

Interdependency without Imperialism: Neville Callam's Ecumenical Contributions

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Abstract

This article, originally presented as the presidential address for the annual meeting of the National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion Region-at-Large,¹ explores the contributions to the ecumenical movement of Neville Callam, who served as General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance from 2007 until 2017. The article treats Callam's contributions to ecumenism in terms of the background of his own ecumenical formation, the ecumenical service of his ministerial career prior to his election as BWA General Secretary, his ecumenical leadership of the BWA, and the ecumenical theology articulated in his publications. The article characterises Callam's ecumenical vision as one rooted in the ecclesial interdependence that marks Baptist congregational ecclesiology despite its tendencies toward a more radical congregational independence, but an interdependent ecumenism that resists an imperialism to which some approaches to ecumenical convergence are susceptible.

Keywords

Neville Callam; Baptist World Alliance; ecumenism

Introduction

The Baptist World Alliance — the Christian world communion for Baptists founded in 1905 — has as one of its constitutional objectives 'to promote understanding and cooperation among Baptist bodies and

¹ An earlier version of this article was presented as the presidential address for the annual meeting of the National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion Region-at-Large during the College Theology Society Annual Convention, Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, Connecticut, 4 June 2022.

with other Christian groups, in keeping with our unity in Christ'.² All of the nine General Secretaries of the BWA from J. H. Rushbrooke to Elijah Brown have contributed to advancing this objective through their service in that role, but arguably none more so than Neville Callam — not only through the ecumenical dimensions of his leadership of the BWA, but as a published Baptist ecumenical theologian in his own right. This article explores Neville Callam's ecumenical contributions in terms of the ecumenical formation he received, the ecumenical service of his ministerial career prior to his election as BWA General Secretary, his ecumenical leadership of the BWA, and the ecumenical theology articulated in his publications. The main title of this article, 'Interdependence without Imperialism', expresses something of the distinctiveness of Callam's ecumenical vision: an ecumenism rooted in the ecclesial interdependence that marks Baptist congregational ecclesiology in spite of its tendencies toward a more radical congregational independence, but an interdependent ecumenism that resists an imperialism to which some approaches to ecumenical convergence are susceptible.

Callam's Ecumenical Formation

Callam's election in 2007 as the eighth General Secretary of the BWA was significant in no small measure because he was the first (and thus far only) non-European and non-American to serve in that role. Four General Secretaries have been from the United States, and five from Europe (one from the United Kingdom, two from Norway, and one from Germany). But Callam's Jamaican identity not only diversified the top leadership of the BWA; his formation by the Baptists of Jamaica and by their distinctive patterns of ecumenical relationships helped shape the convictions that guided his ecumenical leadership of the global Baptist community. Callam on multiple occasions has credited his Jamaican formation as a primary influence on his ecumenical outlook, and in retirement he completed a book manuscript of 272 pages (single-

² Baptist World Alliance, 'Constitution of the BWA', <<https://secureservercdn.net/166.62.112.219/o7e.4a3.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/BWA-Constitution-and-Bylaws-2020.pdf>> [accessed 3 January 2023], 'Preamble' and 'II. Objectives'.

spaced) titled *Ecumenism in Jamaica, 1890–2021*.³ Callam began researching and writing the book in 1981, but put it on hiatus when he became BWA General Secretary in 2007 and resumed work on the project in 2018 following his retirement. It is a work of thoroughly documented historiography that also gives expression to Callam’s own ecumenical theology; it will make important contributions to ecumenical studies as well as to scholarship on Jamaican Christianity. A companion book titled *Fading Ecumenical Dream* documents eighteen collaborative ecumenical initiatives introduced in Jamaica during the period covered by *Ecumenism in Jamaica* — some of which have more recently de-emphasised or abandoned their original ecumenical aims (a phenomenon with parallels in my own North American context, it should be said).⁴ This article draws from the account of ecumenism in Jamaica in these works as it relates to Callam’s own ecumenical formation. The article will return later to the perspectives on ecumenical theology expressed therein, along with other published sources for Callam’s ecumenical perspectives.

In the first two chapters of *Ecumenism in Jamaica*, Callam narrates the history of the arrival of the Christian traditions in Jamaica — the story not only of the arrival of Christianity, but also of the introduction of the churches’ divisions that would call for a Jamaican ecumenism. Missionary work by Catholics, Anglicans, Quakers, Moravians, Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries established those traditions in Jamaica that came to be known as the ‘mainline churches’ of that context, but this work was entangled with European colonialism and its importation of enslaved Africans to the island. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which saw the ending of slavery in Jamaica and eventually Jamaican independence from Great Britain, those traditions were joined by Congregationalists,

³ Neville R. Callam, *Ecumenism in Jamaica, 1890–2021* (unpublished book manuscript, 2022). At the time of writing this article, plans for the publication of this book manuscript were not yet finalised. I am grateful to Callam for sharing the manuscript with me in connection with my research for this article.

