

The Pacific Journal of Baptist Research

Vol.5, No. 1

April 2009

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The Pacific Journal of Baptist Research

(ISSN 1177-0228)

(incorporating *The New Zealand Journal of Baptist Research*)

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Subscriptions: Institutions: US \$50 p.a. (two issues)

Individuals: US \$30 p.a. (two issues)

Back copies of issues 1-9 of the *N.Z. Journal of Baptist Research*: US \$10 ea.

Orders and payments to *Baptist Research*

PO Box 12149
Auckland, New Zealand

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

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‘Duties of Manhood’: South Australian Baptists and Manly Character circa 1880-1940¹

ABSTRACT

South Australian Baptists liked to view themselves as ‘people of the Book’. But their views on what constituted manliness were strongly influenced by a pervasive discourse on character which was rooted not only in biblical ideas but in notions derived from the Enlightenment and Romanticism. South Australian Baptists believed that men had a God-given responsibility to engage with the wider world and in the process protect women from the dangers of the world and provide for them. They maintained that men needed to provide strong leadership if manly character, families and churches were to flourish. Denominational leaders hoped that men would lead in a ‘red-blooded revival of vital religion’ that would result in many conversions and the transformation of society, but were often disappointed by what they viewed as men’s failure to fulfil their God-given duties.² Moreover, they viewed with alarm the disparity between the sexes in church attendance and membership.

The Importance of Christ-like Character

In 1877, James Gray, a leading South Australian Baptist, theorised that the ‘duties of manhood’ included protecting women from the demands of the wider world.³ He declared that ‘in all ordinary cases the protector

¹ This article is largely drawn from the author’s doctoral thesis. J.S Walker, ‘The Baptists in South Australia, circa 1900 to 1939’, (PhD thesis, Flinders University, Adelaide, 2006).

² The words belong to the Rev. F.W. Norwood, minister of North Adelaide Baptist Church. *Australian Baptist (AB)*, 3 July 1917, 2. Norwood later became the minister of City Temple, London.

³ South Australia was founded as a British colony in 1836. It was the only Australian colony not to accept convicts from Britain and from its

takes to the woman the place of society, and while her duties are towards him he meets for her all the demands of the great world outside'.⁴ Gray's beliefs about masculinity and femininity were predicated on beliefs about 'character' which were widely influential for much of the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth century in the English-speaking world. As Stefan Collini has argued in his study of political thought and intellectual life in Britain between 1850 and 1930, the popularity of political and social theories such as liberalism and socialism rested on their ability to give foundation and coherent form to attitudes and beliefs already widely held, beliefs such as the importance of 'character' and 'altruism'.⁵ Churches, too, invoked the idea of character in their attempt to provide church members and potential converts a compelling vision of life. Indeed, Hugh McLeod has suggested that the notion of character was the nearest thing to a basic tenet 'linking conversion-centred, sacrament-centred, and undogmatic liberal churches in late Victorian London'.⁶

Such was the importance of the idea of character to South Australian Baptists that they frequently used the term 'character' alongside (or even to displace) older terms such as 'holiness' that had previously been employed to describe the moral and spiritual growth of individuals. Edith Wilcox, secretary of the South Australian Baptist Women's League and a major influence within the South Australian Baptist Union (SABU) from the mid-1920s to the mid-1950s, for one, avoided the older terms when she claimed:

There is no denying that there are advantages and disadvantages in a man's birthplace and a man's birthright. We do not start equal in physical or any other endowment... Our ancestry is not our

foundation had no state-established church. Protestant denominations with their origins in British Nonconformity were much stronger in South Australia than in the other Australian colonies. In the 1901 Australian census, 6 per cent of South Australians described themselves as Baptist compared with 1 per cent in New South Wales.

⁴ *Truth and Progress (TP)*, July 1877, 76.

⁵ Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life In Britain, 1850-1930*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 4, 61, chapters 2, 4. On the influence of the idea of character on English socialists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Norman Dennis and A.H. Halsey, *English Ethical Socialism: Thomas More to R. H. Tawney*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 62, ch. 12.

⁶ Hugh McLeod, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City*, (London: Croom Helm, 1974), 157-158.

choice but honesty is, intellectual integrity is, all moral value, all spiritual worth. In a word – CHARACTER.

Character is what you make of life. Character is made, not born. It is achieved, [her emphasis] not donated. The raw material is God's free gift but the fashioning is done by men.⁷

Similarly, John Paynter, a leading South Australian Baptist minister, declared (quoting John Clifford) that 'religion in the last analysis is character'.⁸

Biblical themes were foundational to Baptist beliefs about the importance of character. Baptist leaders, for example, held up Jesus Christ as the ultimate model for Christian character and as the living saviour and lord in whom everyone was called to place their trust. And they often portrayed one quality, self-denial, as the epitome of Christ-like character. The Rev. F.G. Benskin, was one who urged his congregation at Flinders Street Baptist Church to emulate Christ by living a life of self-forgetfulness.⁹ Similarly, when John Weymouth, an elderly Baptist, was killed in 1934 while fighting bush fires, he was lauded as someone who had 'caught the spirit of his master'.¹⁰ By way of contrast, Baptists portrayed those who lived 'selfish' lives as being far removed from

⁷ South Australian Baptist Homes for Aged, *A Rainbow of Hope: Three Addresses by Edith Wilcox, a Founder of the Home*, (Adelaide: South Australian Baptist Homes for the Aged, 1999), 9.

⁸ *Southern Baptist (SB)*, 26 February 1902, 55. Baptists of widely different theological views embraced the concept of character. Paynter was a religious liberal, but Donald McNicol, a conservative evangelical, also defined success in life in terms of character. *Baptist Record (BR)*, 15 May 1930, 16. For further references to character, see *TP*, April 1869, 57; *SB*, 13 October 1908, 244; *AB*, 14 September 1915, 4.

⁹ *BR*, 15 July 1926, 7. Flinders Street Baptist Church is the central 'cathedral' church of Adelaide Baptists. Benskin was minister of Flinders Street Baptist Church in 1921-26. Prior to coming to South Australia he was a prominent minister in England.

¹⁰ *AB*, 17 April 1934, 3. For further examples of this focus on selflessness and self-sacrifice, see *BR*, 15 May 1929, 3; 15 October 1929, 13; South Australian Baptist Union, *Baptist Handbook for 1935*, (Adelaide: South Australian Baptist Union, 1934), 8. Hereafter, this annual publication of the South Australian Baptist Union and the Furreedpore Mission will be referred to as the *Baptist Handbook*.

Christ. Donovan Mitchell, Benskin's successor at Flinders Street Baptist Church, for instance, referred to the 'Christless and selfish individual'.¹¹

Although Baptist ideas about the importance of character drew heavily on biblical concepts, they were also much indebted to contemporary intellectual currents and cultural developments. Baptists, in using the language of character, were often influenced by the cluster of ideas associated with it. Collini's insights on character provide a helpful starting point to explore these ideas. He argues that the moral and political discourse of the eighteenth century was conducted more in the language of virtue than the language of character.¹² The language of virtue, he claims, was not focused on change but on preventing the corruption of the existing order lest the existing balance be disrupted. By way of contrast, the language of character that came to the fore in the nineteenth century with its focus on self-reliant and adaptable behaviour was essentially forward looking and was predicated on the ideas of change and progress – two notions that were characteristic of the Enlightenment. Applying Collini's insights to South Australian Baptists, we see that they believed that only the spread of Christ-like character could provide secure, godly foundations for society in the modern, fast-changing world. That is why one prominent minister, F.W. Norwood, declared that 'character is watched as never before' and why Baptists, worried about industrial conflict, often urged workers to consider the importance of individual character.¹³ Hence also the claim of A.T. Brainsby, Norwood's predecessor as minister of North Adelaide Baptist Church, that 'every man who builds up a steadfast Christian character is helping to build a Christian state'.¹⁴

¹¹ *BR*, 12 March 1931, 11. Mitchell was minister of Flinders Street Baptist Church in 1927-33.

¹² Collini, *Public Moralists*, 104-113.

¹³ *AB*, 28 April 1914, 3. Norwood declared that his generation had been 'born into a time of transition and crisis' and was seeking to discover its duty. *SB*, 15 June 1909, 142. Similarly, the Rev. Thomas Dowding believed he was living in a 'restless, shifting age'. *TP*, 4 January 1894, 9.

¹⁴ A.T. Brainsby (ed.), *Christian Outlook: A Monthly Calendar and Record of Christian Work and Outlook at the Baptist Church, North Adelaide, South Australia*, March 1913, 4. Brainsby, who came to North Adelaide from England, was minister of North Adelaide Baptist Church in 1911-13.

The Development of Christ-like Character

Baptists held that incremental change was essential to character development. They believed that Christians could develop Christian character if they consistently made the right choices and performed the right actions. In 1920, the *Australian Baptist* claimed, for instance, that 'A man has no character except what is built up through the medium of the things he does from day to day.'¹⁵ This was also Edith Wilcox's point when she claimed that character was made, not born, achieved and not donated.¹⁶ Furthermore, Baptists regarded perseverance in a hostile or unsympathetic environment as particularly important to character development. This is seen in a claim in the *Baptist Record* that the gospel way was the way of hardness and that only hardness could make a great soul.¹⁷ Baptists also stressed the importance of making the right character-building choices for the right reasons. Choices were not to be made on the basis of worldly acclaim. 'Character is what a man is in the dark', claimed the *Baptist Messenger*.¹⁸ In addition, Baptists believed that consistent right choices (good habits) led to 'fixity' of good character in which conscience and instinct had been developed aright.¹⁹ Wrong choices, it was thought, led to fixity of the wrong sort, a hardening of bad character from which it was difficult for a person to turn.²⁰ Thus Baptists regarded habit as having a 'mighty power', either for good or for ill. It was 'the magistrate of man's life'.²¹

It is likely that beliefs about incremental change through consistent effort not only owed something to biblical ideas about sanctification, but were partly derived from Enlightenment-inspired ideas about regularity and progressive development.²² Such traits were

¹⁵ *AB*, 2 March 1920, 9.

¹⁶ Wilcox, *A Rainbow of Hope*, 9.

¹⁷ *BR*, 15 October 1924, 14. See also *SB*, 14 July 1903, 165.

¹⁸ *The Baptist Home Messenger and Morphet Vale and Aldinga Church Herald*, April 1908, unpagged. This phrase originated with the American evangelist, Dwight L. Moody.

¹⁹ *AB*, 14 April 1914, 2; 3 August 1915, 16; *BR*, 15 May 1925, 11. On 'fixity' of character, see the sermon by F.C. Spurr, minister of Collins Street Baptist Church in Melbourne. *SB*, 1 January 1910, 13.

²⁰ *TP*, May 1878, 49-50; *SB*, 1 January 1910, 13.

²¹ *TP*, May 1878, 50.

²² The emphasis on regularity can be seen in the work of the English utilitarian, Jeremy Bentham. According to Roy Porter, 'irregularity was Jeremy Bentham's *bête noire*, and the rationalization of the legal and administrative systems his *raison d'être*'. Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World*, (London, Allen Lane, 2000), 213.

popularised by authors such as the nineteenth-century Scot, Samuel Smiles, who acclaimed qualities like duty, consistent effort, and perseverance in the face of adversity.²³ Given the widespread appeal of authors such as Smiles, it is highly probable that they influenced the thinking of South Australian Baptists regarding character development. Certainly, R.M. Waddy's presidential address to the SABU in 1908, entitled 'A Committee of One', reads like a Smiles book, so effusive is it in its portrayal of consistent effort and individual achievement.²⁴

While ideas about character development not directly drawn from biblical thought influenced Baptists, Baptists also derived many of their beliefs about character growth from the Bible. In the opinion of Baptist leaders, for example, the most important habits were the ones which helped develop an on-going relationship with God for it was this relationship that was regarded as being foundational to the deepening of character. They believed that 'the life of God in the soul' was essential to 'vital personal religion' and to the development of Christian character.²⁵ While some Baptists who had been influenced by liberal theology did not place as much emphasis on the need for a conversion experience at a particular point in time as did more conservative members of the denomination, Baptists of every theological hue shared a concern for religious experience. Richard Ostrander's argument that American Protestants of divergent theological perspectives all sought to 'recover vibrant spirituality in an age obsessed with material achievement' can be applied to South Australian Baptists.²⁶ Peter Fleming and Norman Beurle, both ministers who had been influenced by moderate religious liberalism, called for the return of 'vital religion'.²⁷ Beurle declared that what was needed to counter the modern world's 'feverish' and 'shallow' activity was Christians 'vitalized by the Spirit of God, and absolutely surrendered to the will of Christ'.²⁸ The same concerns are evident among those who held more conservative theological beliefs. The

²³ On Smiles, see Kenneth Fielden, 'Samuel Smiles and Self-Help', *Victorian Studies* 12 (December 1968), 155-176; Collini, *Public Moralists*, 100-101; Arthur Herman, *The Scottish Enlightenment: The Scots' Invention of the Modern World*, (London: Fourth Estate, 2001), 326-328.

²⁴ *Baptist Handbook for 1908*, 11-18. On the importance of consistent, regular effort, see also the poem 'Little by Little', *TP*, March 1879, 34.

²⁵ *SB*, 19 October 1911, 698; *BR*, July 1923, 13.

²⁶ Richard Ostrander, 'The Battery and the Windmill: Two Models of Protestant Devotionalism in Early-Twentieth-Century America', *Church History* 65:1 (March 1996): 42.

²⁷ *AB*, 7 October 1919, 4; 21 October 1919, 1, 4.

²⁸ *AB*, 21 October 1919, 1, 4.

thinking of another minister, E.H. Watson, was typical. In answer to his own question as to why so many Baptists had 'little desire to see souls won for Christ', Watson claimed that it was because they had not been inspired by the Holy Spirit. He declared that Baptists needed the 'Pentecostal fire'.²⁹

In line with their beliefs about the need for a developing relationship with God, Baptist ministers and other leaders in church life emphasised to church members the importance of regular public worship and the practice of other spiritual disciplines. 'Religion will never become a reality to us', claimed A.W. Badger in his presidential address to the SABU in 1921, 'unless we regularly attend the services of the sanctuary'.³⁰ Personal prayer and Bible study were seen as being of almost equal importance to public worship in the development of Christian character, as God used these two means to build 'direct contact with every human soul'.³¹ As Grimshaw Binns, minister of St Peters Baptist Church, claimed in 1918, only prayer touched 'the springs of character' that led to the kind of religious dynamism that would result in Christians 'building up the city of God in this fair land of ours'.³²

Man the Overcomer

Although Baptists believed that both men and women should strive to build character, they tended to believe, as this article's opening quotation from James Gray illustrates, that the world outside the home was the main location for the development of manly Christian character. They held that men should shape their environment through strength of character, overcoming adversity in the process. Such beliefs are evident in a 1926 obituary to John Jamieson, a farmer from Orreroo in South Australia's northern wheat belt. Jamieson, whose efforts in life were categorised as heroic, was described as an 'incurable optimist' as neither 'drought, nor locust, nor loss of flocks and farm stock could conquer his

²⁹ *Baptist Handbook for 1943*, 10. Baptists who were active in the holiness circles or in the Oxford Group movement also hoped for a widespread renewal of Christian experience and vitality.

³⁰ *Baptist Handbook for 1922*, 10.

³¹ *SB*, 1 May 1906, 104. See also, *SB*, 14 April 1903, 91; *Baptist Home Messenger*, April 1908, unpagged, but the article is entitled 'The Bible About the House'; *Baptist Handbook for 1921*, 17; Westbourne Park Baptist Church Women's Guild, Women's Guild Minutes, 23 June 1927, Society Record Group 465/41/1, State Library of South Australia.

³² *AB*, 8 October 1918, 1.

indomitable courage, nor undermine his faith, nor diminish his zeal and liberality'.³³ William Lucas, a Baptist businessman from Melbourne, recorded of his friend, Charles Bright, an influential South Australian Baptist minister, that he had a painting on his study wall of 'Ulysses ploughing the sea-shore with his infant child before him'.³⁴ Bright's painting, and the description of Jamieson locate them precisely within the manly ideal that came to the fore in Victorian Britain. According to Collini, Victorian society 'paradigmatically envisaged the individual – often an isolated individual, whether literally so, in a remote hill station, or only subjectively so...confronting the task of maintaining his will in the face of adversity'.³⁵ As a popular English Baptist minister and writer, William Landels, argued in *How Men Are Made* (1859), men were not made by 'passively yielding to an internal pressure, but by the putting forth of an internal force which resists and masters, if it cannot change, the outward'.³⁶ Jesus Christ himself was interpreted through this lens. In 1937, South Australian Baptist minister and denominational historian, H. Estcourt Hughes, in a published radio address entitled, *The Splendid Ideal*, portrayed Jesus as one who was frequently and fiercely tempted, but one who triumphed through courage, long-suffering and self-control.³⁷

Baptists believed that men's especial ability to shape their environment could only be developed if young men detached themselves from the feminine comforts of home life and entered the arenas of paid employment and community involvement. In 1923, E.R. Ledger, one of the younger ministers of the denomination, used imagery drawn from a British Romanticist writer, John Ruskin, to express his prayer that 'our sons may be as plants grown up ... our daughters as ... pillars of a palace'.³⁸ Ledger likened young men to a tree which needed to face all the vagaries of the weather, for it was through this that the tree 'lives and flourishes, striking its roots more deeply, extending its branches more widely. In these things is the 'life of its spirit'. Ledger further declared:

³³ *BR*, 15 November 1926, 6. Also see, *AB*, 14 April 1914, 2; 16 March 1938, 14.

³⁴ *AB*, 8 January 1929, 2.

³⁵ Collini, *Public Moralists*, 114.

³⁶ Cited in John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle Class in Victorian England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 111.

³⁷ H. Estcourt Hughes, *The Splendid Ideal*, 2.

³⁸ *BR*, July 1923, 15. Ruskin wrote an influential set of reflections on the meaning of the home in a book entitled, *Sesame and Lilies* (1864). See Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 46.

'Young men must needs find their place in life's battle out in the world. This is in accord with the nature of things.'³⁹

Further evidence of the understanding of manliness as involving a vigorous, confronting and overcoming attitude to the world can be seen in Baptist acceptance of 'muscular Christianity'. This set of beliefs about masculinity, was, in part, an adjustment to a previous version of Christian masculinity that considered that true manliness could be found as much in a weak body as in a strong one.⁴⁰ The focus on muscular Christianity was prompted by fears of the supposedly emasculating tendencies of home life and the hope that a more 'manly' form of Christianity would bring men into the church, and help rectify the gender imbalance in churches.⁴¹ In an unmodified form, as spread by the English clergyman, Charles Kingsley, muscular Christianity involved:

the duty of patriotism; the moral and physical beauty of athleticism; the salutary effects of Spartan habits and discipline; the cultivation of all that is masculine and the expulsion of all that is effeminate, un-English, and excessively intellectual.⁴²

Amongst South Australian Baptists, muscular Christianity found expression in organisations like the Boys' Brigade and in church-run gymnasiums and sporting teams.⁴³ It was said of the young men's Bible class of Semaphore Baptist Church that it represented 'the muscular Christianity of the male members of the church, for in season both football and cricket clubs are organised among the members'.⁴⁴ Very importantly, ministers were expected, if not themselves able to participate in physical activities, to encourage the young men of the congregation to be physically active. Churches were very aware of a decline in male attendance and hoped that 'manly' ministers would help to turn this situation around. In 1911, North Adelaide Baptist Church looked forward to receiving its new minister, A.T. Brainsby, who was

³⁹ BR, July 1923, 15. These type of beliefs were widespread. See Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 110.

⁴⁰ On different versions of manliness in Victorian Britain and Australia, see Collini, *Public Moralists*, ch. 5; Tosh, *A Man's Place*, ch. 8; Martin Crotty, *Making the Australian Male: Middle Class Masculinity, 1870– 1920*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), chapters 2 and 3.

⁴¹ The issue of gender imbalance in churches is touched on later in this article.

⁴² Cited in Collini, *Public Moralists*, 188.

⁴³ In 1900, Flinders Street Baptist Church founded the first Boys' Brigade in South Australia to be affiliated with the parent organisation in Britain.

⁴⁴ *Daily Herald* (Adelaide), 27 September 1913, 11.

described as ‘hearty, virile, eager, impetuous... in the best sense a manly man, vigorous in body, mind and soul.’⁴⁵ Brainsby’s ‘fine physique’ and delight in ‘manly sports’ were also noted.

South Australian Baptists also believed that overcoming the ‘world’ was essential for the development of manly Christian character. The world, in this sense, included all ‘sinful’ thought, desire and behaviour.⁴⁶ In theory there was a clear division between Christ’s way and the way of the world, but long before the beginning of twentieth century, South Australian Baptists were aware of changing interpretations of what constituted worldly behaviour. In 1875, William Clare, minister of Angaston Baptist Church, complained that ‘the line of demarcation between the Church and the World seems to be passing away’.⁴⁷ Many voiced the same sentiment in the twentieth century.⁴⁸ By the beginning of the new century, activities such as the reading of novels and attendance at secular musical events, widely condemned by Baptists in the first half of the nineteenth century, were becoming popular among South Australian Baptists. The shifting beliefs of the Rev. D. Davis about novel-reading reveal the trend. In 1902, he condemned the ‘weak craze for fiction reading’ among Christians, but 12 years later he had become an enthusiast for the novels of Charles Dickens.⁴⁹

Baptists’ attitudes to various social and recreational activities had softened, but Baptists remained guarded lest worldliness encroached. ‘Leisure hours have become a positive menace’, claimed one writer to the *Baptist Record* in 1925.⁵⁰ Some Baptists were more guarded than others. Card-playing was a much loved feature of family life when the young Tom Playford (a future Premier of South Australia) was growing up in his strict Baptist home at Norton Summit. In contrast, the Baptist

⁴⁵ *SB*, 6 July 1911, 439. Following his move in 1913 to the Pastorate of the Vivian Street Baptist Church, Wellington, New Zealand, Brainsby destroyed his reputation for Christian manliness when he exposed himself in public and was sentenced to six months in prison. For an account of this episode, see Martin Sutherland, ‘Better to Ignore the Past: New Zealand Baptists and Historical Memory’, *Fides et Historia* 36 (2004): 41-52.

⁴⁶ On the ‘world’, see *TP*, March 1878, 28; *SB*, 4 October 1900, 226; *BR*, 15 September 1927, 9.

