directive statements and concrete advice does not form a feature of these essays. This is not an exercise in prescriptive ethics. This makes the *Companion* more *Atlantic Monthly* than *Time Magazine* in its approach.

The fields of literature and the arts are plundered for what they can offer to a contextualized approach to Christian ethics. For many, this will seem like a dilution of Christian ethics. The lack of exegetical content will put many off as will the adoption of a narrative theology combined with a cultural-linguistic methodology. To be honest, I am sympathetic to these criticisms, and yet the approach offered in the *Companion* does have a large appeal. It may not help to decide an ethical dilemma, and it seldom offers concrete advice on what to do in any given situation, but it does offer a valuable perspective on what sort of people we should be. For this Hauerwas and Wells are to be congratulated. This is a *Companion* to ethics and as such it needs to be supplemented with other works which offer a more rigorous biblical engagement. As a *Companion* however, it does a superb job.

Myk Habets

Samuel Wells. *God's Companions: Reimagining Christian Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006. (viii + 232 pp.) [9781405120142]

Samuel Wells is known to many for his earlier work *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (2004), in which he outlined a bold new way to conceive of Christian ethics as a dramatic participation in God's ongoing story and involvement with the world. In that work Wells constructed an ethic which was attractive and compelling, and yet left many readers with a sense of 'how do I *do* this though?' In *God's Companions* Wells provides a tour de force on how to live out a Christian ethic developed along the lines of improvisation. The work is divided into three parts. Part One is on the Body of Christ as Jesus and explores what it means to worship God in, with, and through Jesus Christ. Over three chapters Wells explores the themes of scripture and the role of memory, kingdom and the presence of hope, and the Holy Spirit and the presence of God. Part Two is on the Body of Christ as the Church and explores what it means to be called companions (friends) of God. Central to the development of this theme is the sacrament of baptism and its role of forming, incorporating, performing and restoring humanity to God. Part Three is on the body of Christ as the Eucharist and explores what it means to eat with God as we meet, hear, respond, share, and then go out into the world.

The contents of this book can be stated in a sentence: 'God gives his people everything they need to worship him, to be his friends, to eat with him.' Wells briefly explains each part of this statement in the Introduction. These three things form the basis of this book – God establishes a friendship with humans and this makes us 'God's companions.' Companions are friends of God (the church) and share table fellowship or commune with one another. Central to the realization of this companionship is Jesus Christ. Adopting Barth's statement Wells affirms a central axiom: 'God's original choice never to be except to be for us in Christ' (p. 1). Because of the incarnation God has access to humanity and humanity has access to God so that to be God's companions is the nature and destiny of humanity. This gives Wells' ethic a christological rigor and as such leads him to affirm that:

This study is an exercise in ecclesial ethics. It believes that God's call is to all people, but it does not take for granted that all people are therefore the same: it locates their sameness in their shared humanity with Christ, rather than in something significant they share with one another. It believes God's call

turns the world upside-down, but that that subversion finds its power not in numbers or guile but in running with the grain of the universe, that is along the contours of cross and resurrection, remembering God's surprises and anticipating God's transforming future (p. 4).

In order to recommend this ethic Wells adopts the method of description rather than comparison or persuasion. In his words, 'I simply intend to overwhelm the reader with examples' (p. 2). And this he does with grace and gravity. This is a work of beautiful prose where illustrations are eloquently retold, and the lives of many of God's companions - the often mundane and mangy - are held up as a lens through which the love of God in Christ shines. Wells is not simply an ethicist, he is a pastor and a poet. The ethic Wells adopts is a Christianized version of virtue ethics combined with a character ethic (see what he says about the fruit of the Spirit p. 49!), shaped by Christ and the Spirit, in which practices (what were once called 'habits') play a central role. The practices Wells recommends are those first enumerated in his *Improvisation*: status, overaccepting, and reincorporation. Being ethical is not simply doing the right things, it is being the right sort of people - God's companions - and on that basis, doing the right things for the right reasons, namely, worship, befriending, and eating (fellowshipping).