⁴ Neville R. Callam, *Fading Ecumenical Dream* (unpublished book manuscript, 2022). Likewise, at the time of writing, plans for the publication of this book manuscript were not yet finalised. I am grateful to Callam for sharing the manuscript with me in connection with my research for this article.

the Christian Church (or Disciples of Christ), the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Salvation Army, the Church of God, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (the latter was established in Jamaica in response to an invitation from Rastafarian leaders who desired the presence of an indigenous African expression of Christianity in Jamaica). While the modern ecumenical movement arose in part out of the missionary recognition of the scandal of a divided evangelisation, in Jamaica the impetus for seeking the unity of the church developed rather differently. In a paper Callam presented to a World Council of Churches Faith and Order Consultation with Younger Theologians in Finland in 1995 — over a decade before his election as BWA Secretary — Callam made these observations:

One major problem resulting from the evangelization of the Caribbean region is the preponderance of churches of numerous confessional groupings which were 'planted' by missionaries who were too busy compiling statistical reports to send to their homelands, to attest to their 'success' and to justify the continuing financial commitment required, to find time to engage in the kind of ministry which takes St John 17 seriously [...] The churches led by the missionaries manifested little or no interest in the problem the churches pose for the church.

With the development in Caribbean churches of an increased awareness of the theological implications of our history and the commitment to working out a theology which rejects self-disparagement and self-hate, the churches began to discover how the divisions among them have hindered the effective fulfilment of the ministry to be carried out. The divisions were understood as a sign of the strategy, sometimes framed without an awareness of its devastating consequences, to divide and rule the oppressed people who had recently been evangelized. The development of local Councils of Churches and of such instruments as the Caribbean Conference of Churches represents efforts to meet the need to work together in the one ministry which has been given to the church by other than human agency.

If interchurch co-operation was motivated by a desire to protest against the taken-for-granted divisions which characterise us, it was predicated, also, on the need to unite in the face of a hostile social context which had not yet emerged from captivity to an implanted mentality which was insensitive to Caribbean reality. In the church in the Caribbean region, the road to unity is paved not with the stones of doctrine and constitution, but with the marl of a deeply felt community sense

emerging from a common history of slavery and emancipation [...] In addition, we believe we have received a missional mandate which requires us, who are united by a history and culture over which the Triune God is sovereign, to live out our dignity together in community to the glory of God. The route to unity taken by the historic Faith and Order Movement may be differently directed.⁵

This last sentence was by no means a rejection of Faith and Order approaches to ecumenical convergence, but a recognition that this vital stream of the ecumenical movement has not always driven the ecumenical commitments of the Caribbean churches and that they nonetheless have embodied the church's call to unity in other distinctive ways that further the one ecumenical movement. More will be said about Callam's positive assessment of the Faith and Order stream of the one ecumenical movement later in this article.

In the section on the Baptists in *Ecumenism in Jamaica*, Callam recounts the history of Jamaican Baptists from the missionary work in the 1780s of formerly enslaved African American George Liele, the first Black person to be ordained to Christian ministry in colonial America, to the present, giving particular attention to the ecumenical commitments of the Jamaican Baptists. These are reflected in the ecumenical antislavery advocacy prior to emancipation and collaborative support of integral human development in Jamaica ever since, but also in the participation of Jamaican Baptists in the institutional structures of the modern ecumenical movement. The Jamaica Baptist Union was a founding member of the Union of Evangelical Churches in Jamaica in 1895 (which became the Jamaica Council of Evangelical Churches in 1900) and of the Council of Christian Churches in Jamaica in 1922. While it was not one of the founding Baptist member unions of the World Council of Churches, the

⁵ Neville R. Callam, 'F&O: A Perspective from the Caribbean', paper presented to a World Council of Churches Faith and Order Consultation with Younger Theologians, Turku, Finland, 3–11 August 1995 <<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/fo-a-perspective-from-the-caribbean>> [accessed 3 January 2023]. Livingstone Thompson, on the other hand, attributes the origins of ecumenical engagement in the Caribbean in general and in Jamaica in particular, to the influence of the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910 and the participation in that conference of missionaries from the denominations with a missionary presence in the Caribbean (Thompson, 'Ecumenism in the Caribbean', *Ecumenical Review*, 53, no. 3 (July 2011), 421–427). The perspectives of Callam and Thompson on the roots of Caribbean/Jamaican ecumenism are not mutually exclusive.