⁴⁷ *TP*, November 1875, 132.

⁴⁸ See, for example, *AB*, 27 September 1921, 6; 8 January 1924, 6; *BR*, 15 September 1927, 9.

⁴⁹ *SB*, 3 September 1902, 195; *Baptist Handbook for 1915*, 22.

⁵⁰ *BR*, 15 May 1925, 11.

parents of Playford's future wife, Lorna Clark, prohibited the playing of card games in their family home.⁵¹

The development of radio and cinema posed serious quandaries for Baptists. They were ambivalent about the new mass media; recognising its potential for good but holding concerns about its misuse. A short film was shown for the first time at the 1909 SABU annual meetings and Baptist services were broadcast on radio on a regular basis from the middle of the 1920s.⁵² Despite their use of the new media, Baptist leaders believed that radio broadcasts and commercial films were often tainted by worldly values.⁵³ They were worried about the excitation of 'unnatural passions' that were thought to dissipate energies that might otherwise be used for godly purposes. The general advice was to avoid anything questionable lest worldly values smother the development of Christian character.⁵⁴

Man as Provider and Protector

In 1868, the Rev. Silas Mead, minister of the Flinders Street Baptist Church from 1861 to 1898 and the most influential leader among South Australian Baptists in the nineteenth century, reflecting on the roles of men and women in the home and the church, declared that 'it is the will of the Master that women should not usurp authority over the man'.⁵⁵ Likewise, James Gray interpreted biblical teaching in such a way so as to claim that one of the privileges of men was to be served by women, who were their 'helpmeets'. To Baptists, as to their fellow evangelicals, male leadership in the home and the church had the ultimate sanction, that of God himself.⁵⁶

According to the dominant understanding of gender relations that prevailed among Baptists, husbands and fathers as heads of their families, were also expected to be the principal economic providers for their families. Any other arrangement was regarded as unnatural as it was against the order of creation. Gray declared that when a man sat idly at home or in the public house and sent his wife to do 'the hard work' and

⁵¹ Stewart Cockburn, *Playford: Benevolent Despot*, (Adelaide: Axiom Press, 1991), 57-58.

⁵² *SB*, 12 October 1909, 243.

⁵³ *AB*, 1 September 1914, 12; 1 April 1924, 7; 26 July 1932, 6.

⁵⁴ *AB*, 20 January 1910, 61; 1 April 1924, 7.

⁵⁵ *TP*, May 1868, 112. See also *AB*, 27 May 1913, 8.

⁵⁶ I will more fully explore South Australian Baptist beliefs about men's and women's roles in the church in a forthcoming article in this journal.

‘maintain the family’, ‘our human nature rises up against him, and our indignation would fain express itself in another manner than by words’.⁵⁷ These were strong words for a Baptist. To Baptists like Gray, failure to provide for one’s family was to fail as a man.

The notion of man as economic provider was inextricably linked with the idea of man as protector. In an article in the *Australian Baptist* in 1914, Jane Stoddart, an English Nonconformist, stated that the ideal father was one who:

thinks, as he looks at his young, growing daughters, ‘I do not intend my girls to take part in the rough and tumble of the City, to catch early suburban trains in wet weather, to rub shoulders with men in the Tube lifts, to return at night tired, cross, and dispirited. I mean to stand between them and the stress of wage-earning competition’.⁵⁸

Here the father is the provider and protector. He is the one who guards the sexual purity and wider well-being of the women of his household by rendering it unnecessary for them to ‘rub shoulders’ with men at close quarters, or face energy-sapping paid employment.

Men, too, were expected to protect women in time of war by enlisting to fight overseas.⁵⁹ F.W. Norwood believed that men who did not enlist without good reason failed in their manly duty. While allowing for the fact that some men had valid reasons for not enlisting, he claimed in 1916 that the ‘normal man’ should throw every ounce of his strength into Britain’s defence.⁶⁰ Alec Raws’ letter to his father, John, a prominent minister, reveals the impact of this type of thinking on one young Baptist soldier. Raws, who along with his brother Goldy was later killed in the Battle of the Somme, claimed: ‘there are principles, and there are women, and there are standards of decency that are worth shedding one’s blood for, surely. I am content to believe that you will be with me in this.’⁶¹ Raws’ comment, ‘and there are women’, suggests that he believed that the duty of men was to protect women by going to war if need be. Man, the warrior, needed to defend woman, the vulnerable one.⁶²

⁵⁷ *TP*, July 1877, 76.

⁵⁸ *AB*, 24 March 1914, 10.

⁵⁹ All Australians who fought in the Boer War and in the First World War were volunteers.

⁶⁰ *AB*, 16 May 1916, 5.

⁶¹ Alec and Goldy Raws, *Hail and Farewell: Letters from Two Brothers Killed in France in 1916*, (Kenthurst, New South Wales: Kangaroo Press, 1995), 104.

⁶² For a discussion of the beliefs of Australians during the First World War

'Domestic Man'

While South Australian Baptists believed that authority in the home resided with the husband and father, they also believed that God placed constraints on how that authority could be used. It was incumbent on men to expect only a 'reasonable service' from women; no more than Christ, the head of men, expected from them. In addition, men should not please themselves for even Christ did not please himself.⁶³ These types of expectations can be categorised as fitting with 'Domestic Man', one of the two Australian male 'ideal types' identified by Australian historian Marilyn Lake; the other being 'Lone Hand Man'.⁶⁴ Domestic Man read religious magazines, avoided gambling and alcoholic beverages, was devoted to his family, and preferred the fellowship of the church to that of the hotel. He broadly reflected the middle-class ideal.⁶⁵ Building on the work of a British historian, Catherine Hall, Lake claims that Domestic Man was the product of the 'cult of domesticity' and of the reformation of morals and manners that were linked to the rise of evangelicalism.⁶⁶ For the evangelical, domesticity had become a defining attribute of manliness.⁶⁷ Lake reasons, by way of contrast, that Lone Hand Man, who was principally found among urban working-class males, was dissatisfied with the constraints of domestic and urban life.⁶⁸ Lone Hand Man idealised the freedom of bush life and gave himself to drinking, gambling and womanising.⁶⁹ To Lone Hand Man, 'home influence' was emasculating.

about the roles of men and women in wartime, see Carmel Shute, 'Heroines and Heroes: Sexual Mythology in Australia, 1914-1918', in Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake (eds.), *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 23.

⁶³ *TP*, July 1877, 76-77.

⁶⁴ Marilyn Lake, 'The Politics of Respectability: Identifying the Masculinist Context', *Historical Studies* 22 (April 1986): 116-131.

⁶⁵ Miriam Dixson, 'The 'Born-Modern' Self: Revisiting *The Real Matilda*: An Exploration of Women and Identity in Australia', *Australian Historical Studies* 27 (April 1996): 24.

⁶⁶ Lake, 'The Politics of Respectability', 117.

⁶⁷ Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 113.

⁶⁸ Dixson, 'The 'Born-Modern' Self', 24.

⁶⁹ I have also drawn on, Stuart Piggin, 'From Independence to Domesticity: Masculinity in Australian History and the Female Ordination Debate', in Mark Hutchinson and Edmund Campion (eds), *Long Patient Struggle: Studies in the Role of Women in Australian Christianity*, (Sydney: Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, 1994), 151-160.

Even a hard-driving Baptist businessman like John Darling (junior) fitted the type of Domestic Man. It was said of him that

he had a great love of his home, and in this he was rewarded by as congenial a family life as any father ever enjoyed. ... His own and his family's chief pleasures were found within the walls of their own dwelling.⁷⁰

A contemporary commentator, Hippolyte Taine observed of the English in the 1850s:

Every Englishman has, in the matter of marriage, a romantic spot in his heart. He imagines a 'home', with the woman of his choice, the pair of them alone with their children. That is his own little universe, closed to the world.⁷¹

The domestic arrangements of the Darling family represented this Victorian middle-class ideal. This ideal continued to exert a powerful influence on South Australian Baptists in the first half of the twentieth century.⁷²

Underpinning this ideal of family life was the idea of the 'companionate marriage', a concept that came to the fore in the first half of the nineteenth century. This was a marriage based on romantic love and common values and interests, rather than on the parental choice of marriage partner and strict hierarchy.⁷³ The Victorian English middle-class, as John Tosh contends, 'inherited a liberal discourse from the Enlightenment which laid down that in marriage, as in the body politic, authority should rest on reasonableness and shared values, not on the exercise of force'.⁷⁴ The idea of companionate marriage, which also resonated with biblical notions of self-giving love, was well established among South Australian Baptists by the middle of the nineteenth

⁷⁰ *AB*, 14 April 1914, 2.

⁷¹ Cited in Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 28.

⁷² This ideal was a heterosexual one. I have not found any reference in South Australian Baptist literature and documents to homosexual behaviour. Presumably Baptists thought that homosexual behaviour was not a proper subject for public discussion.

⁷³ Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 7, 26-27, 53-44. The English historian, Lawrence Stone, was the first to use the term, 'companionate marriage'. He suggested that companionate marriages became widespread among the upper bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century and slowly spread through the rest of society. Lawrence Stone, *The Family Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800*, (London, Weidenfeld, 1977).

⁷⁴ Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 29.

century. The young James Holden, courting his future wife, Mary Phillips, declared to his diary his overwhelming love for her and his delight that they seemed to 'agree at every point'.⁷⁵ For many Baptists, that companionship was based around a shared commitment to following the way of Jesus. The biographer of Dr. Cecil Mead and his wife Alice, South Australian Baptist missionaries who met in Bengal and married in 1896, stated of their relationship:

A fellowship of 'great praying' and mutual help in great crises developed into a mutual understanding which consummated in their marriage. No two people, as man and wife, could be more perfectly the complement one of the other than were Alice Pappin and Cecil Mead.⁷⁶

So highly did Cecil Mead rate the importance of companionate marriage that one of the questions he asked Bengali baptismal candidates immediately prior to baptism was, 'Will you endeavour to make your home full of love, peace, forbearance and kindness?'⁷⁷ To the Meads, the qualities that contributed to a companionate marriage were universal ones that God required of all races.

Polished Man

While South Australian Baptists continued to hold that men should maintain a vigorous, assertive approach to life, there is abundant evidence that the 'pinched and hidebound type of character' (which writers such as John Stuart Mill and Matthew Arnold claimed was widespread amongst English Nonconformists in the nineteenth century) became less common among South Australian Baptists in the late nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Cited in Nancy Buttfield, *So Great a Change: The Story of the Holden Family in Australia*, (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1979), 44. Holden was to found a family business that grew into Australia's largest car manufacturing firm.

⁷⁶ Walter Barry, *There Was a Man: The Life of Cecil Silas Mead, Missionary Doctor*, (Melbourne, Australian Baptist Foreign Mission, 1952), 67. Barry was a fellow missionary of the Meads.

⁷⁷ Barry, *There Was a Man*, 123.

⁷⁸ The quote comes from John Stuart Mill. Cited in Collini, *Public Moralists*, 101. Mill's famous work, *On Liberty*, was in part a protest against the promulgation of this character-type in the chapels of provincial Nonconformity. See Collini, *Public Moralists*, 101.

Obituaries reveal the trend.⁷⁹ Frank Cowell, a member of a successful Baptist professional and business family, was described upon his death at age 41 as a ‘polished shaft in the Divine quiver’. Described as a man of ‘scholarship and grace’ and of ‘consecrated personality’, his eulogist praised his love of others, courtesy, thoughtfulness, generosity, loyalty, commitment to self-improvement, and strength of character. These combined to make him a ‘Christian gentleman’ who had the ‘spirit of the scholar and the diligence of the merchant’.⁸⁰ The reference to Cowell being a ‘polished shaft’ is one of a number of indications that the Baptist compendium of virtues had widened. Further evidence of the trend is found in Robert Charlick’s obituary of 1914. The writer was alert to the fact that he was not representative of a new generation of Baptists: ‘Some might have thought that he was almost severe in his religious scruples, but we do not in these days err too much on the side of austerity in religion.’⁸¹ Obituaries in the 1920s and 1930s continued to mention character traits such as integrity, deep spirituality and firmness of belief and purpose, but they also give an impression of a more relaxed and less driven people.⁸² While such qualities were by no means absent among Baptists of earlier generations, they were now more to the fore. Obituaries in the 1930s also frequently made mention of traits such as tolerance, cheerfulness, and very commonly, geniality.⁸³

Apart from the fact that many young Baptists received more schooling and a broader education than their parents’ generation had done, two developments contributed to (and reflected) the trend towards a greater roundedness of character. Firstly, the spread of more liberal approaches to theology provided many South Australian Baptists with alternatives to the world-rejecting stance favoured by some conservative evangelicals. A corollary of liberalism’s rejection of the total depravity of human beings was a more optimistic assessment of human achievement. This type of optimism was evident in the title of a sermon by A.H. Collins on Christian attitudes to art, music and politics: ‘All things are

⁷⁹ Obituaries not only tell us something about the person who died, but through the choices of the writer, the qualities of character which the writer valued.

⁸⁰ *BR*, 17 February 1925, 8-9.

⁸¹ *AB*, 22 September 1914, 13.

⁸² These impressions are drawn from my comprehensive reading of obituaries in *Truth and Progress*, the *Southern Baptist*, the *Australian Baptist* and the *Baptist Record* for the period, 1868-1950.

⁸³ *BR*, 15 July 1936, 13; 17 February 1937, 10; 15 September 1937, 9; 16 June 1937, 11; 18 October 1938, 6.

yours'.⁸⁴ In this sermon, Collins, minister of Parkside Baptist Church in suburban Adelaide from 1908 to 1919, affirmed Christian engagement with contemporary culture for the purpose of transforming it in the image of Christ, an engagement which he believed was about to result in a radical betterment of society.

Secondly, Romanticism, with its critique of Enlightenment rationality and its emphasis on aesthetic beauty, non-intellectual means of apprehending truth, and development of all aspects of human personality helped to create a social milieu which greatly influenced South Australian Baptists. Their embrace of 'Nonconformist Gothic' architecture was one expression of this Romanticist mood as was Baptists' enthusiasm for pipe organs, church choirs and stained glass windows. The *Baptist Record* summed up the prevailing mood when it claimed in 1929 that 'our God is a lover of beauty'.⁸⁵ To Baptists, following Christ still involved strenuous effort and sacrifice, but aesthetics now had a place in the growth of Christian character.

Manly Duties Fulfilled?

Baptist leaders hoped that Baptist men, in developing manly Christ-like character, would be able to give a vigorous lead in extending Christ's kingdom. There were many men who did their best to fulfil these expectations. Two who made great sacrifices were E.F. Nickels and J.A. Innes who did pioneering home mission work in the 1920s in newly opened farming areas on Eyre Peninsula, west of Adelaide. Both Nickels and Innes faced the difficulties of isolation, loneliness, and constant travel in horse-drawn buggies on 'never to be forgotten roads' in heat, dust, sand and mud.⁸⁶ They lived and preached – when they were fortunate – in small, galvanised-iron buildings, and gave strenuously of themselves as they provided a full range of religious services, taught secular subjects to school children, helped erect farm buildings, assisted with harvests, and generally provided whatever support they could to often isolated farming families.⁸⁷ Such work took its toll. Innes, who slept in a tent with a bag stuffed with papers as his mattress, suffered a physical breakdown following surgery for appendicitis.⁸⁸ Milton Lee, a

⁸⁴ *AB*, 16 February 1915, 7.

⁸⁵ *BR*, 15 August 1929, 4.

⁸⁶ *AB*, 20 April 1915, 10.

⁸⁷ For a description of home mission work on Eyre Peninsula, see *BR*, 15 August 1925, 6.

⁸⁸ *BR*, 15 January 1927, 4; Hughes, *Our First Hundred Years*, 211.

college student who temporarily took Innes' place on Eyre Peninsula, had no doubts that Innes' poor health was 'largely due to the life he has led here'.⁸⁹

Despite the vigorous efforts of many men such as Nickels and Innes, Baptist leaders often voiced concern about the lack of impact that Baptist men were having in church life. They believed that any race, organisation or denomination that did not have vigorous male leadership lacked 'virility' and consequently faced decline, especially when faced with a more virile competitor. Thus the *Baptist Record*, reflecting perspectives drawn from social Darwinism, attributed the decline in the number of indigenous Australians to dispossession by 'a more virile race'.⁹⁰ The same concern over lack of virility was evident in a special conference of male deacons convened by the SABU in 1939 to address the issue of denominational decline. It was noted that women in Baptist churches were doing wonderful things and that the 'men are willing to leave it to them'. One leader asked:

Will someone tell us how to arouse the enthusiasm and interest of those (male) officers, who, whilst quite willing to take up the offering, occasionally, or give out books at the back door, are never found in the prayer meeting, nor evince any interest in the spiritual life of the church?⁹¹

Baptists believed that their denomination would decline if men did not cast aside their passivity and become vigorous leaders in church life.

A shortage of men in Baptist churches fuelled leaders' concerns. As early as 1881, Baptists commented on the comparative lack of men in churches and they continued to bemoan the lack of male members in the twentieth century.⁹² In 1923, John Raws observed that 'under any circumstance the male sex is seldom well represented in a really spiritual gathering'.⁹³ Such comments were well justified. As Paul Barreira has demonstrated, there was a marked male–female asymmetry among South

⁸⁹ *BR*, 15 January 1927, 4.

⁹⁰ *BR*, 15 December 1925, 3.

⁹¹ *BR*, 18 May 1939, 3.

⁹² *TP*, 1 June 1881, 70. When there was an abundance of men, this was worthy of special comment. *TP*, 1 October 1885, 130.

⁹³ *AB*, 27 March 1923, 3. For other expressions of the same sentiment, see *SB*, 11 September 1901, 205; *AB*, 3 April 1923, 3; *BR*, 15 May 1930, 6.

Australian Protestants.⁹⁴ In South Australia, an average of 44.8 percent of all self-described Baptists aged fifteen and over in the five census years between 1901 and 1947 were male.⁹⁵ Membership rolls are even more revealing. In 1928 only 30 per cent of Norwood Baptist Church's membership was male. At Port Pirie Baptist Church in 1929 male members constituted 31 per cent of the membership. In the Baptist church in Angaston in the same year they made up only 20 per cent of the membership roll.⁹⁶ These figures are similar to male–female ratios in English Free Churches of the period.⁹⁷

Local churches used various strategies to interest men in the church and to preach the gospel to them. In 1915, Port Pirie Baptist Church established a men's club that met in the church hall. Gymnasium equipment, a billiard table and a literary room were provided.⁹⁸ Unley Park Baptist Church had a more direct approach. It held open-air Sunday evening meetings on the church-owned tennis court adjacent to the church in an attempt to attract men.⁹⁹ On another front, some Baptists churches attempted to reach working-class men through evangelism in the work place.¹⁰⁰ In 1911, Donald McNicol, the SABU young people's worker, addressed workers at a factory in suburban Edwardstown.¹⁰¹ In 1913, Alberton Baptist Church conducted wharf-side services at Port Adelaide.¹⁰² But such efforts were isolated and seemingly had little impact.

⁹⁴ Barreira, 'Protestant Piety and Religious Culture in South Australia, c. 1914 - c. 1981', (PhD thesis, Flinders University, Adelaide, 2003), 121-124. However, Barreira notes that such feminisation occurred before the twentieth century, and claims that between the world wars the membership density of Protestant women in South Australia declined faster than that of men.

⁹⁵ Calculated from Barreira, 'Protestant Piety and Religious Culture in South Australia', Table 1, 298.

⁹⁶ Statistics derived from Barreira, 'Protestant Piety and Religious Culture in South Australia', Table 1, 314; Table 3:2, 315; Table 4:2, 315.

⁹⁷ Clive D. Field, 'Adam and Eve: Gender in the English Free Church Constituency', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 44, (1993), 63-79.

⁹⁸ *AB*, 8 June 1915, 13.

⁹⁹ *AB*, 6 January 1914, 7.

¹⁰⁰ For claims about the absence of the working classes from Baptist churches see *AB*, 3 August 1920, 2; *TP*, 18 October 1894, 312; *SB*, 2 October 1906, 235; 11 December 1906, 303.

¹⁰¹ *SB*, 3 August 1911, 511.

¹⁰² *AB*, 1 April 1913, 16.

In the 1930s, the Oxford Group movement had some influence among South Australian Baptists and some thought it had the potential to reach men outside the orbit of the church. Disappointingly, to some, the early enthusiasm soon dissipated and the movement had little practical effect. Its one legacy among South Australian Baptists was that some of its popular terms, such as 'sharing', 'guidance', and 'life-changing', became a more prominent part of their religious vocabulary.¹⁰³

The most successful attempt by South Australian Baptists to reach men who were not regular churchgoers was made by A.H. Collins. In 1908, Collins, an avowed socialist who believed in the nationalisation of industry, began a long-running, highly successful series of monthly Sunday night services directed particularly to working-class men.¹⁰⁴ Topics of his addresses included 'The Golden Rule of Capital and Labour', 'He Was One of Us', 'The Collapse of Competition', and 'The Social Redemption'. Three-quarters of those attending were men. The special services resulted in an increased involvement of men in other aspects of the church's life. The thrust of Collins' message was that the true solution to social questions lay in the acceptance of Christ's authority over all aspects of life and society. In 1913, five years after their commencement, the monthly special services at Parkside Baptist Church were still going strongly.¹⁰⁵

One attempt to strengthen Christian work amongst Baptist men was the formation of a men's brotherhood. At a SABU men's meeting in June 1917, F.W. Norwood challenged his hearers to initiate 'a league of spiritual men, not to hold concerts or while away evenings in vague discussions, but to inaugurate a movement which will result in a red-blooded revival of vital religion in our churches'.¹⁰⁶ A direct result of his call was the formation of the 'Baptist Brotherhood', an organisation whose members promised to display an 'unselfish spirit', to 'regularly pray and read the Bible', to 'attempt the improvement of the spiritual tone' of their own churches, and 'to labour for a new and more truly Christian civilisation in Australia'.¹⁰⁷ A number of Brotherhoods were formed in South Australian Baptist churches, but the movement soon

¹⁰³ For comments on the South Australian Baptist use of the vocabulary of the Oxford Group movement, see *AB*, 9 May 1933, 3.

¹⁰⁴ Parkside Baptist Church, *Parkside Baptist Church Centenary, 1880-1980: To God be the Glory*, (Adelaide: Parkside Baptist Church, 1980), 7; *SB*, 28 July 1908, 181.

¹⁰⁵ *AB*, 3 June 1913, 16.