Those committed to a more deontological approach to ethics will find Wells' work confronting and perhaps frustrating. This sort of confrontation and challenge is essential if the church is to continue to explore what it means to follow Christ faithfully in the world. Throughout Part One especially Wells develops a fascinating account of God's abundance in contrast to our sin of only seeing scarcity. In the face of suffering, poverty, and pain Wells shows us in scripture, history, and today how God has provided all we need to worship him, be his friends, and eat with him. This leads him to conclude that 'Christian ethics is truly the practice of abundance' (p. 54). Whether or not Wells has answered all the questions raised in *Improvisation* will have to be left to the reader's judgment. Perhaps this was not his intent. He does say this present work has many gaps which something like the *Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* is meant to fill. As such he considers *God's Companions* as a 'companion to the *Companion*' (p. 13). The work is heavily reliant on a liturgical ecclesial context, but even Baptists and other nonconformists will find this a treasure trove of insights and wisdom which may be applied to their contexts with little difficulty.

Questions notwithstanding, this is a truly outstanding work on ethics and, as Wells puts it: ‘this book is intended to be a constant interweaving of display and challenge, enticing to inspire and dismissing to embody’ (p. 12). May many take up and embody.

Myk Habets

John A. Studebaker Jr. *The Lord is the Spirit: The Authority of the Holy Spirit in Contemporary Theology and Church Practice*. Evangelical Theological Society Monograph Series 7. Oregon: Pickwick, 2008. (xiii + 391 pp.)

Using Lloyd-Jones’s 1958 work *Authority* as his catalyst, Studebaker sets out to define and articulate a doctrine of the authority of the Holy Spirit in evangelical theology, specifically to recover the authority of the Holy Spirit in and over the Church and to meet the challenges posed by postmodern misconceptions of ‘Spirit’. Studebaker applies this doctrine to the church practically by showing how the Spirit’s authority is brought to bear with respect to hermeneutics, the structure and guidance of the church, and Christian spirituality (p. 5). Motivated by the lack of direct articulation on the Spirit’s authority Studebaker sets out to offer a ‘new’ doctrine of the Spirit’s authority for those working within Evangelical commitments as opposed to modern and postmodern thinkers.

Following Ramm, Studebaker identifies the Christian *principle* of authority as ‘the triune God in self-revelation’, and the *pattern* of authority he presents as the Father as the *author* of revelation (establishing its authority), the Son is the *focus* of divine revelation (establishing its content), and the Spirit is the *revealer* and *executor* of divine revelation (revealing God’s authority in the world) (pp. 9-10). Given these commitments the pattern of divine authority revealed in the New Testament now includes the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and the sacred Scriptures which are inspired by the Spirit and witness to Christ. Thus Studebaker follows Ramm in keeping the reciprocity between Word and Spirit in the closest proximity. This is clarified through a historical survey in which the *filioque* is affirmed and a generally Reformed perspective is adopted.

Throughout this work Studebaker presents the authority of the Holy Spirit under four aspects. First, the Spirit possesses a *divine authority* by virtue of being a divine person, thus he has the authority of ‘God’. Second, the Spirit has an *executorial authority* whereby he has the ability to act as Christ’s executor. It is here that Studebaker accepts the *filioque* as a way to respect the role of the Spirit as the *Paraclete*. Third, the Spirit has a *veracious authority* whereby he speaks authoritatively through Scripture. The doctrines of divine inspiration and illumination are developed here in order to highlight the ‘Spirit of Truth.’ Finally the Spirit possess a *governing authority* by which he is Governor of the church, its ‘Lord’. This governance results in democratization, liberation, and transformation. With this understanding of the Spirit’s authority Studebaker examines the realms of the Spirit’s authority with special focus given to the Scriptures (hermeneutics) and the Church (structure and guidance, and Christian spirituality). Along the way Studebaker confronts modern and postmodern pneumatologies and critiques them in light of his fourfold articulation of the Spirit’s authority.

This is a comprehensive work and a lengthy one. This has strengths and weakness. The strengths of the book lie in the central thesis – the Spirit possesses divine authority, the nature of which requires exegetical and theological clarification. Studebaker is at his best when he provides theological exegesis of texts. Approximately a quarter of the book consists in such exegetical work, focusing on both Old and New Testaments. John 14 – 16 comes in for sustained examination and it was refreshing to see Studebaker depart from much of the older North American evangelicalism and adopt a more sophisticated hermeneutic which allows the Spirit to speak *through* Scripture not just *in* Scripture. Speech-Act theory, narrative theology, and other nonfoundationalist hermeneutics are critically adopted but always within the context of a clearly articulated evangelicalism. Throughout Studebaker relies on the likes of Ramm and rejects the doctrine of Scripture and hermeneutics of Barth and others. Those with a good grasp of pneuamtology will find much in this work that stimulates thought and contributes to further reflection on the area, even if many of these areas still require further examination.