Jamaica Baptist Union officially joined the WCC as a member church in 1995 after having already supplied official representatives to the WCC's Standing Commission on Faith and Order for decades: Horace Russell served in the role from 1968 to 1990, and then Neville Callam himself did so from 1992 to 2007 (Glenroy Lalor succeeded Callam in representing the Jamaica Baptist Union on the Commission on Faith and Order). On multiple occasions, Neville has credited his current ecumenical convictions to his initial Christian formation by Jamaican Baptists. Thanks to this formation, he could not imagine that there was any other way to be a Christian, or a Baptist Christian, than to be ecumenical.

An important means of Callam's ecumenical formation in Jamaica was the United Theological College of the West Indies. That institution, which in 1975 awarded him the Diploma in Ministerial Studies in connection with his Bachelor of Arts in Theological Studies from the University of the West Indies, embodied the Jamaican commitment to ecumenical relationships and was a significant means of fostering these relationships. Baptist theological education in Jamaica had an earlier history that began with the foundation of the Calabar Theological College in 1843. Presbyterians had established a Theological Hall two years earlier, and later in the nineteenth century, the Methodists and Anglicans had also opened institutions of theological education. In the early twentieth century, these institutions began to find ways to approach their work co-operatively; in 1913, the Baptist, Presbyterian, and Methodist colleges launched a more formal pattern of co-operation with the sharing of faculty to teach courses in various subjects. In 1966, with the assistance of the Theological Education Fund of the World Council of Churches, six denominations founded the present United Theological College of the West Indies: besides the Baptists, the Anglicans, Moravians, Methodists, Lutherans, and the United Church of Jamaica, which had united the Congregationalists, Disciples of Christ, and Presbyterians. The history of the United Theological College has been documented in a University of Utrecht doctoral dissertation by former Jamaica Council of Churches General Secretary Edmund Davis and is the subject of a chapter in *Fading Ecumenical Dream*, Callam's

companion volume to *Ecumenism in Jamaica*.⁶ By the time Callam was a student in the United Theological College, 1971–1975, this ecumenical venture in theological education had also entered into a cross-registration arrangement with St. Michael’s Seminary and Theological College, the Catholic seminary in Jamaica. Such a context undoubtedly shaped Callam’s developing ecumenical convictions.

The same can be said for Callam’s education at Harvard Divinity School, where he studied from 1978 through 1980, earning the Master of Theological Studies degree with a focus on theological ethics. The ecumenically inclined Swedish New Testament scholar and Bishop of Stockholm Krister Stendahl was dean there until 1979, leading an ecumenical and interfaith faculty that included Radical Reformation historian George Huntston Williams. Harvard Divinity introduced Callam to additional dimensions of ecumenical awareness on which he would soon draw.

A significant personal influence on Callam’s ecumenical formation was Horace Russell, who served as president of United Theological College 1972–1976, during the years of Callam’s studies there. Russell had become the first full-time Jamaican-born faculty member of the Calabar Theological College in 1958, after completing studies at Regent’s Park College of the University of Oxford. In 1968, Russell was appointed as a member of the WCC Commission on Faith and Order as the first person from the Caribbean to serve on the Commission; he was eventually its vice moderator and served on the Commission until 1990. Callam succeeded Russell in this role in 1992. Russell was the author of numerous works in Baptist historical and theological studies as well as missiology and ecumenism — including four books, five booklets, seven chapters in multi-author books, and seventeen journal articles — and was described in a tribute to him published by the Baptist World Alliance in 2014 and re-posted upon his death in 2021 as ‘the foremost church historian in the English-speaking Caribbean’ who was ‘at the forefront of forging a Caribbean theology

⁶ Edmund Davis, ‘The History of Theological Education in Jamaica: The United Theological College of the West Indies and its Four Antecedent Colleges, 1841–1966’ (doctoral thesis, Universiteit Utrecht, 1998); Neville R. Callam, *Fading Ecumenical Dream*, chapter 12.

for more than 50 years'.⁷ Callam's ecumenical contributions build on Russell's pioneering work as a Baptist ecumenist.

Callam's Pre-General-Secretary Ecumenical Service

Before he succeeded Russell on the WCC Commission on Faith and Order, Callam had already been active in ecumenical service in Jamaica and the Caribbean. During his years of pastoral ministry, he also served as chair of an ecumenical ministerial association, chairman of the Church and Society Commission of the Jamaica Council of Churches (1989–1993), chairman of the Faith and Order Commission of the JCC (1993–2000), and as member of the Steering Committee of the Regional Ecumenical Institute of the Caribbean Conference of Churches (2003–2007). On behalf of the Baptist World Alliance, he represented Baptist life in the Caribbean region on the joint commissions to international dialogues with the Anglican Consultative Council and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Phase II (he resigned from the latter when he assumed his duties as General Secretary).