¹⁰⁶ *AB*, 3 July 1917, 2.

¹⁰⁷ *Baptist Handbook for 1918*, 45.

collapsed.¹⁰⁸ It was revived, though, in 1927, and branches were formed in local churches, annual camps were held, and quarterly conferences and rallies conducted. Nevertheless, Baptist Brotherhoods were not as numerous as Baptist women's organisations, and, as H.E. Hughes claimed in 1937, the Brotherhood movement did not 'become the power in our church life that it was so confidently hoped and anticipated it would be'.¹⁰⁹ The programme of local Brotherhoods bore some similarity to that of women's guilds. Addresses on popular topics were given, and service and fundraising activities were undertaken.¹¹⁰ But there was little of the intense spirituality that Norwood had called for. Baptist Brotherhoods played a part in Baptist church life, but they were not the dynamic force that denominational leaders hoped they might be.

Conclusion

Throughout the history of the church, the beliefs and culture of the day have inevitably influenced Christian belief and practice. While South Australian Baptists derived some of their beliefs about the role of men from the Bible, their views and practices on this matter were as much a product of the contemporary social and intellectual milieu as they were of biblical reflection. Their ideas about 'the duties of manhood' owed much to prevailing ideas about character and to thinking derived from the Enlightenment and Romanticism. While changes in thinking resulted in greater 'roundedness' of character, Baptists continued to hold to the belief that men must take leadership in the home, church and wider society. While many Baptist men tried hard to live up to the ideals of manhood that were presented to them, Baptist leaders were often disappointed by a marked gender imbalance in churches and complained about a lack of leadership shown by Baptist men. When F.W. Norwood helped found the Baptist Brotherhood of South Australia in 1917 he

¹⁰⁸ H.E. Hughes, *Our First Hundred Years: The Baptist Church of South Australia*, (Adelaide: South Australian Baptist Union, 1937), 249.

¹⁰⁹ Hughes, *Our First Hundred Years*, 250-251. Baptist Brotherhoods were possibly not as strong as women's organisations because of competition from various lodges for men such as the Freemasons. Baptist leaders sometimes complained that their men were more committed to lodge meetings than to church meetings. *BR*, 15 May 1928, 3; 15 September 1937, 3.

¹¹⁰ See, for example, Lorraine Badger, *Celebrate 100: Unley Park Baptist Church, 1903-2003*, (Adelaide: Unley Park Baptist Church, 2003), 87; *BR*, 16 June 1937, 18.

adapted William Blake's 'Jerusalem' for the Brotherhood's member pledge card. It read:

I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my right hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In Australia's pleasant land.¹¹¹

However, Norwood's optimism was misplaced. There was no revival of the type of fervent spirituality among men he called for and there was to be no earthly Jerusalem established in South Australia.

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¹¹¹ *Baptist Handbook for 1918*, 45.

Be the Community: Baptist Ecclesiology in the Context of Missional Church

ABSTRACT

In the face of the apparent decline of the church in the West, advocates for the 'Missional' church and the 'Emerging' church have called for reform. This essay critiques these influential movements for their historically and sociologically naive analysis of the church's decline and their lack of sustained theological reflection. Drawing on the work of Paul Fiddes, the essay explores what an appropriate Baptist missional ecclesiology might be, arguing that what defines the church's role in mission is not primarily what it does or needs to do functionally to be relevant in mission but who it ontologically is in Christ.

Introduction

The church in Western society is in serious decline on many fronts. There has been significant decline in the church's attendance, influence and role within society throughout the last generation. Some express this as the process of both external *and* internal secularisation and note that it has decisively altered the Western church in either its social locale or its inner universe of meaning, or both.¹ Whilst there is some debate regarding the legitimacy of the secularisation theory,² the significant marginalisation of the church and its role within society is undoubted. Some estimate the church will continue to decline in some areas in the West until there is only a residual Christian presence.³ In response to this

¹ T. Luckman, 'The Decline of Church-Oriented Religion' in *Sociology of Religion*, ed. Roland Robertson (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969):149-150.

² See Peter Matheson, 'The Myth of a Secular New Zealand,' *Pacifica* 19, no. 2 (2006). 177-92.

³ Derek Tidball, 'Leadership and Baptist Church Governance: Biblical Foundations,' in *Leadership and Baptist Church Governance*, ed. Graeme Chatfield (NSW: Morling Press, 2005). 9.

dramatic decline, many now argue that if the church in the West is to survive, it must radically reconceive itself to become relevant and missionally effective in the current cultural context.

As a Baptist Minister I am interested in how the church might respond in its current cultural context from the theological perspective of the Baptist vision of church. What may be an appropriate Baptist ecclesiological response? Two recent movements have been at the forefront of the cry for the reform of the church – the Missional Church and the Emerging Church.⁴ For this essay I will focus primarily on the New Zealand, Australian and British authors of the Missional and Emerging Church to acknowledge that these forms are often different than those from America. Both of these movements have contributed creative and thoughtful responses. Whilst this essay is a sympathetic critique of these two movements, I remain deeply indebted to the many thoughtful theological, missiological and ecclesiological insights of the Missional Church and the Emerging Church. Both have influenced my thinking and my practice. Nonetheless, this essay critiques these responses for what Michael Jinkins describes as ‘two gaping holes in the analysis’ of the church and its decline.⁵ The first is the lack of careful historical and sociological examination of the church’s decline, to place it in its proper context. The second is the lack of sustained theological reflection. Whilst agreeing with much of their analysis of the church’s decline and the cultural change, I will argue that the Missional Church and the Emerging Church view culture as both cause *and* cure for the church’s decline. I will argue that as a result they define the church in primarily functional terms – the church is defined by what it does (or needs to do) to be relevant in mission. I will argue instead that whilst mission activity is very important, if the church is to fulfil its role in God’s mission it needs a theological understanding of the nature and scope of the church within God’s mission.

⁴ Darrell Guder states that the rise of the Missional Church is due to the changing cultural context in the West generally and North America specifically. Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998). 3-7. John Drane states that the rise of the Emerging Church is due to serious church decline. John Drane, ‘Editorial: The Emerging Church,’ *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 6, no. 1 (2006). 3.

⁵ Michael Jinkins, *Stewards of the Mysteries of God’s Church* (accessed 10 July 2007); available from <http://www.synodrm.org/Resoures/Stewardship/Stewards%20of%20the%20Mystery%God.doc>. 17.

In the second section I will draw upon the work of Paul Fiddes, a British Baptist theologian, to outline the contours of the historic Baptist vision of church and, most importantly for this essay, highlight its underlying theological convictions. Having established this *theological* Baptist vision of church, I will then use it to explore what an appropriate missional ecclesiology might be. This methodology stands in contrast to that of the Missional and Emerging Church which use a primarily sociological grid to define a relevant missional ecclesiology. I will argue that what defines the church's role in mission is not primarily what it does or needs to do functionally to be relevant in mission but who it ontologically is in Christ. I will conclude this essay by showing how this primarily theological understanding of the nature of the church and its participation in God's mission provides different implications for a Baptist missional ecclesiology than those of the Missional and Emerging Church.

Church Decline

The church in the West has fallen on hard times. It is facing decline on multiple fronts all at once – decline in terms of numbers attending, of membership, of finances, of the number of people willing to serve in positions of leadership (both lay and ordained), of its influence within society, of people identifying themselves as Christian and a decline in comprehension of the Biblical narrative both outside *and inside* the church.⁶

Within the New Zealand context, Kevin Ward has conducted extensive research and concludes 'Whatever statistics one uses, and however one looks at them, they all point in one direction: down.'⁷ Church attendance in New Zealand in 1960 was about 20% of the

⁶ Chris Marshall, commenting on the lack of Biblical literacy in New Zealand comments: 'What then is this 'crisis' of biblical proportions (!) to which people refer? Put simply, it is the way in which the Christian community is becoming increasingly estranged from its sacred text, the Bible, increasingly deaf to its witness, bewildered by its contents, unsure of how best to read it or apply it responsibly to life, and unable to explain just why it is the Bible ought to be esteemed so highly.' Chris Marshall, 'Re-Engaging with the Bible in a Postmodern World,' *Stimulus* 15, no. 1 (2007). 5.

⁷ Kevin Ward, 'No Longer Believing' - or - 'Believing without Belonging', in *The Future of Christianity: Historical, Sociological, Political and Theological Perspectives from New Zealand*, ed. John Stenhouse and Brett Knowles (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2004). 60.

population weekly and about 40% monthly. By 1999 this had halved to 10% weekly and 20% monthly. Not only is the church declining, it is not replacing itself in the next generation. In 1960, 169,000 children were on Protestant Sunday school rolls (40% of the primary school roll). By 1985 the Protestant Sunday School roll was at 52,800 (11.4% of the Primary School roll).⁸ In terms of age profile, the church is, on average, much older than the rest of society whilst having low levels of young attendees. The report of the findings of the New Zealand Church Life Survey states '[the] church has greater proportions of people aged over 50 years and only half the number under 40 years than the community.'⁹ Such troubling statistics for the church in New Zealand has been cause for significant alarm and is a clear indicator that all is not well. The New Zealand story is not unique. John Drane points to research which suggests that by 2040 there will be only a residual Christian presence in Britain, and that the institutional structures will have imploded and disappeared long before that.¹⁰ According to Alan Hirsch the church today is further away from world evangelisation than we were at the end of the third century.¹¹ Mike Riddell bluntly writes '53,000 attenders are leaving the church in Europe and North America every week, and they are not coming back.'¹² As Michael Jenkins wryly comments 'the only thing that appears to be growing in mainline Protestantism is the literature on its decline.'¹³

The decline of the church in the West is seen by Missional Church and Emerging Church authors as a clear indicator of how ineffective and irrelevant the church is today and its dire need to radically reconceive itself for mission in today's world or face the reality of becoming an ancient relic of a nostalgic past.

⁸ Kevin Ward, 'Losing My Religion? An Examination of Church Decline, Growth and Change in New Zealand 1960 to 1999, with Particular Reference to Christchurch' (University of Otago, 2003). 8-9. See also Ward, 'No Longer Believing' - or - 'Believing without Belonging!': 60 and Kevin Ward, 'Is New Zealand's Future Churchless?', *Stimulus* 12, no. 2 (2004). 2.

⁹ Cited in Ward, 'Losing My Religion? An Examination of Church Decline, Growth and Change in New Zealand 1960 to 1999, with Particular Reference to Christchurch'. 9-10. See also David Allis, 'Has the Church Had Its Day?', *The New Zealand Baptist* 123, no. 2 (2007). 3.

¹⁰ Drane. 'The Emerging Church' 3.

¹¹ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006). 51.

¹² Michael Riddell, *Threshold of the Future: Reforming the Church in the Post-Christian West* (London: SPCK, 1998). 3.

¹³ Jenkins, *Stewards of the Mysteries of God's Church*. 3.

Paradigm Shift:

It is widely agreed that Western culture has undergone major cultural change in the last 50 years. The Missional Church and the Emerging Church perceive this to be an unprecedented paradigm shift. The paradigm shift theory is based on the work of Thomas Kuhn and his analysis of how the natural sciences grow and change.¹⁴ Paradigm shifts occur when scientific theories are assailed by internal contradictions, exposed by new evidence, and are therefore abandoned in favour of a new theory and paradigm.¹⁵ Authors of the Missional Church and the Emerging Church argue that Western culture and the Western church is undergoing another major paradigm shift (the Missional Church – from Christendom to Post-Christendom; the Emerging Church – from Modernism to Postmodernism). In light of this paradigm shift, they argue that the church must radically reconceive itself for the new paradigm. The inappropriateness of applying Kuhn's paradigm shift model to define culture and historical church eras will be a significant critique later in this essay.

Missional Church – From Christendom to Post-Christendom

In their analysis of the current cultural climate, the Missional Church authors argue that Western culture has shifted from a Christendom era to a Post-Christendom era. In the Christendom shift, a major change occurred for Christianity in the fourth century when it moved from being *religio illicita* to becoming the official state religion of the Roman Empire.¹⁶ This Christendom shift is characterised in the way Christianity moved from society's margins to take a central place within the State and

¹⁴ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* 3rd ed. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996).

¹⁵ Martin Sutherland, 'Pine Trees and Paradigms: Rethinking Mission in the West' in *Mission without Christendom: Exploring the Site. Essays for Brian Smith*, ed. Martin Sutherland (Auckland: Carey Baptist College, 2000). 132-33. David Bosch applied Kuhn's theory to divide the history of the church's mission to the world into six distinct paradigms. David J Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991). 181-82.

¹⁶ The conversion of Constantine and Theodosius' instatement of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire are marked by many Missional Church authors as vital starting points in the Christendom paradigm shift.

Christians came to occupy central positions in society. Christians were no longer regarded as deviant. Christianity had become the religion of the imperial establishment and a vital part of the constellation of powers within the new Christian State. Some see the relationship between church and state in Christendom to have bred an oppressive form of culturally accommodated Christianity that was missionally impotent. Darrell Guder argues that one of the major lasting legacies of Christendom is the reductionism of the gospel, salvation and the mission of the church.¹⁷ Wilbert Shenk goes as far as to say that the Christendom church was a church without a mission.¹⁸ Mike Riddell characterises the Christendom church with centuries of manipulation, power, religious hegemony and abuse.¹⁹

This Christendom view of the church's role in society and mission is argued to have lasted up until recent years. With the paradigm shift in culture, the church, with its Christendom mentality, is today rendered missionally impotent.²⁰ The Christendom Church is seen in contrast to the Missional Church as formal not informal; institutional not fluid; organisational not relational; structured not flexible; static not dynamic; attractional not incarnational; hierarchical not functional; and buildings-focussed not people-focussed.²¹ The problem is, it is argued, that in recent times the Christendom paradigm has begun to break up and the church has fallen from its position of prominence. The church has been pushed from the centre of Western society to the margins and must

¹⁷ Darrell L. Guder, 'The Church as Missional Community,' in *The Community of the Word: Toward and Evangelical Ecclesiology*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel Trier (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005). 117-21.

¹⁸ Wilbert R. Shenk, 'New Wineskins for New Wine: Toward a Post-Christendom Ecclesiology,' *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 29, no. 2 (2005). 73. See also Guder, 'The Church as Missional Community.' 117-120.

¹⁹ Michael Riddell, 'Beyond Ground Zero: Resourcing Faith in a Post-Christian Era Obligation,' in *The Future of Christianity: Historical, Sociological, Political and Theological Perspectives from New Zealand*, ed. Brett Knowles and John Stenhouse (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2004). 219.

²⁰ Michael Frost argues that the Christendom paradigm has lasted up until the twentieth century and that for seventeen centuries little has changed in the understandings of how we 'do' church. Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006). 4-8.

²¹ See *Ibid.* See also Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003). 14-21.

rethink how it can be missionally effective in a Post-Christendom society.

David Bjork, drawing on the work of French sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger, speaks of a deliberate process of *exculturation* of Christianity in the context of Western Europe. *Exculturation* is not just that the church is losing its influence in French society; but that even the Christian tissue underlying the secular European culture is coming undone.²² Upon his return from more than 30 years of missionary service in India, Lesslie Newbigin, a key author for Missional Church writers, found that the Christian soul of the Western world he left had all but disappeared and the West was now a mission field. Newbigin asked, 'Can the West be converted?'²³ Missional Church authors argue this can happen only if the church reforms its Christendom mentality and regains a missional identity and stance in a Post-Christendom society.

Recapturing the 'Sentness' of the Church:

According to Patrick Mays the cure for the church is simple: rid the church of 'Christendom cholesterol' and excessive institutional fat.²⁴ Others argue for a less simplistic response and, importantly, call for the church to recapture its fundamental 'sentness' within God's redemptive plan.²⁵ Missional Church authors employ the theological concept of the *missio Dei* as crucial in highlighting the missional nature of the church as

²² David E. Bjork, 'The Future of Christianity in Western Europe: The End of a World,' *Missiology* 34, no. 3 (2006). 309-310. I have highlighted, elsewhere, similar significant cultural changes that occurred in New Zealand in the 1960s, and the impact this had upon the church and its role in New Zealand society. See Andrew Picard, 'A Conflict of Ideologies: New Zealand Baptist Discourse on the Vietnam War,' *The Pacific Journal of Baptist Research* 1, no. 1 (2005).

²³ Lesslie Newbigin, 'Can the West Be Converted?,' *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11, no. 1 (1987). See also Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986). See also Craig Van Gelder, 'A Great New Fact of Today: America as Mission Field' in *The Church between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America*, ed. George Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996).

²⁴ Patrick Mays, 'After Christendom What? Renewal and Discovery of Church and Mission in the West,' *Missiology* 27, no. 2 (1999). 256.

²⁵ Craig Van Gelder, 'From Corporate Church to Missional Church: The Challenge Facing Congregations Today,' *Review and Expositor* 101, no. Summer (2004). 427-28.

one who is being sent into the world. Bosch draws on John 20:21 'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you', writing that mission comes from the very nature of God as Trinity. 'The classical doctrine of the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit [is] expanded to include yet another 'movement': Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.'²⁶ The church is not to understand itself as a place where certain things happen but as the called and sent people of God. Therefore, Missional Church authors rightly argue, the normal posture of a faithful church to any culture is that of a missionary encounter as opposed to the culturally accommodated church of Christendom.²⁷

A defining feature of the Missional Church is how it views the church's relationship to the kingdom/reign of God. Guder argues that the church must understand itself as an eschatological community of salvation which has its beginning and foundation in the reign of God. The church is not to be equated with the kingdom of God, but is a sign and firstfruit of the kingdom that has come in Christ. Guder helpfully argues that the church is called and empowered by God to be the sign, foretaste and instrument of God's new order under the lordship of Christ.²⁸ This identity of the church is then placed within the wider framework of the theological concept of the *missio Dei*. I will later argue that the concept of *missio Dei* that is developed here places the *missio Dei* out of the hands of God and into the hands of the church. The church is now sent out by the risen Jesus to carry out the *missio Dei* by making known to all the world the joyful message of Jesus as risen and returning Lord and incarnating it in their particular contexts. Importantly, Missional Church authors maintain that the fundamental purpose of the church is mission and the church's nature serves this more fundamental purpose.²⁹ Frost and Hirsch see the church needing to reinvent itself as

²⁶ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*. 390.

²⁷ George R. Hunsberger, 'Evangelical Conversion toward a Missional Ecclesiology,' in *Evangelical Ecclesiology: Reality or Illusion?*, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003). 109. See also Michael W. Goheen, 'Liberating the Gospel from Its Modern Cage: An Interpretation of Lesslie Newbigin's Gospel and Modern Culture Project,' *Missionalia* 30, no. 3 (2002). 361; and David E. Bjork, 'Toward a Trinitarian Understanding of Mission in Post-Christendom Lands,' *Missiology* 27, no. 2 (1999). 232.

²⁸ Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*. 35-48. See also Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. 86.

²⁹ Shenk, 'New Wineskins for New Wine: Toward a Post-Christendom Ecclesiology' 79.

incarnational communities, as opposed to the attractively focussed church of Christendom with its ‘come to us’ mentality. Such reinvented churches will be planted communities of Christians who are engaging with society *outside* the church context and on the terms of the people who are *outside* the church. Examples of such incarnational missional communities are Christian shoe stores, Christian cafés and restaurants that are frequented by both Christians and not-yet-Christians, where mutual interaction and organic, natural relationships may form and people will be drawn closer to God. Examples of such incarnational missional communities are Christian shoe stores, Christian cafés and restaurants that are frequented by both Christians and not-yet-Christians, where mutual interaction and organic, natural relationships may form and people will be drawn closer to God.³⁰

These Missional Church authors view the nature of the church as primarily functional, defined by whatever is useful in the church’s external evangelistic mission to the world. I will argue that such functional views of the church and its mission neglect the church’s ontological identity and unhelpfully move the *missio Dei* from being something that God is primarily responsible for to being something that the church is primarily responsible for. Such a movement has significant theological implications.

Emerging Church – from Modernism to Postmodernism

The Emerging Church emphasises the cultural paradigm shift more in terms of a shift from Modernism to Postmodernism than Christendom to Post-Christendom.³¹ Modernism is linked to the spirit of the Enlightenment where the general mood is one of optimism and progress. The main underlying assumption that is present in all

³⁰ Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*. 41-46.

³¹ Leonard Sweet, *Aqua Church: Essential Leadership Arts for Piloting Your Church in Today’s Fluid Culture* (Loveland: Group Publishing, Inc, 1999). 22-24. See also John Drane, *The McDonalidization of the Church: Consumer Culture and the Church’s Future* (Macon: Smith and Helwys Publishing, Inc, 2001). 68; Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*. 15; Eddie Gibbs, *Church Next: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000). 28-30; Brian D. McLaren, *The Church in the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000). 11-13; Michael Riddell, *Threshold of the Future*. 101; Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002). 47.

'Enlightenment' thinking is epistemological foundationalism. In Modernity, autonomous human reason became the foundation that lay behind the Western epistemological quest and thus was the governing principle for establishing truth statements.³² Rene Descartes' famous phrase *cogito ergo sum*, 'I think therefore I am' sums up this quest for an autonomous rational foundation.

Emerging Church authors maintain that the framework of Modernity has undergone significant changes and is now breaking up to give way to postmodernity. James Smith writes of a disorientation from one construction of reality and a reorientation to a new construction of reality; from modernity to postmodernity.³³ Within today's Western culture, there has been a movement away from the universalising metanarratives of Modernity and a shift towards much more localised and tribal truths. In Modernity truth claims were seen as timeless, universal propositions that were deduced by logic. In postmodernity, truth claims are now seen as situational and perspectival. Jacques Derrida, the famous French Deconstructionist author, suggests that metaphysics, with its inherent logocentrism, is now exposed as a social construction and mere talk about talk. Derrida argues that sciences that claim to tell us anything about how the world objectively is are actually driven by power, control and oppression (predominantly by the white male; a 'white mythology'). Derrida claims that rather than being able to point upwards to metaphysics, we can only point across to language. Therefore, 'there is nothing outside the text.'³⁴ Derrida's deconstructionism aside, it is clear that at a very fundamental level there has been a profound shift in the current cultural context in how people view themselves, the world and their search for meaning.

The diagnosis of the Emerging Church is that the Western church is irretrievably wedded to Modernity and Enlightenment assumptions

³² Stanley J. Grenz, 'Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic: Theological Method after the Demise of Foundationalism,' in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000). 110.

³³ James K. A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2006). 17.

³⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1976). 158. For a response to Derrida and deconstructionism see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Leicester: Apollos, 1998): 63.

and therefore is irrelevant to the new postmodern era.³⁵ The Modern Church is seen as building-based, word-based, needs-defining, centralised, inflexible, authoritarian and boundary-obsessed. 'It is 'heavy' church in multiple senses of the word, requiring intense resource expenditure to maintain and extracting costly allegiance from its participants.'³⁶ Drane, drawing on the work of George Ritzer, speaks of the McDonaldisation of the church. The Modern church is characterised by the ideals of efficiency, calculability, predictability and control. The Modern church, with its quick-fix, pre-packaged and marketed rituals, more closely resembles a fast-food outlet that emulates middle class values of predictability, efficiency and control than the dynamic community of God. Drane also notes the dehumanising effects of the Modern church that treats people as numbers on the bottom line of yet another church growth strategy.³⁷ Drane warns that the Church is 'increasingly in danger of being left high and dry as one of the last bastions of modernity.'³⁸ The implication is that if the world has changed then the church must change in order to remain relevant.

Postmodern Contextualisation:

Emerging Church authors emphasise the need for the church to recontextualise itself for today's postmodern world. Scott Bader-Saye defines the postmodern ethos as a return to mystery; a hunger for spirituality; new models of networked communities; a desire to find roots in tradition; and a yearning to encounter God through image, ritual and sacrament.³⁹ Whatever form the Emerging Church takes it is agreed that there will be a movement away from rational logocentrism and a

³⁵ Riddell, 'Beyond Ground Zero' 219. See also Steve Taylor, *The Out of Bounds Church? Learning to Create a Community of Faith in a Culture of Change* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005). 22-30.

³⁶ Riddell, 'Beyond Ground Zero' 223. See also Pete Ward, *Liquid Church: A Bold Vision of How to Be God's People in Worship and Mission – a Flexible, Fluid Way of Being Church* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002). 13-30.

³⁷ Drane, *The McDonaldisation of the Church*. 51-54 and Riddell, *Threshold of the Future*. 65-86.

³⁸ Drane, *The McDonaldisation of the Church*. 54.

³⁹ Scott Bader-Saye, 'Improvising Church: An Introduction to the Emerging Church Conversation,' *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 6, no. 1 (2006).16.

movement towards creativity, spontaneity and a much greater focus on 'the arts'.⁴⁰

Central to the church's response to postmodernity will be the need to embrace people's desire for community. Modernity, with its incipient individualism, is seen as leaving people feeling isolated and alone. It is argued that in Postmodernism there is a renewed desire for community. Such community will seek to hold in tension the need to share a deep unity without falling into the stifling homogeneity and bland one-size-fits-all straight-jacket of the Modern Church. Steve Taylor draws on the writings of popular culture author Douglas Coupland and asserts that in postmodernity meaning and truth are found through community and the shared stories of life together. Spiritual seekers are seeking community and belonging before they come to believe, therefore the church must be a place that values communal meaning and truth seeking.⁴¹ Such a view of community will hold in tension the one and the many, based on Trinitarian theology and the *perichoretic* relations that exist within the life of Father, Son and Spirit.⁴² Later in this essay I will contrast this vision of postmodern community that seeks community and then constructs tribal truths with the historic Baptist vision of the covenanted community that sought truth and found community.

Emerging Church authors also emphasise the growth in desire for spirituality in postmodernity which coincides with a decline in church attendance. This decline in belonging has affected not just the church but all kinds of voluntary institutions and organisations.⁴³ It is interpreted that whilst people desire God, they are not seeking God in the Institutional Church. The message seems to be 'yes' to God but 'no' to church. This phenomenon is called 'believing without belonging'.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Drane, *The McDonaldization of the Church*; Riddell, *Threshold of the Future*. 190. See especially the examples cited by Ward, *Liquid Church: A Bold Vision of How to Be God's People in Worship and Mission – a Flexible, Fluid Way of Being Church* 94-97.

⁴¹ Taylor, *The Out of Bounds Church*. 101-103.

⁴² Ibid. 108-110.

⁴³ Ward, 'Is New Zealand's Future Churchless?.' 3. See also Tidball. 'Biblical Foundations' 9-10.

⁴⁴ Ward, 'Is New Zealand's Future Churchless?.' See also Ward, 'No Longer Believing' - or - 'Believing without Belonging!'; Ward, 'Losing My Religion? An Examination of Church Decline, Growth and Change in New Zealand 1960 to 1999, with Particular Reference to Christchurch'. The most significant work that has been developed on the phenomenon of believing without belonging in the New Zealand context is the important work of Alan Jamieson. See Alan Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith: Faith Journeys Beyond*

Studies of church leavers within Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches show that many people, some of whom were key leaders within the church, left the church not because they had lost their faith but in order to grow in their faith.⁴⁵ The Modern Church, with its nice, bland, middle class spirituality, is seen as not resourcing Christians or spiritual seekers on their spiritual quest in a postmodern world. Drane argues that we have ended up with a secular church in a spiritual society.⁴⁶ Many Emerging Church authors conclude that '[if] people want God, then the problem doesn't lie with those outside the church; it rests on those inside.'⁴⁷ The problem is seen to be at the supply end and not the demand end – apparently the customer *is* always right. I will later critique this view as reducing the church to little more than a marketing agent.

Zygmunt Bauman, Emeritus Professor of Sociology at Leeds University, is regarded as a significant voice when it comes to describing the current cultural context. He gives it the term 'Liquid Modernity' and many Emerging Church authors draw on his sociological insights. Bauman contrasts Liquid Modernity with Solid Modernity and argues that the structures, referents and certainties of Solid Modernity have been liquified in the rapidly changing context of Liquid Modernity.⁴⁸ Pete Ward, whose book *Liquid Church* is seen as an important work for many within the Emerging Church, bases his ecclesiology on Bauman's insights. Ward argues that life in postmodernity is a series of consumptive choices and shopping is not about purchasing useful goods but about desire and the meaning the goods give us in terms of constructing identity and status. In response, it is argued that the church in postmodernity must embrace consumption and design church to feed the desires of spiritual consumers. 'Thus [the church] community would

Evangelical, Pentecostal & Charismatic Churches (Wellington: Philip Garside Publishing, 2000).7-14. See also Alan Jamieson, 'Post-Church Groups and Their Place as Emergent Forms of Church,' *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 6, no. 1 (2006).

⁴⁵ Jamieson, *Churchless Faith*.7-22.

⁴⁶ Drane, *The McDonaldization of the Church*. 54.

⁴⁷ Ward, *Liquid Church: A Bold Vision of How to Be God's People in Worship and Mission – a Flexible, Fluid Way of Being Church* 75. See also John Drane, *Cultural Change and Biblical Faith: The Future of the Church. Biblical and Missiological Essays* (Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 2000).

⁴⁸ See Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000). See also Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

evolve around what people find interesting, attractive, and compelling.⁴⁹ Ward argues for a radical decentering and reworking of congregational gathering and worship into relational networks in order to connect with the growing spiritual hunger in society. Church would be more like a network than an assembly of people. Such a networked church would become a series of relational networks and communications that connect individuals, groups, and organisations in a series of flows. People would gather around hubs that they find interesting such as a retreat centre, a sports team, a music group, a record company, or a Christian shop. These informal fellowships, where people experience Christ as they share with other Christians, are to be understood *as church* and takes the place of going to church and being committed to belonging.⁵⁰ Ward suggests that the basis of these networks of relations is found in the *perichoretic* life of God as Trinity.⁵¹ I will later critique this view of consumptive church as not only misreading the work of Zygmunt Bauman but also misreading the nature of the Trinity.

What these Emerging Church authors share in common is the belief that church forms, even gathering together for worship, must be radically reconceived in order for the church to be relevant in a postmodern age. In this way, these authors see Postmodernism as not only the cause for the church's decline but *also its cure* – the church must become postmodern. Like their Missional Church counterparts, the Emerging Church authors see the nature of the church as primarily functional and defined by their postmodern contextualisation.

'Two gaping holes'

Historical Reductionism:

Missional Church and Emerging Church authors rightly argue that Western culture has undergone significant cultural shifts. However, the apocalyptic and bombastic rhetoric of 'never seen before tectonic paradigms shifts' is naïve and historically inaccurate.⁵² Such an analysis is

⁴⁹ Ward, *Liquid Church: A Bold Vision of How to Be God's People in Worship and Mission – a Flexible, Fluid Way of Being Church*. 89.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*2.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 53-55.

⁵² D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005): 75-78.

appealing as it creates a crisis and the need for a radical church revolution.⁵³ As Martin Sutherland suggests, such an analysis is exciting but the definitions resemble more of a crude cartoon picture than any actual historical reality.⁵⁴ Scott Bayder-Saye acknowledges that the Emerging Church is plagued by hype and overstatement in its rhetoric.⁵⁵ The question of just how far separated from modernity postmodernity actually is, will be an important later discussion. Is postmodernity the most useful term or does 'mostmodernity' better capture the current context?

Importantly, Sutherland argues that the adoption of Kuhn's model of scientific paradigm shift and its application to analysing Western culture is inappropriate and gives a misleading comprehension of Western culture. Cultures are far too complex and variegated to be described by simplistic labels such as 'Postmodern', 'Post-Christendom' or 'Generation X'.⁵⁶ In terms of historical accuracy the Christendom period, in which secular and spiritual power were fused together and the Pope was the paramount figure, lasted for only three hundred years in the Medieval Period.⁵⁷ The historical reductionism of the Missional Church and Emerging Church authors simplifies taxonomies such as Christendom or Enlightenment to become mere terms of abuse. Brian Stanley notes the irony of how so much postmodern writing falls prey to the very universalising and essentialising tendencies of Enlightenment epistemology that it so deplores.⁵⁸ A sense of history teaches caution

⁵³ See Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*. ix. See also McLaren's idea of a dramatic, historic, unrepeatable kind of (cultural) movement. *Church on the Other Side*. 11; Sweet's ideas of the 'Postmodern Era' *Aqua Church*. 24; Riddell's idea of a new cultural matrix, *Threshold of the Future*. 101; and Drane's idea that everyone in the next generation will be 'postmodern', *McDonaldization of the Church*. 68. Bader-Saye, 'Improvising Church: An Introduction to the Emerging Church Conversation' 15.

⁵⁴ Sutherland, 'Pine Trees and Paradigms: Rethinking Mission in the West'. 132.

⁵⁵ Bader-Saye, 'Improvising Church: An Introduction to the Emerging Church Conversation' 15.

⁵⁶ Sutherland, 'Pine Trees and Paradigms: Rethinking Mission in the West': 135-36.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 136-37.. See also John Colwell, 'In Defence of Christendom: The Claim of Christ and the Defence of the Church,' *Baptist Minister's Journal* (2007).

⁵⁸ Brian Stanley, 'Christian Missions and the Enlightenment: A Reevaluation,' in *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment*, ed. Brian Stanley

about exaggerated accounts of the ‘unprecedented challenges’ facing the contemporary Western church and this sense of history gives it some perspective.⁵⁹ As Sutherland suggests, far from being anything new and paradigmatic, Postmodernism has many historical parallels in the thinking of Blake, Coleridge, Rousseau, Hazlitt, Emerson and Thoreau. Rather than a new paradigm, it is more likely that different threads of thinking exist together throughout time but come to public prominence at different times.⁶⁰ Michael Jinkins argues that the collapsing of sixteen centuries of the church’s development into a so-called Christendom paradigm is simplistic and fails to do justice to the splendid panopoly of Christian history. Most significantly, the simplistic paradigm shift model resigns sixteen hundred years of the church’s history to failure when reflection on the creative multiplicity of the church’s historical response to culture could be the very thing that could help it in this time of change. Critiquing the simplistic taxonomies used by Loren Mead, Jinkins writes,

In a sense, the simplicity of his categories of taxonomy and his elusion of contradiction, countervailation, paradox, and irony lead him to miss or to ignore the one thing that seems most obvious about the church throughout its history: there are a multiplicity of forms of ministry that are coming into existence; there are emerging a variety of models or paradigms for church; and this situation is not unique, or unprecedented, but is the way the church is and has always been.⁶¹

As I have argued, the Emerging Church views Postmodernism as not only the cause of the church’s decline but also its cure. However,

(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). 5. See also Jeffery K. Jue’s critique of the Emerging Church’s pseudo historical scholarship in defining the Enlightenment period. Jeffery K. Jue, ‘What’s Emerging in the Church? Postmodernity, the Emergent Church, and the Reformation,’ *Themelios* 31, no. 2 (2006). 22-27.

⁵⁹ Robert Hannaford, ‘Editorial: Mission and Ministry,’ *Ecclesiology* 3, no. 1 (2006). 8.

⁶⁰ Sutherland, ‘Pine Trees and Paradigms: Rethinking Mission in the West’, 142. See also Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity. The 1992 Bampton Lectures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).11-40; Ted Peters, *God - the World’s Future: Systematic Theology for a Postmodern Era* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992). 19; and Tyron Inbody, ‘Postmodernism: Intellectual Velcro Dragged across Culture?’ *Theology Today* 51 (1995). 536-38.

⁶¹ Michael Jinkins, *The Church Faces Death: Ecclesiology in a Post-Modern Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). 60.

basing any ecclesiology on being relevant to the shifting sands of culture is fraught with danger. Postmodernism is a very slippery term and there is significant debate about its definition and nature. According to Ellen Charry, Derrida's philosophy does not represent a departure from autonomous rationalism, but rather stands in continuity. The commonality, argues Charry, lies in the emphasis on emancipation from any external referent. 'Emancipation, first from external constraint and now from meaning itself, binds this long tradition into a single narrative from Descartes to Derrida.'⁶² Gunton and many others suggest that Postmodernism is better termed late Modernism, or as McClendon sardonically terms it – 'Mostmodernism', for its connection to, rather than its separation from Modernism.⁶³ Inbody sees Postmodernism as an 'enlightenment of the Enlightenment'.⁶⁴ There is also debate about the intellectual credibility of some postmodern philosophy. Andrew Moore picks up on the paradox that is present in Derrida's deconstructionist writings and postmodern epistemology – 'meaninglessness expressed meaningfully.'⁶⁵ Alister McGrath critiques the postmodern attack on the natural sciences as little more than 'pseudo-scientific jibberish'.⁶⁶ He finally, and importantly, notes that Postmodernism has been seen as attractive 'not on account of its intellectual *credentials*, but on account of its intellectual *consequences*.'⁶⁷ This at least highlights the need for caution in any suggestion that the church must reconceive itself to be relevant to postmodernity. In viewing postmodernity as both cause and cure for the church's ills, the Emerging Church's message seems clear – the church must become postmodern. This has the effect of turning the Christian hope into the desire that one day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Postmodernism is Lord to the glory of Continental Deconstructionism.

⁶² Ellen T Charry, 'The Crisis of Modernity and the Christian Self,' in *A Passion for God's Reign*, ed. Miroslav Volf (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). 98.

⁶³ James Wm. McClendon, *Witness: Systematic Theology, Volume 3* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000). 219-26. See also Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many*. 12; 69-70.

⁶⁴ Inbody, 'Postmodernism: Intellectual Velcro Dragged Across Carpet' 537-38.

⁶⁵ Andrew Moore, *Realism and Christian Faith: God, Grammar and Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). 151. For a more sustained argument against deconstruction, see Vanhoozer.

⁶⁶ Alister E. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology: Reality*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002). 188.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 178.

Uncritical Application of Sociological Insights:

David Kettle, in his article engaging with the phenomenon of believing without belonging, warns against the temptation to read off sociological insights as mission directives.⁶⁸ This is an important insight. Zygmunt Bauman's description of Liquid Modernity forms the basis of much of the Emerging Church's reflections on postmodernising the church. However, their uncritical 'reading off' of Bauman's work as mission directives does not do justice to Bauman's own ambivalence towards Liquid Modernity. Even a cursory reading of Bauman's almost gloomy picture would leave one to wonder why anyone would want to promote the notion of a Liquid Church.⁶⁹ Many Emerging Church authors uncritically engage with Bauman's work to support their predetermined conclusions. However, Bauman is not neutral in regards to Liquid Modernity.

Emerging Church and Missional Church authors argue for the church to reconceive itself around fulfilling the consumptive religious desires of today's spiritual seekers. However, Bauman's work reveals how futile such a reconception of the church would be. Bauman contrasts the former society of producers with today's society of consumers. In the society of producers, people found their identity by what they could produce (on the farm or the battlefield or in the home), goods were valued for their durability, bank books characterised the importance of delaying gratification and lives were built around a coherent story. In today's society of consumers people find their identity in what they consume, goods are valued for their newness and credit cards characterise the way we do not delay gratification but consume the future in advance. Liquid modern life is a nowist life with no coherent story but is rather a series of, often unrelated, 'episodes'.⁷⁰ In the society of consumers happiness is to be found in what we consume. Everything, including dissenting voices, is recast as a consumptive product (e.g. eco-friendly washing machines or organic foods). In liquid modernity, even consumers must learn to recast themselves as consumptive commodities to be sold as attractive to the society of consumers in order to keep up

⁶⁸ David Kettle, 'Believing without Belonging? Cultural Change Seen in Theological Context,' *International Review of Mission* 94, no. 375 (2005). 508.

⁶⁹ Kees de Groot, 'The Church in Liquid Modernity: A Sociological and Theological Exploration of Liquid Church,' *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 6, no. 1 (2006). 95.

⁷⁰ Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007). 28-38.

with the style pack. Individuals must construct their own identities. This is done through selling yourself by what one wears, owns or consumes. Social networking sites are part of identity construction and selling yourself. *Facebook* allows you to show how many people like you and status updates allow you to sell yourself. The by-line of you tube promises that you can 'broadcast yourself'. The more graphic the detail one shares of one's private experiences and intimate adventures, the more likely one is to stand out from the crowd.⁷¹

With the constant demand to create your own identity and keep up with the style pack, disposal forms part of the heart of the society of consumers. In liquid modernity there is not only the creation of new needs but also the deliberate uglification of yesterday's goods that have passed their enjoy-by date. Individuals construct their identity through commodities and these must be disposed of when they no longer adorn us or make us desirable commodities.⁷² Bauman observes that 'Fraudulent or botched selves need to be discarded on the grounds of their 'non-authenticity', while the search for the real one should go on.'⁷³ Trading websites, such as New Zealand's Trade-Me website, become graveyards for the disposal of uglified goods. The joy of liquid modernity is that you can be 'born again' many times. However, one *must* keep pace with the 'new and improved' or risk social exclusion. Bauman notes that 'the assertion that 'you *can* make yourself into someone other than you are' is rephrased as 'you *must* make yourself into someone other than you are.'⁷⁴ The Missional and Emerging Church's emphasis that the church must change or risk social exclusion fits within this broader framework of liquid modern identity formation and the disposal of uglified goods.

Bauman argues that it is not the *state* of happiness that is at the heart of the society of consumers but the *pursuit* of happiness.⁷⁵ Whilst the ideal of happiness and satisfaction are the supreme values upheld in the society of consumers, it is the continual non-satisfaction of consumers that keeps it going. In such a society, product deception and a swift transition from shop counter to rubbish bin are signs of good health. Perpetually unfulfilled desires are what drive the irrational 'nowist' society of consumers; the finish line of satisfied desires moves at the same rate as the consumers chasing it.⁷⁶ At the heart of liquid

⁷¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *The Art of Life* (Cambridge: Polity Press). 71.

⁷² Ibid. 15.

⁷³ Ibid. 15.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 78.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 29.

⁷⁶ Bauman, *Consuming Life*. 47.

modern culture is not the satisfaction of needs but the creation of desire.⁷⁷ The ideal of the church fulfilling the spiritual desires of religious consumers is a futile waste of time because perpetually unfulfilled desire is what keeps the society of consumers going. Whilst the church must undoubtedly renew itself, surely the church must base any renewal on something of more substance than the shifting desires of consumptive culture.

With the Missional and Emerging Church's demand that the church must change to meet the needs of spiritual consumers there is the need to ask critical questions about the nature of the spiritual desires of today's religious tourists and how Christians should engage with them. Simon Barrow points out that the alternative spiritualities espoused today are a long way from Christian orthodoxy. Simon Barrow argues that the much-cited example of the spirituality displayed at the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, involved a specifically secular eulogy instead of a sermon, a sentimental devoutly non-religious anthem by Elton John, and a huge outpouring of non-Christian grieving rituals.⁷⁸ David Wells argues that the spirituality of today's spiritual tourists bears no resemblance to Christian spirituality. Where traditional Christian spirituality valued sacrifice, discipline and self-abnegation, today's spirituality is about self-realisation and self-discovery. The image of a flighty tourist who is seeking only pleasure and entertainment, picking up on the tidbits of other people's depth, contributing nothing before moving on is, Wells suggests, an apt illustration.⁷⁹ This must lead to critical questions as to whether it is a simple issue of supplying what is demanded by religious consumers. Is the Christian missional response to peddle the Christian faith at cut-price rates for spiritual tourists to choose what suits their spiritual hunger? David Kettle, engaging with the phenomenon of 'believing without belonging', reminds missiologists that scripture gives a very different image to that of spiritual consumers shopping for God, 'you did not choose me; I chose you...' (John 15:16).⁸⁰

Pete Ward, drawing on Bauman's work, argues for a radical decentering and reworking of church in terms of 'liquid' networks and

⁷⁷ Bauman, *The Art of Life*. 30.

⁷⁸ Simon Barrow, 'From Management to Vision: Issues for British Churches Negotiating Decline and Change,' *International Review of Mission* XCII, no. 364. 9-10.

⁷⁹ David F. Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005). 133-34.

⁸⁰ Kettle, 'Believing Without Belonging' 515.

flows. However, even a cursory reading of Bauman would observe his own concern about the way liquid modernity recasts relationships as consumptive products that are disposed of easily like any other product. Bauman mourns the replacement of the ‘relationships’ and ‘partnerships’ of Solid Modernity with the frail and flimsy ‘networks’ and ‘connections’ in Liquid Modernity.

