

Editorial

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This volume of the *Journal of European Baptist Studies* includes a range of topics, from ethical discussions to preaching and church history. The first four articles are the fruit of a conference which was held in May 2022, at the International Baptist Theological Study Centre, in Amsterdam. The conference, under the title ‘The Heart of Christian Ethics’ explored issues, such as sacredness, justice, forgiveness, truthfulness, and love. The launching platform for academic discussions was Professor David Gushee’s recent book *Introducing Christian Ethics: Core Convictions for Christians Today*. In the opening presentation, Gushee explained his approach to discussing ethics and underlined his methodological hallmarks. This survey, introducing both the conference and the book, is also an opening text for this *JEBS* issue.

This initial chapter is followed by three responses to Gushee’s ideas, promoting further discussion. Gushee’s academic conversation partners are Tommaso Manzoni, Erica Whitaker, and Lee Spitzer. Manzoni engages with the central issue of Gushee’s discourse on Christian ethics — that of truth and truthfulness. In what ways is the church a community of truth? Whitaker wrestles with the difficult question of collective forgiveness, especially for white Baptist churches in the United States of America. Whitaker analyses the nature of the challenges met by the ecclesial communities who are ready to repent and seek forgiveness for the past practices of slavery, and what the steps forward might be. Spitzer offers appreciative, yet critical response to Gushee’s understanding of the sacredness of life and justice ethics. Spitzer’s article ‘considers how *personality* as an integral aspect of *imago Dei* impacts the ethical discussion of Christian justice concerns’, especially in relation to the Holocaust and racism.

The next five articles, in a way a second part of the journal issue, bring together topics which have been and continue to be important for Baptists in Europe and beyond. Andrew Messmer argues that, in addition to infant baptism, the early church also practised some form of infant dedication which was followed by an enrollment into the catechumenate. This, according to the author, was more widespread than is usually supposed. The article draws some conclusions for the present day, especially for ecumenical relations. Preaching has also been an important aspect of Baptist worship, mission, and theological reflection. Stuart Blythe uses the novel metaphor of graffiti to describe and analyse the practice of preaching, emphasising preaching's performative nature. Blythe also contends that the graffiti metaphor helps to see other aspects of preaching that may go unnoticed when employing more conventional 'images'; aspects such as its artistic, interruptive, and ephemeral nature.

Alistair Cuthbert's contribution can be read together with Whitaker's article. Cuthbert argues for a robust theology of forgiveness and reconciliation lest the reparation of human relationships be degraded to only formal lip service without genuine transformation. The article develops its argument in a conversation with Paul Fiddes' theology of reconciliation which is rooted in a dynamic understanding of the Trinity. In addition, Samuel Davidson, in his treatise 'Toward a Baptist Theology of Creation', offers a discussion about Baptist modes of creation theology, which draws inspiration from Willie Jennings, and engages with Paul Fiddes and Stephen Holmes as conversation partners. The author emphasises that ecclesiology and creation theology are interrelated and inform each other: both doctrines are oriented towards a better understanding of how 'a given place is created and sustained by God in its ecological interdependence'. For a reader interested in eco-theology, it is worth mentioning that *JEBS* has published other articles in a similar vein; for example Helle Liht's article 'Beyond Instrumentalism and Mere Symbolism: Nature as Sacramental' (2020, issue no. 2).

The last article in this volume is like an anchor, fastening the diverse discussion in historical awareness. Ian Randall's article gives an analytical survey of the way in which the General Baptist Missionary Society, established in 1816, worked to develop a mission in Orissa, India between the 1860s and the 1880s. This original historical research is based on primary sources, especially the Society's monthly magazine the *Missionary Observer*, allowing the author to throw light on a number of aspects of this successful Baptist missionary endeavour: developing churches and engaging in social ministry, exploring and strengthening Baptist convictions, and building wider relations.

I also draw readers' attention to the rich variety of book reviews that *JEB S* book editor Dr Dorothy McMillan collates for each issue. These reviews offer a window into what has been recently published by a wide network of scholars — both in Baptist theology and history and beyond — and provide insight into how these publications could be helpful and inspiring in research, teaching, and learning. I thoroughly recommend reading the book review section of *JEB S* together with the articles.