Callam's appointment to the WCC Commission on Faith and Order in 1992 soon led to numerous roles of leadership in the work of the Commission during the fifteen years he served on it. Prior to resigning from the Commission on Faith and Order when he began his service as BWA General Secretary, Callam participated in thirty-six meetings of its Standing Commission, Plenary Commission, working groups, drafting groups, and consultations, often sharing in planning and leading these meetings and speaking on their programmes. Callam was co-moderator of the Consultation on Ecclesiology and Ecumenical Hermeneutics; co-moderator of the Drafting Group on Ecclesiology; co-moderator of the Study on Ecclesiology; member of the Consultation on the Ecumenical Implications of our Common Baptism; co-moderator of the Consultation on Episkopé and Episcopacy and the

⁷ Baptist World Alliance, 'Celebrating Christian Witness of The Reverend Doctor Horace Orlando Russell', cited in 'Reverend Horace Russell Dies; Leaves Huge Legacy', *Radio Jamaica News*, 6 April 2021 <<http://radiojamaicanewsonline.com/opinion/reverend-horace-russell-dies-leaves-huge-legacy>> [accessed 4 January 2023]. The BWA tribute no longer appears on the BWA web site, but it is quoted extensively in the *Radio Jamaica News* story.

Quest for Visible Unity; member of the Planning Committee for the 2004 Commission Meeting; co-rappeteur for the Consultation on Ministry and Ordination in the Community of Women and Men in the Church; and presenter of a paper on ‘Baptism and Christian Initiation’ commissioned by the WCC Central Committee.⁸

Callam’s Ecumenical Leadership of the BWA

Callam relinquished these positions when he assumed his duties as BWA General Secretary, but he then embodied his passion for the unity of the church in his ecumenical leadership of the global Baptist community as an important dimension of his responsibilities. This included first and foremost his insistence that the BWA continue to engage in international bilateral dialogues with other Christian world communions. The BWA had already been participating in the international bilaterals that proliferated in the wake of Vatican II. Catholic initiatives to enter into formal dialogue with other communions soon after the Council encouraged non-Catholic communions to dialogue not only with the Catholic Church but with one another. In 1973, the BWA began a five-year dialogue with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches; this was followed by dialogues with the Catholic Church (1984–1988), the Lutheran World Federation (1986–1989), the World Mennonite Conference (1989–1992), and the Anglican Consultative Council (2000–2005).⁹ As noted earlier, Callam

⁸ Neville R. Callam, ‘Ecumenical Service and Some Ecumenical Conferences in Which I Participated’ (unpublished document shared with the author).

⁹ Baptist World Alliance and World Alliance of Reformed Churches, ‘Report of Theological Conversations Sponsored by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Baptist World Alliance’, § 2 in *Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, ed. by Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer, Faith and Order Paper no. 108 (New York: Paulist Press; Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1984), pp. 132–151; Baptist World Alliance and Catholic Church, ‘Summons to Witness to Christ in Today’s World: A Report on Conversations 1984–1988’, in *Growth in Agreement II: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982–1998*, ed. by Jeffrey Gros, Harding Meyer, and William G. Rusch (Geneva: WCC Publications; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 373–385; Baptist World Alliance and Lutheran World Federation, ‘A Message to Our Churches’, § 1 in *Growth in Agreement II: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982–1998*, ed. Jeffrey Gros, Harding Meyer, and William G. Rusch, Faith and Order Paper no. 187 (Geneva: WCC Publications; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 155–175; Baptist World Alliance and Mennonite World Conference, ‘Theological Conversations, 1989–

was a member of the joint commission for the dialogue with the Anglican Communion and was in the midst of serving as a member of the Baptist delegation to a second phase of dialogue with the Catholic Church, 2006–2010, when he was appointed General Secretary and thus relinquished his role in that dialogue. As General Secretary, Callam worked to facilitate the reception of the agreed report from Phase II of the Baptist-Catholic dialogue¹⁰ and was instrumental in securing commitments for launching a third phase of dialogue four years after the report from the second phase was issued (in contrast to the two decades that elapsed between Phase I and Phase II, this time making possible embodied continuity in the makeup of the dialogue joint commissions). He also led in the initiation of a dialogue with the World Methodist Council (2014–2018)¹¹ and a dialogue with representatives of global Pentecostalism that met initially in 2011 but was placed on hiatus the following year.¹² Callam also in 2011 led a small team of Baptist theologians to re-engage an earlier series of ‘pre-conversation’ with representatives of the Eastern Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate, the outcome of which was a mutual recommendation to proceed to a formal dialogue that proved not to be possible due to opposition from the

1992’, in *Growth in Agreement III: International Dialogue Texts and Agreed Statements, 1998–2005*, ed. by Jeffrey Gros, Thomas F. Best, and Lorelei F. Fuchs, Faith and Order Paper no. 204 (Geneva: WCC Publications; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), pp. 426–448; Anglican Consultative Council and Baptist World Alliance, *Conversations Around the World: The Report of the International Conversations between the Anglican Communion and the Baptist World Alliance 2000–2005* (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2005).