‘Network’ suggests moments of ‘being in touch’ interspersed with periods of free roaming. In a network, connections are entered on demand, and can be broken at will... Unlike ‘real relationships’, ‘virtual relationships’ are easy to enter and to exit. They look smart and clean, feel easy to use and user-friendly, when compared with the heavy, slow-moving, inert messy ‘real stuff’.⁸¹

Bauman notes that the ties that bind us together relationally are tied very loosely in a Liquid Modern society so that we can easily connect and disconnect into, and out of, networks. Ideal employees have ‘zero drag’ in terms of commitment, bonds or emotional attachments and are able to work unusual hours, take on extra assignments and relocate at any time.⁸² Noting the growth of online dating services, Bauman states that the joy of Liquid Modern relationships is that ‘you can always press delete’.⁸³ They are freer, lighter and have less mess than the heavy partnerships of solid modernity. Today’s Liquid Modern couples are deeply affected by this relational flimsiness as well. Relational challenges become pretexts for breaking off communication and burning bridges. Even the idea of having children must be weighed in consumptive ‘value-for-money’ terms as children compromise one’s autonomy and career prospects – the kind of obligation that is to be avoided at all costs in any Liquid Modern life.⁸⁴ Any serious theological engagement with the work of Bauman must surely pause at suggesting, as Ward does, that such relationally frail and flimsy ‘networks’, based on individual consumptive autonomy, mirror the *perichoretic* relations of the Holy Trinity.

As I have shown, many of Bauman’s insights do not support the Emerging Church’s reconceptions of church but rather stand as significant critiques. Bauman suggests that a deep fear and insecurity of being left behind the times in a Liquid Modern society drives us on to

⁸¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003). xii.

⁸² Bauman, *Consuming Life*. 9-10.

⁸³ Bauman, *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*. xii.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 43.

keep pace with progress.⁸⁵ This fear is then turned into consumptive products to be purchased by fearful consumers.⁸⁶ Connections can be made here to the fear and anxiety that grips the church regarding its decline and demise and the Emerging Church's call for the church to reconceive itself as a postmodern church for a postmodern society. The Emerging Church argues that the church has an image problem and is seen as being embarrassingly behind the postmodern times. It has been left behind by the style pack and has become irrelevant to today's society. De Groot rightly notes that the Emerging Church perceives the problems facing the church today as simply issues of marketing.⁸⁷ Drawing on the fear and anxiety that exists within the church in the face of its decline, the Emerging Church then turns this fear back into a consumptive product for the church. Acting as ecclesial style guides, the Emerging Church can teach the ('traditional', 'modern', 'Christendom') church *What Not to Wear* to keep pace with the postmodern times. The church's embarrassing appearance is nothing that an extreme makeover will not fix with the help of the Emerging Church's style gurus. 'Do not fear, this irrelevance is not irreversible', the joy of liquid modernity is always being able to start over, be 'born again', therefore become postmodern.

By viewing culture as both cause *and cure* for the church, the Emerging Church's insights lack a sustained theological engagement with the cultural change and church decline. De Groot captures the comparative stances of Bauman and the Emerging Church in Liquid Modernity well when he writes that the former's message is 'Watch out! Beware liquid modernity!' while the latter's message seems to be 'Behold, society is liquid! Church should be likewise!'⁸⁸ The Emerging Church continually reads off sociological insights as missional directives all in the name of relevance. Graeme Redding asks the pertinent theological question; to whom is the church first called to be relevant – to postmodern society or to the Triune God revealed in Jesus Christ?⁸⁹ I

⁸⁵ Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty*. 103-104. See Bauman, *Consuming Life*. 103-104.

⁸⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Fear* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006). 7. Bauman gives examples of anti-aging creams, SUVs and clean spring water fresh from the mountains.

⁸⁷ de Groot, 'The Church in Liquid Modernity' 99.

⁸⁸ de Groot, 'The Church in Liquid Modernity' 99.

⁸⁹ Graeme Redding, *Calvin and Café Church: Reflections at the Interface between Reformed Theology and Current Trends in Worship* (2005, accessed 10 July 2007); available from

will later outline an alternative vision of the life of the church as a creature of the word by drawing on the work of John Webster, a British Anglican theologian.

Lack of Theological Engagement:

William Dyrness, in reviewing evangelical books about 'the church', notes that much of the work on the church is not actually about ecclesiology but mission, evangelism or spirituality. 'Church' is whatever shape or trajectory these, often creative, bursts of Christian energy take at a given time.⁹⁰ The gaping hole in much of the Missional Church and Emerging Church's creative response to today's cultural climate is theology and specifically ecclesiology. The church is defined primarily in functional terms by what it does to be relevant in mission, rather than in primarily ontological terms by who (or whose) the church is in Christ. The church is whatever mission creates, because what really matters in this conception of church is mission and not church.

James McClendon, an American Baptist theologian, writes that if the church is defined in primarily functional terms then the church can be perceived of little worth in itself other than a mere recruitment agency. When defined in primarily functional terms, the church exists as a means to something it is not and it proclaims a grace it cannot confess because it does not embody that grace.⁹¹ Roland Riem, critiquing the Anglican 'Mission Shaped Church', writes that it is not enough to proclaim that the church has missional values if in the next breath the church is defined as simply a worship style, or restrictively as a blueprint to be avoided for the sake of mission.⁹² God's plan for the church is more than simply being a divine recruitment or mission agency; the church is an embodiment of God's cosmic plan to redeem the world in Christ.

The Missional and Emerging Church's sustained emphasis on the church taking up a missional stance to our changing cultural context is

http://www.presbyterian.org.nz/fileadmin/a_resources_for_ministers/SoM_inaugural_lecture_05.pdf. 2.

⁹⁰ William A. Dyrness, 'Spaces for an Evangelical Ecclesiology,' in *The Community of the Word: Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology*, ed. Daniel Treier and Mark Husbands (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005). 252.

⁹¹ James Wm. McClendon, *Doctrine: Systematic Theology, Volume 2* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994). 439.

⁹² Roland Riem, 'Mission-Shaped Church: An Emerging Critique,' *Ecclesiology* 3, no. 1 (2006). 136-37.

important and to be welcomed. However, a strong missional ecclesiology finds its source from a broad *theological* vision of the nature of the church and its role in God's mission, rather than *sociological* directives. Daniel Migliore captures the necessary methodology well.

Much of what we hear and read about the church is often disappointing because it lacks an explicitly theological dimension. We are overwhelmed with statistical reports, historical surveys, sociological analyses, and church growth proposals. There is no doubt that responsible ecclesiology will need to take such studies into account. Yet the primary task for Christian reflection about the nature and mission of the church, now as ever, is theological.⁹³

Sutherland writes that if the church is to fulfil its part in God's mission it must understand the scope of God's mission and understand itself and its role within God's mission. For this to happen ecclesiology must be pursued and pursued vigorously.⁹⁴ In what follows, I will seek to vigorously pursue Baptist ecclesiology in order to fill the gaping holes in the analysis of the church in today's current cultural climate. Having explored the Baptist vision of church, I will then use this specifically theological lens to outline a Baptist missional ecclesiology.

II. TOWARDS A BAPTIST MISSIONAL ECCLESIOLOGY

The Baptist Vision of Church

In this section I will explore the development of the distinctive Baptist vision of church. In doing so, I will primarily draw on and outline the work of leading British Baptist theologian Paul Fiddes.⁹⁵ I will outline not

⁹³ Daniel Migliore, 'The Missionary God and the Missionary Church,' *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 19, no. 1 (1998). 14.

⁹⁴ Sutherland, 'The Kingdom Made Visible: A Missional Theology of Church.' 2.

⁹⁵ Fiddes' most recent work on the Baptist vision of church has been described by one reviewer as 'the most important piece of Baptist ecumenical scholarship for several decades.' See Sean Winter, 'Tracks and Traces: A Review Article,' *Baptist Quarterly* 141, no. 7 (2006). 439. Stephen Holmes calls Fiddes 'the leading British Baptist theologian of recent decades.' Stephen R. Holmes, 'Trinitarian Missiology: Towards a Theology

merely the history of the development of the Baptist vision of church but, more importantly, the theological convictions that underlie the Baptist vision of the church. Central for the Baptist vision is not a distinctive theology but a distinctive ecclesiology.⁹⁶ Whilst Baptists share many common Christian theological convictions about the nature of God, ‘our account of what the Church is and how it is properly grounded is rather different from most other denominations.’⁹⁷ In outlining the Baptist vision of church it will be significant to note the primarily ontological nature of the church and its mission in Baptist ecclesiology. I will use this distinctively theological framework to explore an appropriate ecclesiological response to the current cultural climate.

It is common to speak of key Baptist convictions. Nigel Wright suggests seven core convictions of the Baptist ‘genetic code’ – the supreme authority of scripture on all of faith and conduct, a believer’s church, believer’s baptism, the priesthood of all believers, the autonomy of the local church, freedom of conscience, and separation of church from state.⁹⁸ What is significant is not the convictions alone, as Baptists share these with others, but the way Baptists hold these convictions and live them out. As Fiddes asserts, ‘the combination or constellation is more distinctive than the single items.’⁹⁹ At the centre of Baptist convictions there is a beating heart around which everything else coheres and this beating heart of Baptist convictions is the liberating rule of Christ. And it is this centre that gives the distinctive ‘feel’ of Baptist congregational life.¹⁰⁰ According to Sutherland, everything in the Baptist vision derives from the dynamic experience of Christ in the

of God as Missionary,’ *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8 no. 1 (2006). 83.

⁹⁶ Martin Sutherland, ‘On Method: A Baptist *Tikanga*,’ in *Talking Theology: 2001-2002 Proceedings*, ed. Martin Sutherland (Auckland: R.J. Thompson Centre for Theological Studies, 2003). 123.

⁹⁷ Stephen R. Holmes, ‘Towards a Baptist Theology of Ordained Ministry,’ in *Baptist Sacramentalism*, ed. Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003). 247.

⁹⁸ These titles are taken from Nigel G. Wright, *Free Church, Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2005). 42-43.

⁹⁹ Paul S. Fiddes, ‘Theology and the Baptist Way of Community,’ in *Doing Theology in a Baptist Way*, ed. Paul S. Fiddes (Oxford: Whitley Publications, 2000). 28. See also Brian Haymes, ‘Theology and Baptist Identity,’ in *Doing Theology in a Baptist Way*, ed. Paul S. Fiddes (Oxford: Whitley Publications, 2000). 1.

¹⁰⁰ Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought (Carlisle Paternoster Press, 2003). 6.

community.¹⁰¹ At the heart of the Baptist vision of church is the direct, dynamic and liberating rule of the Risen Christ in the church which liberates the church from all other rules and rulers.

The Historic Baptist Vision of Church

Since the beginning, Baptists have sought to pattern the church on what they believed was outlined in the scriptures. They believed that their vision of church was not merely one way of interpreting the New Testament but possibly the most faithful.¹⁰² The 1644 London Confession is seen by many as the most significant and influential of all of the Baptist confessions. It declared:

The Rule of this Knowledge, Faith, and Obedience, concerning the worship and service of God, and all other Christian duties, is not mans inventions, opinions, devices, lawes, constitutions, or traditions unwritten whatsoever, but onely the word of God contained in the Canonick Scriptures.¹⁰³

Paul Beasley-Murray writes that for Baptists, it is our study of God's Word that leads us to believe that this pattern of church is God's way for living our life together. Baptists are radical believers who believe in getting back to the biblical roots of the Christian faith and being 'the true church'.¹⁰⁴ Today the Baptist claim to be the true church patterned on the New Testament is thankfully much more chastened. Baptists speak of 'a Baptist way of being church' that, as Nigel Wright states, represents a new and welcome degree of modesty. Baptists now acknowledge that there are a variety of patterns and structures for the church in the New Testament.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Sutherland, 'On Method: A Baptist *Tikanga*.' 127.

¹⁰² Tidball, 'Biblical Foundations' 10-11. See also Derek Tidball, 'Leadership and Baptist Church Governance: Historical Perspectives,' in *Leadership and Baptist Church Governance*, ed. Graeme Chatfield (NSW: Morling Press, 2005). 24.

¹⁰³ William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 2nd ed. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1969). 158. Article VII. I have retained the original spelling in all quotations and citations from early Baptist writings.

¹⁰⁴ Paul Beasley-Murray, *Radical Believers: The Baptist Way of Being the Church* (London: The Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1992). 6.

¹⁰⁵ Wright, *Free Church, Free State*. 25. See also Tidball, 'Leadership and Baptist Church Governance: Biblical Foundations.' 14; and Paul S. Fiddes, *A Leading Question: The Structure and Authority of Leadership in the Local Church* (London: Baptist Publications, 1985). 33

Historically, Baptists find their roots in various streams of the dissenting and separatist traditions of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Early in its history the Baptist movement developed into two streams – General Baptists and Particular Baptists. Debate exists as to what influenced the earliest Baptists and to what degree. Most agree that significant among the influences were English Separatism and Continental Anabaptism.¹⁰⁶

Separatists believed that the church reformers had not sufficiently reformed the church. They regarded the Church of England as unscriptural, corrupt and incapable of reform and that the true church must be separate from the ungodly National Church. They, along with the earliest Baptists, believed that the covenant relationship between God and the National Church was broken and void. English Separatists continued to hold membership in the National Church whilst meeting separately for worship. Despite this membership they were persecuted because of their views and as a result they terminated their membership with the Established Church and began to organise Separatist Churches of their own.¹⁰⁷

It was from this need to establish separate churches that a Separatist congregation began to meet at Gainsborough. Fiddes argues that the *formative beginnings* for Baptist Christians are found in the Separatist congregation that met in Gainsborough in 1606 or 1607. Whilst not yet a Baptist church, many of the future Baptist leaders, such as John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, were within this congregation and the seeds of the Baptist vision of church were formed here in a gathered covenanting community.¹⁰⁸ Central to the new congregation at Gainsborough was a covenant for the members of the gathered church. William Bradford recalled that the members:

joyned them selves (by a covenant of the Lord) into a Church estate, in the fellowship of the gospell, to walke in all his wayes, made known, or to be made known unto them, according to their best endeavours, whatsoever it should cost them, the Lord assisting.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Beasley-Murray, *Radical Believers*. 112-16. See also Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*. 11-17 and Robert C. Walton, *The Gathered Community* (London: Carey Press, 1946). 62-64.

¹⁰⁷ Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*. 97-99.

¹⁰⁸ Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology*. 21.

¹⁰⁹ Cited in Paul S. Fiddes, ‘Walking Together’: The Place of Covenant Theology in Baptist Life Yesterday and Today,’ in *Pilgrim Pathways: Essays in*

Fiddes notes that this covenanting to walk together in the ways of the Lord was at the heart of the Baptist vision and it reveals much about Baptist ecclesiology.¹¹⁰ The Baptist view of covenanting will be a major theme to which I will return to explore and develop in greater depth.

The Direct, Dynamic and Liberating Presence of the Risen Christ:

A central text for the Baptist vision of church has been Matthew 18. Miroslav Volf notes that the text of Matthew 18 has shaped the entire Free Church tradition.¹¹¹ Early Baptists took very seriously the promise that 'where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them' (Matt. 18:20). This passage led the early Baptists to ask what it meant for Christ to 'dwell in their midst'. They discerned in the phrase an echo of the covenantal language of the Old Testament prophets where God's promise to 'dwell among' people is combined with the formula 'I will be your God and you will be my people'. The gathered local covenanted community understood itself to have the direct, dynamic and liberating presence of the Risen Christ by the power of the Spirit in their midst. This promised presence of the Risen Christ in the gathered church gives the covenanted community all authority of binding and loosing.¹¹² John Smyth, the pioneering Baptist leader, writes: 'Unto whom the covenant is given unto them the power of binding and loosing is given. The covenant is given to the Body of the Church... therefore the power of binding and loosing is given to them.'¹¹³ As Sutherland argues, the gathered church is therefore both the *site* of Christ's presence and the *means* of discerning his will. This radical emphasis on Christ's promised presence being in the gathered community by the Spirit's power, leads Sutherland to argue that the one true Baptist sacrament is gathering.¹¹⁴

Honour of B. R. White, ed. William Brackney and Paul Fiddes (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1999): 47-48. See also Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*. 97-99.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 99.

¹¹¹ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, ed. Alan G. Padgett, Sacra Doctrina (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998). 135.

¹¹² Paul S. Fiddes, 'A Response to David Carter's Review of *Tracks and Traces*,' *Ecclesiology* 5, no. 1 (2005). 94.

¹¹³ Cited in Roger Hayden, 'Baptists, Covenants and Confessions,' in *Bound to Love: The Covenant Basis of Baptist Life and Mission*, ed. Roger Hayden Paul S Fiddes, Richard L Kidd, Keith Clements and Brian Haymes (London: The Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1985). 25.

¹¹⁴ Sutherland, 'On Method: A Baptist *Tikanga*.' 124-27.

The direct, dynamic and liberating presence of the Risen Christ by the power of the Spirit gives the gathered church liberty from all other rules and rulers in order that they may follow only the rule of the Risen Christ who is in their midst. Because of the promised presence of the Risen Christ, the gathered church has all authority to call its own ministry, discipline its members, direct its own affairs and celebrate the sacraments whether there be ordained ministry in the church or not.¹¹⁵ John Smyth believed the gathered church has ‘all power both of the Kingdom and priesthood from Christ’. It has the power to ‘preach, pray, sing psalms... and to administer the seals of the covenant: also to admonish, convince, excommunicate, absolve, and all other actions either of the Kingdom or priesthood.’¹¹⁶ Smyth writes: ‘We say the Church or two or three faithful people Separated from the world & joyned together in true covenant, have both Christ, the covenant, & promises, & the ministerial powre of Christ given to them.’¹¹⁷ Even leadership such as elders, deacons and pastors are all ultimately accountable to the gathered community, for this is where Christ promises to be present by the power of the Spirit. Church officers and leaders have no power of their own other than that entrusted to them by the gathered church who have sought Christ’s will in appointing them.¹¹⁸ Article XXXVI of the 1644 London Confession states: ‘That being thus joyned, every Church has power given them from Christ for their better well-being, to choose to themselves meet persons into the office of Pastors, Teachers, Elders, Deacons, being qualified according to the Word, as those which Christ has appointed in his Testament, for the feeding, governing, serving, and building up of his Church, and that none other have power to impose them, either these or any other.’¹¹⁹ This represents a radical departure from the structures and nature of the National Church.

In the light of this, it is easy to suggest that for Baptists the final seat of authority is the gathered covenanted community. Without qualification this is misleading. The gathered church is the final seat of authority only in a secondary and derivative sense. A more precise and accurate definition notes that according to Matthew 18 the authority is

¹¹⁵ See Thomas Helwys’ *A Declaration of Faith of English People* Article 11 in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*. 120.

¹¹⁶ Cited in Hayden, ‘Baptists, Covenants and Confessions’ 25; and see also the 1644 London Confession Article XXXV in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*. 166.

¹¹⁷ Cited in Volf, *After Our Likeness*. 132.

¹¹⁸ Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*. 166.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* 166.

Christ's authority, discerned and made visible in the gathered church.¹²⁰ The final seat of authority is the direct, dynamic and liberating rule of the Risen Christ, present through the power of the Spirit, discerned by the gathered congregation. At its best, the Baptist vision is not about a democracy where majority rules but a Christocracy where Christ reigns and rules in the church and directs it in his ways by the power of the Spirit.

The Baptist Covenanted Community:

Separatist leaders such as Francis Johnston and Robert Browne developed the idea of the church covenanting together.¹²¹ This church covenant served as an instrument for Separatists to mark out the true church from the world and bound the saints together in corporate obedience to the ways of God.¹²² The theme of the church covenanting together was a concept which the early Baptist leaders used and developed further. Whilst ecclesiology was central for John Smyth, the divine covenant was central to his ecclesiology.¹²³ Smyth viewed the church as a visible community of 'two, three, or more saints joined together by covenant with God and themselves... for their mutual edification and God's glory.'¹²⁴ Fiddes sees a crucial creative development of covenant theology in early Baptist ecclesiology. Smyth fused together God's eternal covenant of grace with the elect to the covenanting of the local gathered church. The Baptist congregations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries believed that the promise-making of the members of the local church intersected with God's eternal covenant of grace.¹²⁵

In their common life the early Baptists were not merely seeking what they believed was conformity to the divine pattern. They believed

¹²⁰ Sutherland, 'On Method: A Baptist *Tikanga*.' 126.

¹²¹ Fiddes, 'Walking Together': The Place of Covenant Theology in Baptist Life Yesterday and Today.' 47-48.

¹²² Stephen Brachlow, 'Life Together in Exile: The Social Bond of Separatist Ecclesiology,' in *Pilgrim Pathways: Essays in Baptist History in Honour of B. R. White*, ed. William H. Brackney and Paul S. Fiddes (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1999), 115.

¹²³ B. R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition: From the Marian Martyrs to the Pilgrim Fathers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 125.

¹²⁴ Cited in *Ibid.* 125.

¹²⁵ Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology*, 32-34. See also White, *The English Separatist Tradition*, 128.

that in their common life together, as a covenanted community, they experienced the communion of the saints with an intimacy and reality utterly unknown to the casual and undisciplined parish churches around them.¹²⁶ However, this profound life together differed significantly from the postmodern thirst for community. Derek Tidball warns that much of the postmodern focus on community sees relationships as an end in themselves. Community has become an aerosol word – '[it is] a nice smell to spray but it dissolves into the air very quickly.'¹²⁷ It was not that the early Baptists went in search of community and there they found (or constructed) truth and meaning, it was that they went in search of truth and meaning and there they found community.¹²⁸

In Smyth's vision of covenanting, on the one side, God covenanted to be their God, 'to give Christ' and 'with Christ al els'. Through the covenant bond, 'the Lord chose vs to be his', and 'by vertue of the covenant God made with us...[sic] God is our God & our Father, only in Chr[ist] & through him: & al the promises of God in Christ are yea and Amen.' On the other side, the faithful covenant 'to obey all the commandments of God'.¹²⁹ The earliest Baptists believed that their life together, as a covenanted community, was created through the powerful and unifying presence of the Risen Christ by the Spirit's power, who called them into fellowship in and through the covenant relationship they had embraced in faith. Their covenanting together was not simply a human action to be faithful to God and one another, but God covenanting with this gathered community to take them to be God's people.¹³⁰

Therefore, as Fiddes rightly argues, it is positively misleading to understand the church covenant in terms of a voluntary social contract, as if the church is a collection of individuals who have decided to band together.¹³¹ This covenantal understanding stands in contrast to visions of the Missional and Emerging Church of the church as a community

¹²⁶ Keith W. Clements, 'The Covenant and Community,' in *Bound to Love: The Covenant Basis of Baptist Life and Mission*, ed. Roger Hayden Paul S Fiddes, Richard L Kidd, Keith Clements and Brian Haymes (London: The Baptist Union, 1985). 52.