There are weaknesses however. The work has all the hallmarks of a PhD student buckling under the weight of too much information. The production of the manuscript was a little rushed as I identified spelling and other errors on pp. iix, 17, 18, 89, 100-101 fn. 23 (8x), 102 fn. 28, 138 fn 155, 163, 207, 240 fn 14, 249 fn 40 (2x), 250, 331, 338, 368 fn. 14. The work needed to be shorter and have

more focus. For instance, Studebaker claims to interact with and critique modern and postmodern pneumatologies. To do this he identifies five 'postmodern' theologians: Clark Pinnock, Gary Badcock, Jurgen Moltmann, Peter Hodgson, and Michael Welker. However, it is not clear these are 'postmodern' theologians! What makes them so? In addition Studebaker only allocates on average two paragraphs to the analysis of each theologian (pp. 78-84). He then singles out Stanley Grenz, John Franke, Reinhard Hutter, James Buckley and David Yeago for specific comment but once again allocates only several paragraphs to each (pp. 85-88). Such a short analysis means Studebaker falls foul to caricature and essentially sets up straw men which he subsequently beats down. He does return to these theologians in later chapters but never in any depth and never in such a way that makes this so-called interaction with so-called 'postmodernity' useful. He would have been better to have concentrated on Grenz and Franke's, *Beyond Foundationalism*, and made that the focus of his analysis. As with other volumes in this series there are no indexes included which makes easy access to topics extremely difficult. Finally, there is no conclusion to the work, it just seems to finish in mid-flight adding to the frustration of a rather tedious reading of the work.

Myk Habets

David H. Jensen. *Responsive Labor: A Theology of Work*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006 (ISBN 13-978-0-664-23021-0), xiii + 141 pp.

David Jensen's book is a useful addition to the literature on the relevant and practical theological issue of work. He begins by arguing that the topic of human labours 'is rather foreign' to theologians and they assume that what really matters for the life of faith is time spent away from work: in church, in prayer, in contemplation. Consequently, too many Christians regard their time on the job as tangential to the claims of their faith. Jensen's book aims to recover 'a Christian theological vision of ordinary work, a vision that grounds human labor in God's initiating activity' (p. x).

In particular, Jensen wishes to give us a theology of work from within the Reformed tradition. This emerges in chapter two where he reviews a variety of images of human labor in both Christian and secular traditions. These range from the biblical narrative regarding work through medieval perspectives (e.g. the Benedictine view that sees labour as a necessary antidote to idleness) and Lutheran teachings (i.e. work is as an active calling to serve in the world) to the Catholic tradition which sees work as cocreative with God. Hegel and Marx provide a philosophical foundation for work as self-realisation and against its often-alienating outcomes. Ultimately, Jensen takes a view that emphasises the sovereignty of God in extending his grace to all of creation thereby allowing human work to be good as long as God's work is prior and we accept our labour as being a thankful cocreative response to others and finally back to God. The remaining chapters of Jensen's book explore some of the implications of this responsive labour.

How can we know God's preceding work and respond to it? Chapter three answers this question in establishing a Trinitarian view of work. Using Rahner's concept of the 'economic Trinity', Jensen contends that the persons in the Trinity act as an open economy participating fully and abundantly in the life of creation. Consequently, the Trinity is a statement about

God's work of redemption: God's maintenance of the household, creation of new things in the household, and desire to draw all things into full communion in a household of love (p. 50).

Making the gloomy observation that scarcity, efficiency, standardization, avariciousness, lack and overwork epitomize the economies of the West, Jensen contends that God's self-disclosure as Trinity in the economy of salvation counters this 'reality' by pointing to the inherent value of difference, abundance, interdependence, just distribution, and fun in work. In other words, God's work redeems our labours and the economies of which they are part. As we faithfully believe and act in the Triune God, we hope for 'the transformation of alienated human work as it is enfolded in God's very life' (p. 51).