¹⁰ Baptist World Alliance and Catholic Church, ‘The Word of God in the Life of the Church: A Report of International Conversations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Baptist World Alliance 2006–2010’, § 62, *American Baptist Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2012), 28–122.

¹¹ Baptist World Alliance and World Methodist Council, *Faith Working through Love: Report of the International Dialogue between the Baptist World Alliance and the World Methodist Council* (2018): <<https://o7e.4a3.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Final-Report-of-the-International-Dialogue-between-BWA-and-WMC.pdf>> [accessed 4 January 2023].

¹² Jim White, ‘Global Baptists to explore talks with Orthodox and Pentecostals’, *Baptist News Global*, 6 July 2011:

<<https://baptistnews.com/article/globalbaptiststoexploretalkswithorthodoxandpentecostals/>> [accessed 4 January 2023]

Bob Allen, ‘Baptist-Pentecostal Talks Postponed’, *Baptist News Global*, 8 August 2012: <<https://baptistnews.com/article/baptist-pentecostal-talks-postponed/>> [accessed 4 January 2023].

Russian Orthodox Church, led by Patriarch Kirill, to a dialogue with the Baptists.¹³

Callam saw to it that the BWA was represented in plenary meetings of WCC Commission on Faith and Order as a Christian world communion (beyond the representation supplied by member churches such as the Jamaican Baptist Union and the Baptist Union of Great Britain in both the Standing Commission and the Plenary Commission), and that the BWA was represented in the Faith and Order Commission's 'Moral Discernment in the Churches' project.

As General Secretary, Callam participated in the annual meetings of the Conference of Secretaries of Christian World Communions, the Forum on Bilateral Dialogues, and the Global Christian Forum, and delivered one of the plenary addresses at the Tenth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Busan, South Korea. In addition, Callam represented the global Baptist community at Pope Francis's pilgrimage visit to Assisi for the Day of Reflection, Dialogue and Prayer commemorating St. Francis in October 2011 and at the Taizé Jubilee Celebrations commemorating the centenary of Brother Roger's birth and the tenth anniversary of his death, held at Taizé in France in August 2015.

An important expression of Callam's ecumenical leadership of the BWA was his use of the General Secretary's editorial columns published quarterly in the *Baptist World* magazine to call the attention of the global Baptist community to ecumenical matters. He wrote forty-one of these columns between 2007 and 2017, nineteen of which addressed ecumenical themes. Among them are editorials insisting on the importance of Baptists engaging in ecumenical dialogue; urging Baptists to think ecumenically about baptism; calling for reflection on the ecclesial status of the BWA as a Christian world communion; explaining why discussions about the possibility of a common date for Easter are important; appealing for ecumenical solidarity in work on ecclesial moral discernment of ways forward regarding the ethical issues

¹³ Steven R. Harmon, 'Report on Pre-Conversations between Representatives of the Baptist World Alliance and the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate', unpublished paper presented (*in absentia*) to the Baptist World Alliance Commission on Doctrine and Christian Unity meeting during the annual gathering of the Baptist World Alliance, Santiago, Chile, 2–7 July 2012.

that have divided the churches in recent years; suggesting that monasticism offers spiritual treasures Baptists might receive; and highlighting the implications of uniting churches with Baptist participation for Baptist perspectives on Christian unity — in particular the union in Sweden between Methodist, Evangelical Covenant, and Baptist churches, with the membership of the resulting united church in the BWA meaning that the BWA now includes some Methodist and Evangelical Covenant members.¹⁴ It should also be noted that, while the BWA General Secretary does not direct the BWA Resolutions Committee to offer specific resolutions for adoption by the General Council, in 2012, during the BWA annual gathering in Santiago, Chile, the General Council adopted a resolution on ‘Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World’ that speaks to the ‘wider ecumenism’ of inter-religious dialogue by commending and endorsing the document *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World* that had been jointly issued by the World Evangelical Alliance, the World Council of Churches, and the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue.¹⁵