¹²⁷ Derek Tidball, 'Leadership and Baptist Church Governance: Contemporary Application,' in *Leadership and Baptist Church Governance*, ed. Graeme Chatfield (NSW: Morling Press, 2005). 46.

¹²⁸ Clements, 'The Covenant and Community' 52.

¹²⁹ Cited in Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology*. 33.

¹³⁰ Fiddes, 'Theology and the Baptist Way of Community.' 33.

¹³¹ Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology*. 40-44.

that peddles religious goods and services for spiritual consumers to pick and choose from according to their desires. Such views misunderstand the significance of the double meaning of the church covenant – believers certainly gather together in covenant but this is *in response* to being gathered together by Christ, the covenant-mediator, in the Spirit into his one body. It is God who always initiates the covenant and humanity responds.¹³²

In the Baptist vision, it is similarly misleading to speak of the autonomy of the local church if this is understood as an isolationist stance in relation to the church universal, because covenant and catholicity belong together.¹³³ The covenant that the local gathered community participates in is God's eternal covenant with the universal church, which pre-exists any local manifestation of it. The Baptist vision is not the *independence* of the local church but the *liberty* of the local church from all ecclesiastical or other rules so that they may have total dependence on the direct rule of the Risen Christ who is present in their midst by the Spirit's power. In covenanting together, early Baptists held the balance between the privileges of the local church under the rule of Christ on the one hand and the need to seek fellowship, guidance and counsel from the whole body under the rule of Christ on the other.¹³⁴

¹³² This double meaning has also recently been expounded in Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*. 77-78; Wright, *Free Church, Free State*. 49-67; Keith G. Jones, 'Rethinking Baptist Ecclesiology,' *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 1, no. 1 (2000). 8; and Keith G. Jones, 'Towards a Model of Mission for Gathering, Intentional, Convictional *Koinonia*,' *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 4, no. 1 (2004). 7-8.

¹³³ See Fiddes' critique of Miroslav Volf's Free Church ecclesiology in Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000). 87-88. See also Fiddes' response to David Carter's view of the excessively voluntaristic and isolationist aspects of the Baptist vision. David Carter and Paul Fiddes, 'Baptist Ecclesiology,' *Ecclesiology* 5, no. 1 (2005). 89. See also Fiddes' response Fiddes, 'A Response to David Carter's Review of *Tracks and Traces*.' 95.

¹³⁴ Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology*. 32 and 54. Whilst not explicitly using covenant language, the 1644 London Confession follows the 1596 *True Confession* in applying the covenant language of 'walking together' to the associating of local churches. It speaks of each body living under one and the same rule of Christ and members of the one body under Christ their only head. See Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*. 168-69.

Baptist Covenantal Ontology:

At the heart of this Baptist vision of church is a deep conviction of being called out and gathered together by the Risen Christ, in the power of the Spirit, to be his people. The covenant community understands itself to be the eschatological people of God. As the Spirit of the end brings the new creation into the present, the covenant community have a taste, ahead of time, of the glory of the future kingdom. Fiddes draws on the work of Karl Barth and his doctrine of election and covenant to further enrich the ontological element that is at the heart of Baptist ecclesiology – ‘that is the dimension of sheer being which underlies any doing.’¹³⁵

Barth’s doctrine of election is based upon his Trinitarian theology. At the centre of Barth’s doctrine of election is God covenanting in freedom with humanity through the elect human person of Jesus Christ to be ‘God with us’. ‘[What] unites God and us men is that He does not will to be God without us.’¹³⁶ The event of covenanting with the elect human person Jesus Christ in time shapes both the inner being of the Trinity and God’s activity in the world. In Jesus Christ, God has elected both humanity and God’s own self for covenant communion. In this ‘double decree’ Jesus Christ is not only the elect human but also the electing God. ‘He in whom the covenant of grace is fulfilled and revealed in history is also its eternal basis.’¹³⁷ The covenant with Jesus Christ economically is an expression of the eternal covenant of grace God has made with humanity immanently, in the inner communion of the Trinity. Fiddes draws deeply on the work of Barth to enrich his Baptist covenantal ontology:

[We] might say that as God the Father makes [a] covenant of love eternally with the Son in the fellowship of the Spirit, so simultaneously God makes [a] covenant in history with human beings. In one movement of utter self-giving God elects both the divine Son and human children as covenant partners.¹³⁸

According to Fiddes, the covenant of the local gathered church is bound up with the covenant within God’s own life in which God freely determines who God is – God for us. The horizontal human dynamic of covenant making is taken up into the vertical dimension of God’s eternal covenant with humanity in Christ. In this way the church participates not

¹³⁵ Ibid. 37.

¹³⁶ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. W. Bromiley, vol. IV/1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956). 7.

¹³⁷ Ibid. 66.

¹³⁸ Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology*. 36.

only in God's covenant with humanity but the inner covenant-making in God. The church shares in the *koinonia* of the divine community and this participation was God's intention from eternity. Fiddes' Trinitarian Baptist ecclesiology is not simply about the activity of God *through* the church but the sharing of the church *in* God.¹³⁹ 'Church is what happens when these vectors [the horizontal church covenant and the vertical eternal covenant of grace] intersect, and God in humility opens God's own self to the richness of the intercourse.'¹⁴⁰

Fiddes goes on to develop an epistemology of participation in contrast to the epistemologies of observation and imitation. These epistemologies, Fiddes argues, view the persons of the Trinity merely as an example of 'being in communion' for the church to imitate.¹⁴¹ However, language of imitation does not adequately express the ontological depth of the *koinonia* the church experiences with God through covenanting together. For Fiddes, this depth of relationship cannot be objectified. Language of the Trinity is not the language of observation where we try to objectify the Trinitarian relationships and then imitate them in the church. Language of the Trinity must be language of participation that helps us to express our sharing in God. For Fiddes, true ecclesiology is ecclesiology of participation not imitation or observation.¹⁴²

Fiddes uses three key New Testament images of the church (body of Christ; temple indwelt by the Spirit; and the people of God) to help develop a participatory ecclesiology. Having outlined the use of these images in their New Testament context and noted the implications for ecclesiology, Fiddes moves to the broader theological context of what they reveal about the church's relationship to the immanent life of the Trinity.

The church which acts as body, temple and priestly people in practical ways in the world has the power to serve, to focus the presence of the Spirit and to mediate blessing *only* because it is caught up in the life of the triune God. It does not have its own mission, but shares in the mission of God towards the world, God's ecstatic movement of love which draws the creation into

¹³⁹ Ibid. 78-82. This is a major theme for Fiddes' doctrine of the Trinity and is most fully developed in his major Trinitarian work - Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity*.

¹⁴⁰ Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology*. 79-80.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 71; 80-82. This participatory epistemology is most fully developed in Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity*. 34-51.

¹⁴² Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology*. 66-71.

fellowship with God's own self. This movement outwards is an expression of the movements and missions of love within God, in which the church astonishingly is called to share.¹⁴³

Elsewhere he concludes: 'So we may say that the church participates in the external activity of God *because* it shares in the inner life of God.'¹⁴⁴ This captures the ontological nature of the church; the dimension of sheer being that underlies any doing.

III. IMPLICATIONS FOR MISSIONAL ECCLESIOLOGY

In this final section I conclude by suggesting some alternative implications for missional ecclesiology than those offered by the Missional and Emerging Church. These will flow from the Baptist vision of church developed above.

The Church and the *Missio Dei*

At the heart of the Baptist vision of church is the deep ontology of the covenanted community as the eschatological people of God. The church, by its participation in God's eternal covenant with humanity in Christ, lives in deep and lasting relationship with one another and the Triune God – the end for which the world was created. Such ontological depth and richness defines the church as not merely the agent for the *missio Dei* but its embodiment. In his essay on missional ecclesiology, having explored a variety of New Testament texts, Sutherland defines the *missio Dei* as the cosmic plan of God to bring creation into perfect harmony with Godself, thus reflecting the perfect harmony that the three persons of the Trinity subsist in.¹⁴⁵ This cosmic plan of complete reconciliation of the universe with its creator was triumphantly demonstrated in the coming of Christ where God's eternal plan was enacted in time. Drawing on Romans 8:14-25 and Ephesians 3:1-21, Sutherland then argues for the cosmic role of the church as an integral part of God's cosmic plan. Christians have been reconciled to God in Christ by the power of the Spirit. In Ephesians 3 Paul writes that the one wise purpose of God, to reconcile all things through Christ, has now come to clear expression in

¹⁴³ Ibid. 73.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 72.

¹⁴⁵ Sutherland, 'The Kingdom Made Visible: A Missional Theology of Church.' 3-5.

the church.¹⁴⁶ Thus, God's cosmic plan is fulfilled *in the church*. The church by its *nature* displays the new creation to the universe. Fiddes, reflecting on the difference of the Trinitarian persons, goes so far as to say: "There is only truly church when the assembly is made up of the old and the young, employed and unemployed, male and female, black and white, healthy and handicapped."¹⁴⁷ Sutherland notes the benediction in Ephesians 3:21 amazingly states that God may be glorified in the church as well as in Christ.¹⁴⁸

The church participates in God's glory, manifesting the firstfruits of the *missio Dei*, displaying to the universe God's plan for its future and God's own divine nature. The church is the firstfruits of God's cosmic plan (the *missio Dei*) and gives a glimpse of the new heaven and new earth by its very life and being. Mission is therefore not primarily something we *do* but something we *are*. 'As the *koinonia* – the 'common life' – is created by the Spirit, the Church prefigures the end. More than that, it is the eternal reality of the Triune God entering time.¹⁴⁹ In this way we can link the *missio Dei* with the coming reign of God. Whilst the kingdom is not yet the church's possession, and the true church is yet to come, the church, in time, is nonetheless a foretaste and a sign of God's coming kingdom.¹⁵⁰

This primarily ontological vision of the mission of the church stands in contrast to the Missional Church and Emerging Church's primarily functional understandings of the mission of the church. In the Missional Church's conception, the *missio Dei* is a functional concept that sends the church out to *do* mission. "The center or core of the *missio Dei* is evangelization: the communication of the gospel."¹⁵¹ In this conception, not only is the *missio Dei* a call for the church to do mission, but also the *missio Dei* now becomes the domain of the church to carry out. "This risen Lord now sends his disciples into the world to carry out the *missio Dei* (mission of God) that was the purpose and content of his

¹⁴⁶ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Dallas: Word Books, 1990). 187. See also N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon* (London: SPCK, 2002). 34-38.

¹⁴⁷ Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology*. 81.

¹⁴⁸ Sutherland, "The Kingdom Made Visible: A Missional Theology of Church." 6.

¹⁴⁹ Sutherland, "Pine Trees and Paradigms: Rethinking Mission in the West." 148.

¹⁵⁰ Sutherland, "The Kingdom Made Visible: A Missional Theology of Church." 6.

¹⁵¹ Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*. 49.

life, death, and resurrection.¹⁵² Such anthropocentric definitions of the *missio Dei* confuse the role and nature of the church in the mission of God and ultimately misunderstand the mission of God. The church does not have a separate mission of its own nor does it continue on the mission of God nor does it complete Christ's ministry. John Webster argues that '[much] church life is predicated on the assumption that God is only real, present and active in so far as the church's moral action or spirituality or proclamation make him so. Not only is this a (covert or explicit) denial of the resurrection; it is a miserable burdening of the church with a load which it cannot hope to support.¹⁵³ Rather, the church participates through the Spirit in the ongoing ministry and mission of Christ given to him by the Father that is eschatologically complete.¹⁵⁴

A clearer understanding of the role of the church in God's mission will help to sharpen and strengthen Missional and Emerging ecclesiologies. Webster argues that because the gospel is independent of the church, precedes it and calls it into being, the church is not in its creaturely capacity the primary bearer of responsibility for witness to the gospel. God is the first witness to the gospel, whose sum and substance is Jesus Christ. 'In the power of his resurrection and in the energy of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ goes ahead of the church and testifies of himself in the world... He – not the church – is the true witness. He – not the church – is the light of the world.¹⁵⁵ The primary agent of the church's witness is God in the Risen Christ through the Spirit's power. 'God's own witness does not dissolve into that of the church; the church does not replace him, but simply witnesses to the witness.¹⁵⁶ The *missio Dei* is the mission of *God* and not the mission of the church. To assert that the church continues the *missio Dei*, picking up where Christ left off, is to fundamentally confuse whose mission it is. The church most certainly has a role in witness and mission but it does not bear the weight of the *missio Dei*. The church is called, by its life together, to give witness to the reconciling power of Christ by the power of the Spirit – a witness to the witness.

¹⁵² Ibid. 46. See also Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*.

¹⁵³ John Webster, 'The Church as Witnessing Community,' *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 21, no. 3 (2003). 31.

¹⁵⁴ Holmes, 'Towards a Baptist Theology of Ordained Ministry,' 253-54.

¹⁵⁵ Webster, 'The Church as Witnessing Community,' 31.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 30-31.

The Community of the Gospel

In his conception of the church's role in witness, Webster makes a crucial distinction between the church and the gospel. He defines the gospel as 'the announcement of the eschatological reality of God and God's saving governance of all things', whose sum and substance is Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁷ He argues that the gospel precedes the church, calls the church into being, sustains the church in its life and summons the church to bear witness to the gospel. The church is what it is because of the gospel; it is a community of the gospel. 'The church of Jesus Christ is a creature of the Word, and in the power of the Spirit it lives from the Word. That is, it comes into being and is sustained through the word of the gospel spoken by the living Christ.'¹⁵⁸ Importantly, therefore, the church can never assume that it has learned and put its character as the gospel community safely behind it. The church is always a beginner when it comes to the gospel.¹⁵⁹ The church can only be what it is if its entire life and activity emerges out of giving first attention to Jesus Christ – there is simply nowhere else to begin.¹⁶⁰ The church learns its nature and its calling by sitting in the school of the gospel, there to learn of the ways and love of God.¹⁶¹ To do this, the church gathers together around the magnetic presence of the Risen Christ to be renewed by his gospel of grace. 'The church hears the gospel in the repeated event of being encountered, accosted, by the word of the gospel as it meets us in the reading of Scripture in the midst of the community of faith and its worship.'¹⁶² This gathering together is not a Modernist obsession for logocentrism, as the Missional and Emerging Church argue, but the crucial conviction that the critique for the church and its nature comes from *within*, from the Risen Christ, rather than from *without* through culture. Therefore the church will gather (or be gathered together) to sit at the feet of Jesus and be accosted by him.

This has implications for the church's mission to the world. It will mean that the church will adopt a rather free and sometimes unimpressed attitude to other voices that clamour for its attention as it tries to live its life as God's eschatological community. Because the

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. 22.

¹⁵⁸ John Webster, 'Discipleship and Calling,' *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 23, no. 2 (2005). 145.

¹⁵⁹ Webster, 'The Church as Witnessing Community.' 23.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. 21.

¹⁶¹ Webster, 'Discipleship and Calling.' 146.

¹⁶² Webster, 'The Church as Witnessing Community.' 24.

church has placed Jesus Christ as the centre of all its life, it will not be too affected by what it is told. The calming centre of identity in Christ, which is at the heart of the church's life, will not allow the church to be trapped into constantly reinventing itself to keep up with the styles of the world. As Webster notes, an excitable and unstable church cannot properly minister the gospel, and stability comes from constant, patient attention to Christ and his Word.¹⁶³ This does not mean the church will ignore or withdraw from the world; it will listen carefully and courteously but it will not be mesmerised by what the world says.¹⁶⁴

It is simply to say that the gospel outbids the world every time. Jesus himself speaks more authoritatively, legitimately, winningly and interestingly than the world. If the church really loves the world, then the church will give its mind to listen to Jesus' prophetic presentation of himself; it will attend to the gospel, not as something it knows but as something it must always learn. Hearing the gospel will help the church to help the world. It will enable the church to see the world without the masks which the world puts on to hide from things which it fears or hates or longs for but dare not face.¹⁶⁵

In the Baptist vision of church, gathering together as the gospel community is not about being inwardly focussed, nor is it about insulating and inoculating spiritually over-weight Christians as it is accused of by many in the Missional and Emerging Church.¹⁶⁶ It is about the Risen Christ gathering the covenanted community together, by the power of the Spirit, as the eschatological people of God, liberated from all other rules, to find our only true centre – Jesus Christ. Any undermining of the significance of gathering together for the sake of being relevant or missional, tears the heart out of the Baptist self-understanding as the eschatological people of God who are gathered together through the Risen Christ, in the Spirit, and formed by his powerful Word. Whilst such radical reconceptions of church might be culturally and sociologically expedient, they are theologically bankrupt in the Baptist vision of church.

¹⁶³ Webster, 'Discipleship and Calling?': 145.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. 145.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. 145.

¹⁶⁶ Allis, 'Has the Church had Its Day?' 17.

Thanatophobia

It has been noted that much of the ecclesiology espoused by the Missional Church and the Emerging Church is in response to the decline of the church in the West. Such decline creates significant anxiety and fear within the church regarding its future. Some authors have observed that this deep fear and anxiety can drive the church to uncritically adopt many of the various fads that sweep through the church promising statistical success.¹⁶⁷ The Missional Church and the Emerging Church often heighten this fear of the church's decline and irrelevance in order to present their reconceptions of church as the cure that will save the church from its statistical decline. As noted earlier, this mirrors the way in which fear is recast as a product (or products) in liquid modern society.

Michael Jenkins, in his helpful book, calls this fear and anxiety *thanatophobia* – a fear of dying.¹⁶⁸ In contrast to the *thanatophobia* that grips much of the work of the Missional Church and Emerging Church, Jenkins sees the church's decline and possible death as a gift, giving the church an unparalleled opportunity to comprehend and to render its life. 'When the church faces death, in point of fact, it encounters a critical moment when it may know the power of the resurrection.'¹⁶⁹ The church's life does not depend on its own competence, expertise, planning or relevance, the 'church's life depends on the power and faithfulness of God to raise the Body of Christ from every death, because its life is a continuing participation in the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.'¹⁷⁰

Jenkins asks, can we not imagine announcing in word and deed the gospel of Jesus Christ to a culture held captive by consumerism? Can we not imagine proclaiming the good news that people are neither consumers nor products to be sold? It will be very difficult for the church to proclaim this gospel convincingly if it too gives in to the temptation to repackage itself as just another commodity. Finally, Jenkins asks, can we not imagine a church that is attractive to others because it does not desperately need them for its institutional survival? A church living in fear for its own self-preservation does not draw others to it, but

¹⁶⁷ See especially Ian Stackhouse, *The Gospel-Driven Church: Retrieving Classical Ministries for Contemporary Revivalism*, ed. Andrew Walker, Deep Church (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2004), 3-31.

¹⁶⁸ Jenkins, *The Church Faces Death: Ecclesiology in a Post-Modern Context*, 27.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. 13-14.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. 28.

a church that courageously holds up the cross of Christ in its corporate life has, as St. John tells us, the power to draw all humanity.¹⁷¹ The idea that we have to ‘save’ the church by making it relevant to the world is dead wrong. The church already has a saviour and he knows his way out of the grave. Chesterton once said ‘Christianity has died many times and risen again; for it had a god who knew the way out of the grave.’¹⁷² It is when the church, unconcerned about its survival, recklessly gives itself over to Christ and trusts in his resurrecting power to bring it out of all deaths that it is most attractive.

Conclusion: Be the Community

I have argued that the Missional Church and the Emerging Church, through their desire for cultural relevance, define the church in primarily functional terms; the church is whatever makes it relevant to culture in mission. However, to define the church primarily on these terms is to misunderstand the nature and scope of the church in God’s cosmic plan and to rob it of its glory. What defines the church and its mission is not what the church does to be culturally relevant but who the church is in Christ – the fulfilment of God’s cosmic plan and a sign of God’s kingdom. Therefore, the church’s mission is to *become what God has made it*. This is not a call for passive inaction on the church’s part, but a call to a specific type of action that flows out of who it is. In the Baptist vision, the church is never less than mission activity, but it is certainly much more.

The church is called to indwell its nature as the first fruits of God’s cosmic plan and a sign of God’s kingdom. As a sign of God’s kingdom the church must be careful as to what it signifies. The church is to ‘live in such a way as to display the dawning of the redemptive reign of God.’¹⁷³ As Sutherland argues: ‘The missional church (and there is no other kind) exists to make the kingdom visible.’¹⁷⁴ The mission imperative is for the church to *be the community* of God’s kingdom and

¹⁷¹ Jinkins, *Stewards of the Mysteries of God’s Church*, 28-30.

¹⁷² G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1925): 162.

¹⁷³ K. J. Vanhoozer, ‘Evangelicalism and the Church: The Company of the Gospel,’ in *The Futures of Evangelicalism: Issues and Prospects*, ed. R. Parry and A. West C. Bartholomew (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003). 92.

¹⁷⁴ Sutherland, ‘The Kingdom Made Visible: A Missional Theology of Church.’ 7.

therefore, in its corporate life together, make God's kingdom visible. When understood in its full significance, making God's kingdom visible is a severe vision. It is a call to radically and recklessly indwell its nature as the fulfilment of the *missio Dei* and fearlessly hold fast to Christ and his ways, no matter what. It is a call to be God's contrast community of redemption, a sign to the world of God's redemptive plan to reconcile all things in Christ. This is the historic Baptist vision of being a community of radical disciples. This will have significant mission repercussions as the church learns sacrificially to love and to live in such a way as to make God's kingdom visible.

There is clearly rich and disturbing potential in the Baptist vision of church. We are called to explore what it means to make God's kingdom visible, corporately, as a contrast community.¹⁷⁵ Such a corporate vision of witness and mission stands against the many individualistic visions that dominate the church. The church witnesses to Christ by its radical life together as God's covenanted contrast community – the fulfilment of the *missio Dei* and a sign of God's kingdom.