Chapter four presents a lengthy meditation on the Eucharist as the definitive example of God's Triune work and of humanity's response to it. As Jensen notes, without human labour there is no Eucharist. The Eucharist presents us with a vision of work that disrupts the separation of the secular and the sacred. As a Eucharistic

people who encounter Christ in all that we do, work is no longer a place foreign to the Christian faith. However, work is not simply sacred because Christians happen to be doing it, but rather because the Eucharist and the liturgy 'tear open heaven' (p. 75) ensuring God's holiness envelops all that we do. The workplace has worth because it is God's place, where one's work belongs not only to oneself but also to God. At the same time, the Eucharist transfigures our perspective of the world. It is no longer a place of lack but rather of abundance and superfluity. This counters current utilitarian notions of function and scarcity that encourage and result in numerous transgressions against our fellow human beings. Such economic views, Jensen contends, stand over against the *pleroma* (fullness) and gift of God's *oikos* (economy).

This book makes a useful contribution to the growing literature in the theology of work area. While definitely Reformed, the author is commended for the inclusion of ideas from other traditions. These augment his analysis while positively highlighting the catholicity and diversity of the Christian church. Jensen's exploration and use of the Trinity and the Eucharist was, at the same time, both illuminating and convicting. However, some constructive criticism remains. First, from a theological perspective, using the perichoretic nature of Trinity as an analogy for work has limitations. Our understanding of the Triune God must surely inform our working practice. However, to infer, for example, that because the mutually interpenetrated persons in the Trinity engage in distinctive functions means that each human person is also infinitely valued in their work, that no-one should be unemployed, or that no worker should not be elevated over another is surely drawing a long-bow. Perichoresis is employed to describe the dissimilarity between intra-Trinitarian relations and human-to-human relations. Human beings do not participate in a common substance and consequently remain distinct individuals even in the most intimate of their relations.

Second, Jensen's emphasis on divine sovereignty cannot help but give the impression that creation is completed (p. 84). While the new has come in Christ, and in a proleptic sense the redemption of creation has occurred, for those of us still struggling with sin and working in conditions governed by the fall, this type of over-realised eschatology is precarious. It can lead to a lack of realistic application for the here and now. Indeed, Jensen seemingly fails to offer any substantial pathway between the pathologies of work in a fallen world and the ideal that he offers.

Finally, the book's theology appears indiscriminating in both time and place in being worldwide. The author assumes that the North American context is similar, if not the same, to other working environments. This simplistic supposition devalues his effort and begs for a theological analysis that takes into account different cultural and working contexts.

There are other issues worth noting as well. Jensen, perhaps wisely, remarks on his lack of expertise in economics. This is a valid observation. Some of the data provided is out-of-date and there is limited understanding about such economic issues as scarcity, unemployment, and global capitalism. Indeed, a number of other theologians engage with these economic issues at a more in-depth level. Furthermore, there is minimal discussion linking recent changes in the workplace such as the quality of work life (QWL) movement, stakeholder theory, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) as examples of a shift towards the kind of work environment Jensen advocates. Indeed, the reader cannot help but feel that for Jensen all work as it currently exists is bad when this is simply not the case. Despite these criticisms, Jensen's work is a valuable critique of labour, pointing toward more humane and disciplined approaches to work and towards the basic character of work as gratitude and gift, a response to the grace of the Triune God.

Peter McGhee

Contributors to this Issue

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**International Conference
on Baptist Studies V**

&

**Australian Baptist
Research Forum III**

Whitley College, Melbourne, Australia

15 - 18 July 2009

Following four successful International Conferences on Baptist Studies at Oxford in 1997, Wake Forest in 2000, Prague in 2003 and Acadia in 2006, there is to be a fifth at Whitley College, Melbourne, Australia, from Wednesday 15 to Saturday 18 July 2009. On this occasion we are glad that the conference will also be the biennial meeting of the Australian Baptist Research Forum. All the conferences take Baptists as their subject matter, but are not restricted to Baptists as speakers or attenders. The theme this time is 'Interfaces: Baptists and Others', which includes relations with other Christians, other faiths and other movements such as the Enlightenment. What has been the Baptist experience of engaging with different groups and developments? The theme will be explored by means of case studies, some of which will be very specific in time and place while others will cover long periods and more than one country.

A number of main speakers will address aspects of the subject, but offers of short papers to last no more than 25 minutes in delivery are welcome. They should relate in some way to the theme of 'Baptists and Others'. The title should be submitted to Professor D. W. Bebbington, Department of History, University of Stirling, Stirling FK9 4TB, Scotland, United Kingdom (e-mail: d.w.bebbington@stir.ac.uk).