¹⁴ The following columns are among those authored by Neville Callam devoted to ecumenical issues and aspects of Baptist ecclesiology with ecumenical implications: ‘Appeal to Baptist Theologians’, *Baptist World*, April/June 2008, p. 31; ‘A Common Date for Easter’, *Baptist World*, July/September 2008; ‘Baptist Sages of the East: Worthy of Emulation’, *Baptist World*, April/June 2009, p. 31; ‘Marking the Baptist Quadricentennial’, *Baptist World*, July/September 2009, p. 31; ‘Baptists Help Overcome a Scandal’, *Baptist World*, July/September 2010, p. 4; ‘From Alliance to Communion’, *Baptist World*, October/December 2010, p. 31; ‘The Subject of Baptism’, *Baptist World*, January/March 2011, p. 4; ‘A Test of Hospitality’, *Baptist World*, October/December 2012, p. 4; ‘The Triumph of the Love of Christ’, *Baptist World*, October/December 2013, p. 4; ‘Negotiating Disagreement on Ethics and Morals’, *Baptist World*, October/December 2014, p. 4; ‘Baptists Together in a Ministry of Compassion’, *Baptist World*, July/September 2015, p. 4; ‘Fresh Offerings from Heaven’, *Baptist World*, January/March 2016, p. 4; ‘On Reading in Context’, *Baptist World*, April/June 2016, pp. 4–5; ‘Known by Our Love’, *Baptist World*, July/September 2016, p. 4; ‘The Case for Christian Unity’, *Baptist World*, October/December 2016, p. 4; ‘Reclaiming Baptist Interdependency’, *Baptist World*, January/March 2017, p. 3; ‘What a Difference!’, *Baptist World*, April/June 2017, p. 3; ‘Built Sacred Space’, *Baptist World*, July/September 2017, p. 3; ‘BWA and the Future’, *Baptist World*, October/December 2017, p. 2.

¹⁵ Baptist World Alliance, ‘BWA General Council Resolution 2012.4: Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World’ <<https://baptistworld.org/christian-witness-in-a-multi-religious-world/>> [accessed 17 March 2023]. For the text of the document commended and endorsed by the BWA resolution, see World Evangelical Alliance, World Council of Churches, and Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World*, 28 June 2011, <<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/christian-witness-in-a-multi-religious-world>> [accessed March 17, 2023]. An anonymous referee of this present article

Callam's Ecumenical Theology

In his General Secretary columns, Callam was functioning as a public ecumenical theologian, communicating to a general readership some of the ecumenical theology he wrote for theologically educated persons in other venues, sometimes for Baptists but frequently for ecumenical readerships. Besides the two manuscripts of forthcoming books on ecumenism in Jamaica mentioned earlier in this article,¹⁶ Callam published a book rich in ecumenical themes entitled *From Fragmentation to Wholeness: Race, Ethnicity, and Communion*, which addressed the more stubborn divisions in the body of Christ related to race and ethnicity through the lens of eucharistic practice.¹⁷ He has also published several journal articles and book chapter essays on ecumenical topics, including articles in *The Ecumenical Review* on 'Hope: A Caribbean Perspective', 'Baptists and Church Unity', and 'Baptists and the Subject of Baptism';¹⁸ an article on 'The Mission of the Church in the Perspective of the World Council of Churches' Text on the Nature and Purpose of the Church' in the *International Review of Mission*;¹⁹ an article on 'Baptists and the Quest

noted that while there had been BWA resolutions on ecumenical matters prior to Callam's tenure as General Secretary (notably 'BWA General Council Resolution 2001.4: Conversations between Christian Communions' <<https://baptistworld.org/resolution-on-conversations-between-christian-communions/>> and 'BWA General Council Resolution 2008.5: Ministry of Reconciliation' <<https://baptistworld.org/ministry-of-reconciliation-2/>>), apart from the aforementioned resolution on 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World' there were no specifically ecumenical resolutions adopted during Callam's service in the role. The referee raised the question of why this was the case, despite Callam's clear ecumenical commitments. It is possible that Callam avoided pushing too far in that direction in light of the suspicion of conciliar ecumenical relationships in some quarters of the global Baptist community represented in the BWA General Council, but as I have noted above, the BWA General Secretary normally does not direct the BWA Resolutions Committee to offer specific resolutions for adoption by the General Council; a particular year's committee is free to propose to the General Council the resolutions they deem most relevant.

¹⁶ Callam, *Ecumenism in Jamaica*; Callam, *Fading Ecumenical Dream*.

¹⁷ Neville R. Callam, *From Fragmentation to Wholeness: Race, Ethnicity, and Communion* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2017).

¹⁸ Neville R. Callam, 'Hope: A Caribbean Perspective', *The Ecumenical Review*, 50, no. 2 (April 1998), 137–142; Callam, 'Baptists and Church Unity', *The Ecumenical Review* 61, no. 3 (October 2009), 304–314; Callam, 'Baptists and the Subject of Baptism: Any Real Progress during the Last 25 Years?', *The Ecumenical Review* 67, no. 3 (October 2015), 334–361.