Bauman concludes:

If there is to be a community in the world of the individuals, it can only be (and it needs to be) a community woven together from sharing and mutual care; a community of concern and responsibility for the equal right to be human and the equal ability to act on that right.¹⁷⁶

Far from resigning the church to irrelevance, fearlessly *being* the eschatological community of the gospel enables the church to be relevant to Christ and therefore relevant to the deepest longings of our world. When witness and mission are understood as the church's radical life together, there is tremendous missional potential. Bauman's hope for community in the society of individuals resonates deeply with the corporate Baptist vision of the church as God's covenanted contrast

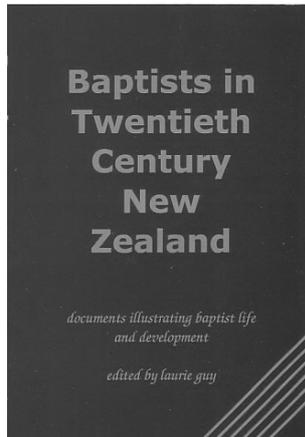
¹⁷⁵ Examples such as Clarence Jordan's *Koinonia Farms* and Tim Costello's ministry at St. Kilda Baptist among the urban poor stand out for their focus on the church *being* the people of God. For the life of Clarence Jordan and the community of Koinonia Farm, see James Wm. McClendon, *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974). 112-139. See also Tim Costello, *Streets of Hope: Finding God in St. Kilda* (Melbourne: Albatross Books, 1998).

¹⁷⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001). 149-50.

community who are gathered together by the Risen Christ in the power of the Spirit, liberated from all other rules and free to be truly human – that is, being in deep *koinonia* with God, and one another.

Andrew Picard
Laidlaw College, Auckland

NZ Baptists - in their own words!

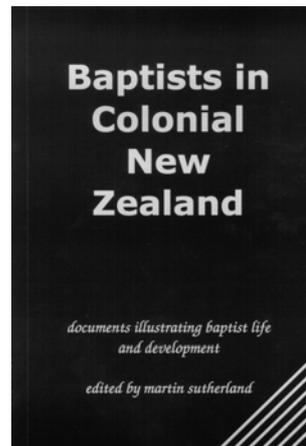


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REVIEWS

Gerald O'Collins, SJ. *Salvation for All: God's Other Peoples*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. (ix + 279 pp.) [ISBN: 978-0-19-923890-3]

Gerald O'Collins is an Australian Roman Catholic theologian who, after 32 years as Professor of Theology at the Gregorian University (Rome), is now Research Professor of Theology at St Marys University College, Twickenham. As an elder statesman of theology O'Collins has established himself as one of the finest theologians working today. His numerous books and articles have established him as an articulate, thoughtful, and faithful representative of classical Christianity.

In the present work O'Collins aim is to examine Scripture and ask what it has to say about those peoples outside the covenant of Israel or the established Church, what O'Collins calls 'God's other peoples.' O'Collins acknowledges that most of Scripture is about those within the covenant community and that God's other peoples are peripheral, but, he sets himself the task of examining what God thinks of these other people and what status they may have in terms of being saved or otherwise. The express focus of the work is a biblical survey which occupies ten chapters, with six chapters summarising the findings and brining them into something of a systematic theology. According to O'Collins, this is one of the few works, perhaps the only such work to attempt to simply present what Scripture has to say about God's other peoples.

Given the credentials of O'Collins and the stated purpose of the work, this book should have been compelling reading and opened up further dialogue on this important subject. Unfortunately this is not the case. The basic premise of O'Collins work appears to be that from Genesis to Revelation Scripture witnesses to God's favourable dealings with many peoples who are not in a formal covenantal relationship with God, and that this relationship is a saving one. O'Collins thus presupposes and presents a strong form of inclusivism, albeit a nuanced one. The problem, however, is that there is just is not enough information in Scripture to support O'Collins' supposition. It is not clear in his case studies that the peoples under review are not part of a covenanted

relationship with God. It is not clear that these so-called 'other peoples' have not come into direct contact with followers of Yahweh or disciples of Christ. Where there is information on God's attitude to these 'others' it is universal in scope and does not refer to salvation. For instance, O'Collins makes much of the universal scope of the Noahic covenant and concludes that God looks favourably on all humanity in a 'decentralized' form of benevolent universalism (p. 12).

In addition to individuals being singled out by O'Collins the religions more generally are also affirmed by him. In a treatment of astral religion O'Collins concludes that all religions, even if inferior to the religion of Israel, are divinely approved (p. 20). In the extended discussion O'Collins claims that God gives astral religions to the nations, that God creates all religions, and thus they are all positive roads to experiencing Yahweh. Thus, while the cult of Israel and the NT church are the supreme examples of God honouring religion, they are not the only ones. To further illustrate, O'Collins finds the stories of Ruth, Naaman the Syrian, Ballam, Amos, the sailors of the Jonah story from the Old Testament, and from the New Testament centurions, the districts of Tyre and Sidon, the demoniac of Gadara, the Samaritan leper, and others to support his case. And yet in each of these stories God's direct revelation is known to the person in question or a general revelation is affirmed but no saving component of the message is included. Thus O'Collins is forced to make ludicrous and unfounded conclusions from the scant evidence he can muster.

Other evidence O'Collins finds includes the fact that the New Testament speaks of Jesus' salvation for all, that at the end-time banquet all the nations will be present, that redemption is for Jew and Gentile, and other such statements. From these O'Collins concludes that all who want to will thus be saved (a form of universalism but universalism as such). O'Collins pays special attention to the Pauline phrase 'all things' and concludes that believers and unbelievers alike are included in God's salvation. According to O'Collins, the burden of Scripture points to the fact that the basis of eternal salvation is merciful deeds, regardless of faith in Jesus Christ or Yahweh. Those who do merciful deeds but are outside of Christ are called 'holy Gentiles' and have an equivalent status to new covenant believers (see p. 134 especially).

O'Collins bases his conclusions on several clear presuppositions: the universal work of Christ necessitates a universal salvation; the sending of the Spirit on all flesh necessitates the salvation of all; and the final eschatological summation of all things in Christ entails that all peoples

who wish to be are in a right relationship with God, regardless of their response to Christ during their lifetime.

Such conclusions on the part of O'Collins put him outside the realm of orthodox Christianity and, perhaps more pertinently, outside the official teaching of the Roman Catholic communion of which he is a part. He writes on p.2 that instead of the traditional Roman Catholic commitment to *extra ecclesiam non saluti* it should be an *extra ???*. One senses the freedom O'Collins perhaps feels in his newly acquired distance from Rome – geographically and perhaps theologically.

It is disappointing that a work which promises so much delivers so little. O'Collins indulges in special pleading, illegitimate inferences, in drawing conclusions from arguments from silence, and in assuming the answers to questions before the evidence has been examined. From a theologian as good as O'Collins this is as surprising as it is disappointing.

Myk Habets

J.L. Walls, and J.R. Dongell. *Why I Am Not a Calvinist*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2004. (230pp.)

R.A. Peterson, and M.D. Williams. *Why I Am Not an Arminian*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2004. (224pp.)

The two volumes under review came out in the same year and were helpfully devised as companion volumes. The idea is a good one: to present the fundamental objections of each system by advocates of the opposing system. The discussion throughout these volumes is marked by an irenic tone, a healthy respect for the other system and its advocates, and an appreciation for the Great Tradition from which both streams of thought flow. A welcome omission in these works is the often-uncharitable polemical nature of the debate that has marked more than one interchange on this topic in the past. This does not mean that the two volumes are not direct, hard hitting, and at times blunt. Both present a coherent, consistent, and lucid discussion of the issues and as such provide a useful overview of these historic systems.

The issue of Arminianism and Calvinism is a perennial one amongst evangelical Christians and in recent years the discussion has become something of a flashpoint, at least in North American evangelicalism. In an Australasian context this may not be quite so acute but systems of

theology, especially these two, are back on the agenda of many, especially baptistic churches. This makes these volumes timely. *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* is written by philosopher Jerry Walls and biblical scholar Joseph Dongell of Asbury Theological Seminary, while *Why I Am Not an Arminian* is written by systematic theologians Robert Peterson and Michael Williams of Covenant Theological Seminary. The two works have much in common but they are not carbon copies of the other. They are, in fact, very different books. The following review is in three parts: first; a review of *Why I Am Not a Calvinist*, second; a review of *Why I Am Not An Arminian*; and third; a critical review of the two works in comparison.

I. *Why I am Not A Calvinist*

Why I Am Not a Calvinist is divided into two parts: the first primarily by Dongell and focuses on the biblical objections to Calvinism; the second primarily by Walls and focuses on the philosophical objections to Calvinism. In the first section Dongell spends a chapter 'Approaching the Bible'; as the title states. This is a very fine introduction to the nature of theological discourse and method and on its own would be of great value. While much wider in its concerns than the Arminian-Calvinist debate it does provide a useful reminder to readers, many of which will be seminary students or pastors, of how to formulate theological ideas and how to present them in gracious dialogue. This chapter is required reading for any who wish to take part in such a debate as this one. Dongell then gets to work in the second chapter 'Engaging the Bible' where he surveys the issues of God's sovereignty, the gracious nature of salvation, and predestination. For each issue the Calvinist position is stated and then an Arminian critique is offered. Not surprisingly Dongell presents a view of corporate election over individual election, and in his focus on Romans 9-11 provides some useful counters to a standard Calvinist exegesis. One of the disappointing things of this chapter, however, was the actual scarcity of biblical texts directly referred to. This tended to diminish the usefulness of this chapter and was an obvious weakness of the book.

Jerry Walls then tackles the philosophical/theological issues that divide Arminians from Calvinists, including the issues of human freedom, divine sovereignty, and pastoral applications. Walls' writes with precision, and is not afraid to draw conclusive summaries from his philosophical surveys. For Calvinists reading this work Walls presents some serious objections and issues that need to be addressed. Walls pays special attention to the works of Packer, Sproul, Piper, Carson, and McGregor-Wright as he mounts an impressive argument against the

consistency of Calvinism. Walls surveys the positions of Molinism, libertarian freedom, determinism, and compatibilist freedom in this section of the work and shows how, in his view, libertarian freedom is the only viable option for a consistent theology which makes sense of Scripture and works in the real world. He shows up weaknesses in the determinist worldview, not in terms of philosophical coherence, but pastoral viability. He also points out, quite effectively, how many Calvinist writers are inconsistent in their application of theology, holding to a determinist view of God's sovereignty but presenting either a compatibilist or a libertarian freedom view of human responsibility. Walls asks that Calvinists be consistent in their theology and if they cannot do this, then their theology is quite obviously faulty. Of the Calvinists who are consistent, including John Piper, Walls is adamant their pastoral application is woefully inadequate.

Throughout this work Westminster or Federal Calvinism is the only form of Calvinism that is interacted with and critiqued; but what of the other streams in this tradition such as the Puritans, or the Scottish Presbyterian Calvinism of the Torrance's? Due to the limited but unstated focus of the critique a slight caricature of Calvinism was implicit throughout the work, despite the occasional but useful citation of Calvin himself. The form of Arminianism represented in these pages is a Wesleyan version, it may be suggested, given the prominence Wesley plays in this account. What was missing, however, was a more nuanced presentation of Wesley's Arminianism, influenced so heavily as it was by Eastern Orthodox theology as mediated through the patristic thinkers predominantly. Arguably, John Wesley's view of divine sovereignty and human freedom was such a nuanced view of Arminianism, but not quite Calvinistic, that it may indeed be a middle-way and deserves more thorough investigation in its own right (something Peterson and Williams address).

Despite the weak biblical section and the rather limited focus on one stream of Calvinism this work succeeds in presenting an honest and polite articulation of why these two thinkers are not Calvinists. This is useful reading and thought provoking, even if it would not be sufficient to persuade Calvinists to change their minds.

II. *Why I am Not An Arminian*

Why I am Not An Arminian consists of nine chapters which canvass the thought of Augustine, the theology surrounding the Synod of Dort, the Arminianism of Wesley and his successors. After a useful introduction the Augustinian-Pelagian controversy is examined as the necessary background to these two systems, with a focus on predestination and

perseverance. Next the Synod of Dort is canvassed followed by a chapter each on freedom, inability, grace, and atonement. As such this is a more systematic work than the earlier volume and exhibits a far greater unity between the two authors than Walls and Dongell achieve. In addition, this work has as its focus a theological exposition of Scripture, something the Walls and Dongell work never succeeded in doing well.

Peterson and Williams point out in the Introduction that they would have preferred to author a book on *Why I am a Calvinist*, pointing out that the false-choice fallacy is a weaker form of argument than that of a constructive argument for a position. They also distance themselves from a polemic against Arminianism and aim to be advocates for Calvinism as the most faithful and coherent way to systematize the biblical material, noting that no system, Calvinism included, is devoid of rough edges and difficulties. In order to achieve this goal the work begins with the following affirmation to show that Arminianism is not a heresy in their opinion: 'The Arminian Christian believes that Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh to save sinners and that the saving work of Christ comes to the sinner by way of the grace of God received through faith. Whatever issues relevant to salvation we disagree upon, let us agree on this: the Calvinist and the Arminian are brothers in Christ' (13). Such a strong affirmation of soteriological solidarity is a welcome start to this irenic volume. In order to be fair this volume interacts with thinkers whom Arminian writers cite as precedent for their own arguments, namely, Jacob Arminius (especially his 'Declaration of Sentiments' and the subsequent 'Remonstrant Articles'), John Wesley, H. Orton Wiley (*Christian Theology*, 3 vols. [Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1940-1943]), H. Ray Dunning (*Grace, Faith and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology* [Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1988]), and J. Ken Grider (*A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* [Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1994]).

In the Augustinian-Pelagian controversy the authors are careful not to paint Pelagius as an arch heretic and then develop a guilt by association tactic for subsequent Arminians (although they do believe Pelagianism to be heretical). In fact, the authors state: 'Arminianism is not Pelagian' (39). Peterson and Williams do a superb job in this section of outlining the differing views of freedom between these two adversaries. For Pelagius, the human will is autonomous and possesses a libertarian freedom. For Augustine, the human will attains freedom by grace such that redemption is monergistic. The authors then state: 'Yet as stark as the difference is between Augustine and Pelagius on sin and grace, they share one thing in common. The structure of each person's understanding of sin and redemption is monergistic' (34). Augustine's was a monergistic view of God's salvation; Pelagius' was a monergistic

view of the meritorious nature of human works. A second point of division was the basic asymmetrical understanding of salvation in the Augustinian tradition such that sin and salvation cannot be treated in the same way. God saves the elect and yet passes over the reprobate. According to Peterson and Williams, Augustine did not hold to double predestination, a point which reappears in the later sections on the theology of Calvin and the Synod of Dort.

In response to the theologies of Augustine and Pelagius the subsequent tradition wrestled with the nature of sin and salvation. In the wake of the Synod of Orange in 529, the theological stage was divided between Augustinians (gracious monergism), Pelagians (meritorious monergism) at the poles, with two mediating groups: Semi-Augustinians (gracious synergism), and the Semi-Pelagians (synergism). In answer to their question 'Where do Calvinism and Arminianism fit?' (39ff), Peterson and Williams reply: 'The Calvinist...closely conforms to Augustine's gracious monergism' (39). The Arminian is not a Pelagian, as already stated, so that leaves either Semi-Pelagian or Semi-Augustinian. According to the authors, Arminians are not Semi-Pelagian as the Semi-Pelagians thought of salvation as beginning with human beings, arguing that we must first seek God; and his grace is a response to our seeking. The Arminians of the 17th century held that the human will has been so corrupted by sin that a person cannot seek grace without the enablement of grace. They therefore affirmed the necessity and priority of grace in redemption. 'This suggests that Arminianism is closer to Semi-Augustinianism than it is to Semi-Pelagianism' (39). Thus 'Semi-Augustinianism was not a Pelagianism that had moved toward Augustine but rather a softening of Augustinianism that sought to modify or excise elements of Augustine's teaching that were found offensive...' (40). This is a helpful schema and establishes clear lines of division between these two systems.

In the subsequent chapter on predestination a theological exposition of Scripture is provided, in which the Arminian position is given, followed by a volley of texts which are claimed to show the individual, unconditional, gracious election of individuals to salvation based on grace not divine foresight of people's faith. The authors move through the election of Abraham, Jacob, and Israel before examining predestination texts in the gospels, focusing especially on the gospel of John, before moving on to Acts, Revelation, and Paul's epistles. The chapter on perseverance examines nine texts claimed to prove that God preserves his people for final salvation (Lk 22.31-32; Jn 6.37, 39-40, 44; 10.27-30; Rom 5.9-10; 8.28-39; Eph 1.13-14; Heb 6.17-20; 7.23-25; and 1 Pt 1.3-5). Arminian objections are raised, taken seriously, and while respected, are rebutted throughout, concluding with statements such as

the following: 'The Arminian rejection of the doctrine of preservation is not due to any lack of clarity in the scriptural witness but is due to a prior commitment to the freedom of the human will in matters pertaining to salvation' (77).

In the second part of the book concerning the Synod of Dort, the Remonstrants, and contemporary Calvinism and Arminianism, Peterson and Williams develop a compelling case that much of the Arminian argument against Calvinism centres around a rebuttal of Calvinistic supralapsarianism (the view that God decreed 1) to save the elect and damn the reprobate, 2) to create both the elect and the reprobate, 3) to permit the fall of humans, 4) to provide salvation for the elect). Peterson and Williams accept the general thesis that Calvinism post-Calvin adopted a greater emphasis upon philosophical and metaphysical concerns than Calvin entertained. Under the leadership of Theodore Beza, Calvin's son-in-law and successor at the Geneva Academy, this scholastic approach led to the dominance of double predestination in Calvinist circles to such an extent that many, Calvinist and Arminian alike, equate Calvinism with supralapsarianism. The authors set themselves the task of correcting this misconception and show that Augustine, Calvin, and the Canons of Dort all affirm an infralapsarianism, and thus all polemic against supralapsarian Calvinism is a caricature of what the authors call 'evangelical' Calvinism. Infralapsarianism (the view that God decreed 1) to create human beings, 2) to permit the fall, 3) to save some and condemn others, 4) to provide salvation for the elect) is presented as the dominant confessional position among Reformed churches (although there is no real support in their work for this contention from the Reformed confessions). Infralapsarianism fits with Augustine's asymmetrical view of the work of Christ and his presentation of passive reprobation. It was Beza's supralapsarianism that Arminius reacted to so strongly in his 1608 'Declaration of Sentiments' in twenty objections. The thesis that true Calvinism is infralapsarian in nature and not supralapsarian is one of the linchpins of Peterson and Williams' argument. In objecting so strongly to supralapsarianism, Arminius also showed his objections to any infralapsarianism as well. For Arminius neither election nor reprobation is causal in any way.

In another crucial move, Peterson and Williams develop the thesis that Arminius was advocating a consistent Molinism as developed by Luis de Molina (1535-1600) and Francisco Suarez (1548-1617). Citing Muller, the authors write: 'Although Arminius nowhere cites either thinker, his argument is quite similar to, and probably based upon, Molina's hypothesis of a divine middle knowledge or *scientia media*: here God

provides the conditions for the future contingent acts of individual human beings.’ Like the Molinists, Arminius sought to bring together a doctrine of divine decree with an affirmation of human freedom through the construct of a cognitive, noncausal divine prescience: God elects or reprobates on the basis of a prior knowledge of human response to sin and the gospel’ (106).

In presenting such a hypothesis Peterson and Williams are following the lead of Richard Muller and other contemporary Calvinists. This is an important move for, if correct, it shows several things: first; Arminius was not a Pelagian or a Semi-Pelagian, second; Arminius was a Semi-Augustinian and it is this synergistic conception of salvation which is enshrined in the 1610 Remonstrance. Accordingly, ‘We believe that the Arminian notion of libertarian free will is false both experientially and biblically. It enshrines an almost idolatrous doctrine of the autonomous human being that is in fact closer to a biblical description of sin than true humanity’ (117). The 1619 Canons of Dort represent a rebuttal of the 1610 Remonstrance and include the now (in)famous ‘Five Points of Calvinism’ which respond to the Five Points of the Remonstrance. Peterson and Williams make clear that the Five Points ‘Do not sufficiently define Calvinism, and certainly do not say all there is to be said about the Reformed faith’ (120). What it does say, however, is important; namely, that a Calvinistic infralapsarianism is faithful to Scripture and thus the Five Points of Calvinism must stand: Total Depravity (not that the Canons of Dort used this terminology), Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints.

The authors conclude their examination of Dort with the comment: ‘The central point of contention between the Calvinists and the early Arminians was whether election is unconditional or conditional upon human acceptance of the gospel, whether salvation is to be understood monergistically – God exercising his sovereign right to choose and save whom he will – or synergistically – God offering salvation to all, but leaving it up to each person to accept the gospel and thus complete the act of salvation: ‘All other issues of dispute emanated from this core disagreement’ (134). What follows is a discussion of differing views of freedom and free will: libertarian (Arminian), compatibilism (Reformed), and determinism (hyper-Calvinist). Through theological exposition and philosophical argument Peterson and Williams attempt to show the superiority of the compatibilist view over any others.

The final chapters examine some of Wesley’s views on prevenient grace and Grotius’s governmental view of the atonement and further the

argument made throughout the book that the Arminian system of theology is not as biblical, or orthodox as that of infralapsarian evangelical Calvinism.

Why I Am Not an Arminian is an important work and makes a clear and consistent case for the superiority of Calvinism over that of Arminianism. The authors are articulate, polite, and erudite, include copious amounts of theological exegesis, and support their arguments with appeals to tradition, philosophy, and pastoral praxis. This is a compelling work which will hold its own against most Arminian protests and, even if not accepted by Arminians, will have to be argued against for Arminians to further a defence of their system.

III. Critical Comparisons

A critical comparison of the two works under review highlights the fact that these are two very different volumes. *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* is more lightweight, includes far less theological exegesis of Scripture, and while strong on philosophical argumentation never quite succeeds in dealing with the heart of the Calvinistic system. As a result its critique lacks compulsion, the theological analysis lacks depth and nuance, and the final appeal rings hollow. *Why I Am Not An Arminian* on the other hand, is a highly nuanced, theologically erudite work which presents Arminianism in the best possible light and then shifts the focus onto a positive construction of Calvinism to counter Arminian claims. Peterson and Williams show a greater understanding of the differing streams of both Arminianism and Calvinism enabling their critique to be more focussed and their advocacy of Calvinism to be that much more convincing. Peterson and Williams also show a greater tendency to acknowledge the weaknesses of their own system and refer to some of the worst advocates of Calvinism in order to highlight the difference between what is at essence Calvinism and what is a caricature of it.