¹⁹ Neville R. Callam, 'The Mission of the Church in the Perspective of the World Council of Churches' Text on the Nature and Purpose of the Church', *International Review of Mission*, 90 (July 2001), 237–242.

for Consensus around Baptism' in the *American Baptist Quarterly*;²⁰ and chapters in multi-author works addressing Faith and Order ecumenism from the context of the Caribbean, Baptist worship in ecumenical perspective, Baptist participation in bilateral dialogues, and visions for ecumenical progress in relation to current challenges for the ecumenical movement.²¹ The following observations summarise seven key emphases in Callam's own ecumenical theology as expressed in these publications.

First, Callam insists on the indispensability of the Faith and Order stream of the modern ecumenical movement, but co-inherent with the missiological and Life and Work streams. The modern ecumenical movement was birthed by the quest for unity in mission. But one of the missionaries present at the Edinburgh Conference, American Episcopal missionary to the Philippines Bishop Charles Brent, became convinced that unity in mission would soon run up against the limits of the enduring divisions of the church unless the global church also addressed the theological roots of their divisions.²² Brent proposed that there be a regular international conference on Faith and Order to address the church's doctrinal divisions; the first was held in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1927. In the wake of the First World War and the industrial revolution, the realisation of the need for inter-church co-operation in addressing social challenges led the Lutheran Archbishop of the Church of Sweden Nathan Söderblom to host the first Conference on Life and Work in Stockholm in 1925. The motto that became associated with the Life and Work movement was 'doctrine divides, but service unites'; it foreshadowed a growing tension between

²⁰ Neville R. Callam, 'Troubling the Waters: Baptists and the Quest for Consensus around Baptism', *American Baptist Quarterly*, 37, no. 2 (Summer 2018), 198–232.

²¹ Neville R. Callam, 'Talking Community Beyond the Home Ground', in *Ministry Perspectives from the Caribbean: Essays in Honor of Horace O. Russell*, ed. by Eron Henry (Bronx, NY: Caribbean Diaspora Baptist Clergy Association, 2010), pp. 30–42; Callam, 'Worship and the Unity of Baptists Today', in *Beyond 400: Exploring Baptist Futures*, ed. by David J. Cohen and Michael Parsons (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), pp. 222–235; Callam, 'In Thanks and Hope', in *Encountering the God of Life: Report of the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, ed. by Erlinda Senturias and Theodore Gill, Jr. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2014), pp. 97–100; Callam, 'Baptists in Bilateral Theological Dialogue', in *Baptist Identity into the 21st Century: Essays in Honour of Ken Manley*, ed. by Frank Rees (Melbourne: Whitley College, 2016), pp. 157–168.

²² Alexander C. Zabriskie, *Bishop Brent, Crusader for Christian Unity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1948).

the Life and Work and Faith and Order streams of the ecumenical movement that in some respects is still with us today. Callam's primary participation in the institutional instruments of the ecumenical movement has been situated in its Faith and Order stream, but in his paper 'Faith and Order: A Perspective from the Caribbean' presented to a WCC Faith and Order Consultation with Younger Theologians, Callam said,

Whilst the clear theological focus on the unity of the church must always be affirmed, a successful attempt to alienate this focus entirely from the consideration of issues affecting God's reconciling and transforming purpose for all of creation will blunt the appeal of Faith and Order to most of the churches in the Two-thirds world.²³

Second, Callam urges Baptists to pursue the ecumenical goal of the visible unity of the church rather than merely being content with affirmations of an already-present spiritual unity. Callam's survey of Baptist perspectives on church unity published in *The Ecumenical Review* grants that Baptists by and large have preferred to identify spiritual rather than visible unity as the proper ecumenical goal, but it also gestures toward a theology of an ecclesial *koinonia* that has concrete manifestations and can be expressed within a paradigm of 'unity in reconciled diversity', which Callam has characterised positively in other writings.²⁴

Third, Callam refuses to allow Baptists to be pressured to surrender their core ecclesiological convictions as a condition for ecumenical convergence. Some ecumenical proposals seem to place the burden on ecclesial minorities such as the Free Churches to rethink their non-conforming perspectives for the sake of ecumenical progress — for example, the insistence on the historic episcopate as an essential principle of unity in the 'Appeal to All Christian People' issued by the Lambeth Conference of the Church of England in 1920;²⁵ portions of

²³ Callam, 'F&O: A Perspective from the Caribbean'.

²⁴ Callam, 'Baptists and the Subject of Baptism'; cf. Callam, *Ecumenism in Jamaica*, chapter 11; Callam, 'A Bold Step toward Church Union', unpublished address to the Church Unity Breakfast at the American Baptist Churches USA Biennial Meeting, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 25 June 2011.