As the two volumes under review were not commissioned to be a rebuttal of each other's arguments directly, it is natural that each volume includes arguments not directly addressed by the other. Walls and Dongell make a number of good philosophical arguments against the consistency of Calvinism, especially Westminster Calvinism. Peterson and Williams address Augustine and Dort, but never comment directly on Westminster or Federal Calvinism (there is not a single entry in the index to Westminster). This is disappointing. If Westminster and some of the more scholastic forms of Calvinism (past and present) were also included in Peterson and Williams' discussion the work may have been of even greater use to Calvinists within those traditions and not simply to Arminians reading the work. This omission is all the more surprising

given the thesis of the work that true or evangelical Calvinism is infralapsarian and not supralapsarian. Does Westminster theology support this claim or not? And what of the accusation of Walls and Dongell that many contemporary Reformed theologians oscillate between compatibilist and libertarian views of human free will? One wonders if Peterson and Williams have limited the true scope of Reformed thought on this issue in order to defend their own versions of Calvinism not only from Arminians but also from some of their fellow Calvinists. If so then a more explicit treatment of these issue would have been welcomed.

Read in tandem these two volumes provide a fine survey of the strengths and weaknesses of the two systems and show why the issue of Calvinism vs Arminianism is a perennial point of contention in the church. In the wake of these two introductory volumes expect to see a number of more specific works come off the printing presses that seek to pick up the discussion these two works have initiated. If subsequent works can show the same irenic and Christian tone of these works then the church has much to be thankful to these authors for.

Myk Habets

Anthony N.S. Lane. *A Reader's Guide to Calvin's Institutes*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009. (174 pp.) [ISBN: 978-0-8010-3731-3]

Anthony Lane (Professor of Historical Theology, London School of Theology) is one of the leading Calvin scholars working today and has established a reputation for his articulate, precise, and exhaustive knowledge of Calvin, his contexts, sources, and theology. Over numerous books and articles Lane has proved himself a reliable and sympathetic reader of Calvin's thought, and yet as a first rate scholar he is able to turn the critical spotlight on Calvin and show where and how his theology is as much a product of his time as it is prophetic to his time. In this work Lane provides a 'reader's guide' to the 1559 edition of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* as it is found in the McNeill-Battles English translation (Westminster, 1960). As such this work is to be used specifically in conjunction with this English translation, with page numbers matching that work.

What is a reader's guide? It is a brief outline, summary, comment, and direction through the four large books of the *Institutes* and the eighty

chapters contained therein. For each Book and for each Chapter Lane provides a concise introduction which outlines the context and content of this part of the *Institutes*. This in itself is an extremely useful resource for those new to the work and a good reminder for those more familiar with it. For each major section Lane also provides a few questions to help focus the student as they read through the selected portion of the *Institutes*. Next follows summaries of each Section and select paragraphs, indicating which paragraphs to read from the *Institutes* and which to skip due to their historically localised nature or polemical content which is not essential reading today. In addition to these features Lane makes lucid and succinct comments on a variety of issues including theology, history, and the reliability or otherwise of the Battles translation, its footnotes, and other detailed features. The volume concludes with a two-page appendix which is a ‘Table of Reading Lengths’ which tells approximately how many pages of the McNeill-Battles edition of Calvin’s *Institutes* are covered in each reading Lane has included. On average each reading is a manageable eighteen pages.

To take one example to illustrate how the work proceeds consider *Institutes* 1.6-9, ‘The Bible and the Holy Spirit’ (pp. 42-48). Lane provides a one paragraph introduction which summarises chapters 6-9, followed by the following Questions to ask as the *Institutes* are read:

Why do we need the Bible (1.6)? How does the Spirit bear witness to the Word, and what part does rational argument play in this (1.7-8)? How should we react to alleged manifestations of the Holy Spirit (1.9)? (p. 43.)

Then follows the summaries of the selected paragraphs of these sections, namely: 1.6-7; 1.8.1, 13; 1.9. On *Institutes* 1.6.2 he comments: ‘The importance of Scripture and our need to study it. Calvin refers to the world as a theatre, even before Shakespeare’s ‘All the world’s a stage,’ (p. 43). On *Institutes* 1.7.4 we read:

Notice the first two sentences. Arguments of the authority of Scripture have some value but do not suffice. If we are to have the certainty that we need, we require the ‘secret testimony of the Spirit’ (sentence before footnote 12). In paragraph 2, we see why arguments do not suffice (see the first sentence). Arguments give birth to probable opinions, not to the certainty of fait. In the section after footnote 14, especially observe the reference to Isaiah, which gives us the heart of Calvin’s case. Until the Spirit illumines our minds, we ever waver among many doubts (last sentence). (P. 45.)

One can see how Lane acts as a guide through the *Institutes*, bringing in ripe observations and informed scholarship, yet never allowing his own voice to eclipse that of Calvin's.

Lane designed the *Reader* to be used in classes on Calvin to aid teachers in getting students into the *Institutes* and actually reading it for themselves. The division of the readings into eighteen pages and the succinct comments Lane provides to guide readers through the work are brilliantly devised and most welcome. There is no doubt this text will be widely used in classrooms around the globe. Lane has done the academy a service in showing how a good reading course on the *Institutes* can proceed and as such has saved many of us a lot of time. I for one will turn to this book whenever students ask me to take them through the *Institutes* either in private reading groups or as part of a taught course. Now for Baker to contract someone to do the same with Barth's *Church Dogmatics*!

Myk Habets

John Piper. *John Calvin and His Passion for the Majesty of God*. Nottingham: IVP, 2009. (59 pp.) [ISBN: 978-1-84474-356-8]

John Piper is pastor for preaching and vision at Bethlehem Baptist Church in the USA and while he is not a Calvin scholar he is one of the most widely recognised Calvinists writing today. Author of over forty books, Piper's work shows a consistent theme – to magnify the glory and majesty of God, captured in one of his many catchphrases, 'God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.' Such a motif as this provides a rationale for the books he writes centred as they are on Reformed figures and Calvinian theology. The present volume is no different as chapter one, 'God Is Who He Is' (a mere four pages) testifies to: it has nothing to do with Calvin directly but is an apologetic for the work: 'the unhidden and unashamed aim in this book is to fan the flame of your passion for the centrality and supremacy of God' (p. 12).

The present work is an extremely thin volume and is a reprint of what originally appeared as a chapter in *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy: God's Triumphant Grace in the Lives of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin* (2000). The Quincentenary of Calvin's birth was the occasion to republish the chapter on Calvin as a separate volume. Added to this volume is a brief four-page foreword by Gerald Bray. Seven chapters and an appendix

provide Piper enough scope to lay bare the life of John Calvin in order to bring out the central theme of his life: the all-consuming and constraining majesty of God over all things. This is then, a tiny biography of John Calvin, with the zeal to illustrate the glory of God (p. 16) in all things as the controlling motif.

Piper chooses to open his life of Calvin with his reply to Cardinal Sadolet in 1538. As is well known, Sadolet wrote to the citizens of Geneva appealing to them to return to Roman Catholicism after their recent tryst with the Protestant Reformation. Despite being exiled from Geneva at the time, Calvin wrote a reply to Sadolet in six days and it has remained one of the outstanding treatises both of Calvin's time or any other. Piper starts here for it outlines what he sees as central to all of Calvin's life and thought. Calvin's chief contention with Rome was that it had displaced the centrality, supremacy, and majesty of the glory of God. Calvin recommends that Sadolet follows Calvin's example and aim to 'set before [man], as the prime motive of his existence, zeal to illustrate the glory of God' (p. 16). It now becomes obvious why Piper chose to begin here.

Chapter Three examines Calvin's doctrine of the assurance of salvation, based as it was on both the Word written and the Holy Spirit (the 'internal testimony of the Holy Spirit'). What unites both in Calvin's experience, and by derivation in the experience of all Christ's followers, is the Word mediates the majesty of God and the majesty of God vindicates the Word so that believers can have a firm and fixed assurance of salvation that is centred on God and not on the self (as became the case in post Reformation Reformed theology and in many forms of contemporary evangelicalism). Chapter Four details how Calvin's many works, filling forty-eight volumes, were 'hammered out on the anvil of pastoral responsibility' (p. 32). Piper's point is that Calvin was not an ivory-tower academic working in tranquil isolation (despite this being what he wanted). Instead, Calvin was the consummate pastor-scholar, one who lived to serve Christ's church. Chapter Five acts as something of a cameo as Calvin's marriage to Idelette, the birth of their three children who all died young, and the eventual death of Idelette is chronicled. Calvin the man, the husband, the father, and the emotional and tender lover are on display here. Clearly Piper is trying to establish a rounded view of Calvin against the many caricatures he has received. In Chapter Six Calvin's constant ill-health and unpopularity are mentioned in order to highlight the constancy of his perseverance. Piper highlights the fact that Calvin applied to himself the goal he encouraged in others when in his commentary on Job 33.1-7 he calls preachers to an 'invincible constancy' (p. 44). Chapter Seven continues this theme but

turns the spotlight on Calvin's commitment to expounding the Word of God in the pulpit and on paper.

Throughout this little volume Piper's prose is spritely and focussed on the central motif outlined in the first chapter. Some key snapshots of Calvin's life are helpfully brought into focus and Calvin the man, not the myth (this accounts for the inclusion of the small appendix entitled 'Calvin's Barbaric World: The Case of Michael Servetus,' pp.53-59), stands out as a warm, committed, serious, sinner redeemed by God and living in the gracious awareness that were it not for God in Christ he would be nothing.

Piper's work does border on hagiography as he paints Calvin in the best light and rarely if ever takes a contrary position to his. Calvin scholars will not find anything here they don't know already and those that aren't familiar with Calvin or dislike him are unlikely to buy or read this work. That leaves those already predisposed to Calvin and his thought as the most likely target audience, but they would pass over such a work as this for more substantial treatments like that of Charles Partee's recent work. If anyone other than such an economic draw card as Piper had written this work it surely would not have been accepted for publication. In my opinion this little volume worked best when it was part of a larger work that traced common themes across several key thinkers.

Myk Habets

***The Lord's Supper: Five Views.* Gordon T. Smith, ed. Downers Grove: IVP, 2008. (157 pp.) [ISBN: 978-0-8303-2884-5]**

***Understanding Four Views on the Lord's Supper.* P.E. Engle and J.H. Armstrong, eds. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007. (224 pp.) [ISBN: 978-0-310-26268-8]**

Multi-views books by major publishers are now standard fare and have proven to be useful teaching aids and informative introductions to many areas of study. The latest topic to be considered from two of the major Christian publishers concerns differing views on the Lord's Supper. In these two books we are treated to a discussion between established scholars from differing traditions as they critically interact with each other's perspective.

In *The Lord's Supper: Five Views* from IVP the five views canvassed are: the Roman Catholic view by J. Gros F.S.C, the Lutheran view by J.R.

Stephenson, the Reformed view by L. Van Dyk, the Baptist view by R.E. Olson, and the Pentecostal view by V-M, Kärkkäinen. Each contributor was specifically instructed to relate their discussion to key aspects of *BEM, Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (1982) and comment on three defining questions: the person and work of Christ, the nature and mission of the Church, and the nature of the Christian life and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Each contributor took these instructions seriously and sought, to a greater or lesser extent, to do so. This gives a focus to the book which is helpful and informative. It also grounds each of the views in an ecclesial context rather than merely leaving the discussion at the level of theory.

In the IVP work each response is limited to two pages, sometimes less than that. These are incredibly concise responses, too concise in fact for the contributors to really respond in substantial and critical ways which would fulfil the task set by the editor of inviting robust and critical interaction with different views. Unlike other multi-view books these responses tended to be big picture comments rather than providing some specific critique. As such the value of the response are limited. Very rarely in this volume do the contributors make substantive critical comments which inform the reader and illustrate a charitable difference of view. Having said this, the work does model charitable and articulate presentations of theological ideas and gracious dialogue from significant ecclesial traditions.

The inclusion of a Baptist and a Pentecostal view was extremely useful to have, given the Baptists can trace their movement back to the Reformation and there are an estimated 463 million adherents today. The problems associated with both groups, however, are that neither of them have centralised governmental bodies, nor do they have settled theological positions on the sacraments. Both Olson and Kärkkäinen acknowledge this fact and thus present a position which they consider to represent most adherents of the respective traditions. As Olson states: 'This brings us to the problem of defining *'the* Baptist view of the Lord's Supper.' No such thing exists. There probably is general consensus among Baptists about what the Lord's Supper *is not* (e.g., a means of grace), but little real consensus about what it *is*' (p. 93). Olson then turns to a brief historical survey to make his point. According to Olson, the Baptist tradition began in 1525 with Anabaptism and a basic Zwinglian - memorialist view of the sacraments, a view most Baptists would probably accept. To illustrate the general Baptist theology of the Lord's Supper Olson proceeds to canvass its theological history, creeds, confessions, and significant figures for crucial reflection upon the meaning and significance of the Lord's Supper. What is especially

interesting are some of the more contemporary reflections which are happy to move towards a more realistic and thus Reformed view of the presence of Christ in the bread and wine. Olson is clear to remind readers that this may not be the view of most laypeople in Baptist churches but it is one of the directions Baptist scholarship is pursuing.

In the responses to Olson's contribution the other contributors note and appreciate the emphasis on individual faith within the Baptist tradition. Gros, a Roman Catholic notes that '...the significance of conversion, personal faith and the gathered community, not to mention the untiring witness to religious freedom – these are the biblical heritage all Christians, stewarded by the Baptists' communities' (p. 110). Stephenson, a Lutheran, fails to see how the position outlined by Olson is any different from the standard Reformed view and doesn't step back from distancing a Lutheran view from it when he writes, '...I find the three 'Reformed' contributors united in denying the all-decisive word and deed of the supreme Teacher of Christendom, Christ our enfleshed God...Like Luther...I will take 'pure blood with the pope' any day over 'mere wine' with those to whom the Reformer referred with an uncomplimentary epithet (*Schwärmer*...). Why do none of the three descendants of Zwingli deal with Paul's commentary on the words of institution, which simply do not mesh with any of the species of Reformed doctrine that they set forth?' (p. 112). Van Dyk simply notes the many convergences between a Baptist and Reformed view of the Lord's Supper, while Kärkkäinen, from a Pentecostal perspective, expresses his desire that 'I would love to hear more about the christological and ecclesiological ramifications...Or is it the case that a faithful presentation of Baptist sacramentology dare not say too much of either Christology or ecclesiology for the simple reason that the movement's emphases have not been there when it comes to the spirituality and theology of the Lord's Supper?' (p. 116). Significant food for thought for Baptists wanting to think through their sacramentology today!

The second work under review appears in Zondervan's 'Counterpoint' series and is in direct competition with the IVP book. *Understanding Four Views on the Lord's Supper* includes the Baptist view by R.D. Moore, the Reformed view by I.J. Hesselink, the Lutheran view by D.S. Scaer, and the Roman Catholic view by T.A. Baima. The same format is followed in that each view is presented and then the other contributors provide concise critical replies. In addition the Eerdmans work includes two appendices, the first including statements on the Lord's Supper in Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms (pp. 160-181), the second consists of various quotations on the Lord's Supper from well known figures in

the history of the church (pp. 182-204). The first appendix was useful, the second seemed unnecessary. (The IVP concludes with a select annotated bibliography and is of immense use as a quick reference guide to works on the sacraments from the representative traditions [pp. 149-154].)

The responses in this work range from two pages to over five and thus constitute a more substantial interaction with each contributors work than in the IVP work. This can be illustrated by focussing on the Baptist view once again. Moore presents a memorialist view of the Lord's Supper, an ordinance – not a sacrament – in Baptist understanding. In response to some baptistic practice he helpfully clarifies the sign aspect of the Lord's Supper and gives a compelling argument that it should be more of a celebration, a 'victory lap' (p. 33) which announces the triumph of Christ over the powers of sin, death, and Satan. This sets Moore up to expound the Lord's Supper as proclamation and as communion. Moore asks Baptists to think about celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly, and making it a compelling part of the service both for believers and visitors alike. Along the way Moore comments on the role of the community, the individual, and church discipline as implications of a memorialist view of the Supper.

The responses to Moore's chapter are not surprisingly varied. Hesselink, from a Reformed perspective, likes much of what he sees but asks Moore to explain just what the Supper is a sign of. In his estimation Moore (and Baptists generally) are unable to clearly state what it is the sign signifies. This leaves the baptistic view insufficient in his opinion. Scaer, a Lutheran, provides a lengthy response in which he gives no ground, arguing that the Lutheran view of the Lord's Supper is diametrically opposed to the Baptist view. The major disagreement is over the nature of the presence of Christ in the elements. In his estimation Lutheran theology recognises the presence of Christ in the elements while the Baptist view settles for a memory of the presence of Christ only, thus, strictly speaking, a Baptist view of the Lord's Supper is less than a sacrament and more of a human ritual. Baima, the Roman Catholic respondent, offers a gracious summary of where Moore's thought could be acceptable to Catholics, and then points out some continuing differences, notably that the Baptist view does not recognise in the elements anything more than bread and wine which bring to memory what Christ has done rather than also being a real participation in the work of Christ through his body and his blood.

The editors of both volumes expressed their desire to include more essays representing the wider Christian traditions, both specifically

mentioning the views of the Eastern Orthodox, yet space did not permit such an extensive survey. Each also identifies key aspects of debate, what Armstrong calls the 'two most important questions', namely, (1) What is the meaning and significance of this Supper? (2) Why should we regularly celebrate the Lord's Supper in our church communions? (see pp. 153-159). Both volumes are useful surveys of contemporary thought, both offer initial critiques of each position, and both will prove useful for laypeople, clergy, and teachers.

Myk Habets

Brian Haymes, Ruth Gouldbourne and Anthony R. Cross *On Being the Church: Revisioning Baptist Identity* (Studies in Baptist History and Thought 21). Milton Keynes, Paternoster, 2008. (217 pp). [ISBN: 978-1-84227-121-6]

This valuable series has offered a wide range of historical treatments of Baptist experience. Baptist theology has been less well represented. To date a standout has been *Track and Traces* (2003), a collection of material on Baptist identity and practice by Paul Fiddes, who contributes a typically incisive foreword to the volume under review. *On Being the Church* takes a number of key discussions forward in a thorough and stimulating manner. The authors have been key figures in Baptist debate in Britain for many years. All have an association with Bristol Baptist College and two (Haymes and Goldbourne) have been or are in ministry at Bloomsbury Baptist Church in London.

The book is a collaborative effort in the most difficult sense of being co-written. Rather than individual chapters or sections being identified with particular authors, all three present the whole as their joint work. As they acknowledge in their preface, this has made the process longer, but perhaps more authentic. In any case the result is a cogent picture of many aspects of ecclesiology from both a Baptist and a Trinitarian perspective. Thus the first substantive chapter talks about God and the *missio Dei*, setting up in turn a general picture of God's people and their calling. Attention then moves to the shape, boundaries, life and practices of this people followed by the implications for the church's engagement with other faiths, society and the cosmos.

The effort at collaborative writing has been rewarded. The authors together present an integrated picture of the church which is at once

continuous with the heritage of Baptist thought and at the same time sharpens and extends some of the important categories. Key among these is the crucial significance of the presence of Christ. This is particularly well thought through in the chapter (6) on the Lord's Supper in which it is argued that Christ's real presence is located in the gathered community. 'Our practice asserts that our conviction is that when we meet in the name of Christ then we can depend on the promise of God that Christ will be present among us' (p 135). Communion together in Christ has both past, present and future aspects and direct implications for discipline, unity, ministry and mission. 'At the table we are united with Christ, given his identity, and sent into the world as his community' (p 151).

This is a fine volume of Baptist thought from the English tradition. It represents well an authentic style and trajectory in ecclesiology and adds significant *mana* to Paternoster's already excellent series.

Martin Sutherland

Timothy Keller. *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Scepticism*. New York: Dutton, 2008 (278 pp.) [978-0-525-95049-3]

Tim Keller's first full length book came off the press in February 2008 and directly onto best seller lists around the Western World. Keller has been the pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, New York City, for 20 years. For more than half of these he has hosted an evening Question and Answer session with any who wanted to stay to ask him any question regarding the God of the Bible, the Scriptures, etc. (You can hear many of these Q&A sessions here: http://www.monergism.com/directory/link_category/Redeemer-Q--A-Sessions/.) This book contains the fruit of these sessions.

The Reason for God has been called the *Mere Christianity* for the 21st century. It is no surprise to see Keller quoting Lewis more than any other author in this book. It is also quite evident that Keller has lived up to this assessment. Keller effectively serves this generation in the same way C.S. Lewis served his and for this we ought to be very thankful. *Publishers Weekly* has called *The Reason for God* '[A book] written for sceptics and for the believers who love them...' Keller wrote this book for the sceptics of the 21st century from a heart that truly desires to see their questions answered from Scripture. He deliberately approached a

non-Christian publisher in the hope that this would place the book in bookstores and venues where non-Christians would see it. Although this book has been read by a significant number of Christians to be sure, it is being read by many non-Christians as well, a result of Keller's efforts.

In *The Reason for God*, Keller starts from the presupposition that all people are people of faith. There are no non-believers. There are certainly sceptics when related to the Christian faith, but those sceptics still believe something. In his book Keller attempts to answer some of the most common questions asked today by these sceptics and to show the inadequacies in their own faith commitments. He then continues to give a clear and compelling argument in defence of the Christian faith.

The book divides nicely into two main sections with an introduction, and Intermission (between the two sections) and an Epilogue. Section one is titled 'The Leap of Doubt' and answers seven common critiques: 1) There can't be just one true religion, 2) A good God could not allow suffering, 2) Christianity is a straitjacket, 4) The church is responsible for so much injustice, 5) A loving God would not send people to hell, 6) Science has disproved Christianity, and 7) You can't take the Bible literally. In the second half of the book, titled 'The Reasons for Faith,' he turns to an examination of seven reasons to believe in the claims of the Christian faith: 1) The clues of God, 2) The knowledge of God, 3) The problem of sin, 4) Religion and the gospel, 5) The (true) story of the cross, 6) The reality of the resurrection, and 7) The Dance of God.

For some Christian readers of *The Reason for God* there will be frustration that Keller does not deal with Creation/Evolution very decisively, has a non-traditional description of Hell, and can be quite ecumenical at times. Although this reviewer sees the first two of these as weakness, this certainly does not outweigh the tremendous value of the book for Christians and non-Christian alike.

By reading and thinking deeply through Keller's arguments found in *The Reason for God* the non-Christian will see their worldview challenged at every turn and the Christian will be strengthened in their faith along with wonderfully equipped to more graciously engage their sceptic friends, etc. with the powerful, saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. A free PDF study guide and related audio/video resources for the book are available at <http://www.thereasonforgod.com/book.php>.

Joe Fleener

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