²⁵ Anglican Communion Office, *The Lambeth Conference: Resolutions Archive from 1920* (Anglican Consultative Council, 2005), resolution 9:

the Ministry section of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* also come across in this manner.²⁶ Callam encourages Baptists to find ways to appreciate the legitimacy of other communions' baptismal practices and structures for ministry without abandoning their own. He has something of a Catholic counterpart in Cardinal Walter Kasper, who in conversation with the Baptist-Catholic dialogue commission in 2009 offered support for an ecumenical vision of a communion of communions, in which each communion retains its distinctive identity while being in full communion with the others — also a vision of ecclesial *koινωνia*.²⁷

Fourth, Callam characterises ecumenical progress as a process of conversion. In an address at a Church Unity breakfast during the 2011 American Baptist Churches USA biennial meeting in Puerto Rico, Callam explored more extensively the Swedish church union scheme with Baptist participation that he also highlighted in a *Baptist World* magazine column.²⁸ He characterised this expression of unity as a mutual conversion of ecclesial identity that made this form of organic unity possible. In another *Baptist World* column, Callam highlighted conversion as a distinctively Baptist emphasis with not merely individual but ecclesial, and even ecumenical, implications, drawing on the work of the late Puerto Rican Baptist theologian Orlando Costas.

Fifth, Callam insists that any ecclesiological structures arrived at through ecumenical convergence should be regarded as provisional. In employing the uniting church in Sweden as a test case for visions of visible unity, Callam noted, "There is a certain provisionality about existing church structures generally, including those which emerge out of church union schemes. The coming together of the Baptist, Methodist and Mission Covenant churches in Sweden does not imply that, for these partners, the road to church unity is over."²⁹ This is an

<<https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/127731/1920.pdf>> [accessed 6 January 2023], paragraphs 6 and 7.

²⁶ World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper no. 111 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1982), pp. 16–30.

²⁷ Cf. Walter Kasper, *That They May All Be One: The Call to Unity Today* (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 50–95.

²⁸ Callam, 'A Bold Step toward Church Union'; Callam, 'Conversion', *Baptist World*, October/December 2015, p. 4.

²⁹ Callam, 'A Bold Step toward Church Union', p. 9.

eschatological ecumenical vision for Baptists and others that in my own work I have called a ‘pilgrim church ecclesiology’ that progresses toward (and sometimes regresses from) fuller realisations of the unity of the church.³⁰

Sixth, Callam encourages the embrace of receptive ecumenism as a paradigm that facilitates convergence through the conversion of the churches. In the final chapter of *Ecumenism in Jamaica*, entitled ‘Moving Toward the Future’, Callam affirms the promise of this paradigm that has been named and theologically explored during the past two decades but has been practised in various ways for as long as the church has existed.³¹ He describes it in this fashion:

No single tradition embodies all that God has called the church to be. At the same time, each church tradition hosts unique gifts that it has preserved and developed over the years. The cause of ecumenism is not primarily to merge all churches into one great universal organic union, although some mergers seem clearly to be within the will of God. It is, instead, the exchange of gifts between Church Communion that may lead to expressions of unity without uniformity and a state of fuller communion among the church traditions.³²

Seventh, Callam regards the socially-located contextual existence of the churches as integral to the catholicity of the church. The WCC Commission on Faith and Order made a significant turn toward affirming the indispensability of contextual theologies to the wholeness of the church in the last stretch of work on the convergence text that became *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* in the aftermath of the 2009 Faith and Order Plenary Commission meeting in Crete, where Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan Geevarghese Mar Coorilos of India called out the failure of an earlier draft to attend to contextual theological challenges and ‘to encounter the real *ecclesia* among communities of people in pain and suffering’.³³ This moved the Plenary Commission to

³⁰ Steven R. Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future: Story, Tradition, and the Recovery of Community* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), pp. 213–242.

³¹ See *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism*, ed. by Paul D. Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

³² Callam, *Ecumenism in Jamaica*, chapter 15.

³³ Geevarghese Mar Coorilos, ‘The Nature and Mission of the Church: An Indian Perspective’, in *Called to Be the One Church: Faith and Order at Crete*, ed. by John Gibaut, Faith and Order Paper No. 212 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012), pp. 188–192.

recommend that the drafting committee ‘make it more contextual, more reflective of the lives of the churches throughout the world’, a recommendation that was heeded in the final text.³⁴ But Callam had already been calling for precisely this recognition by the ecumenical movement, from his 1995 presentation to the Faith and Order Consultation with Younger Theologians through his 2001 analysis in the *International Review of Mission* of an even earlier draft of what became *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* — then entitled *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* — and well beyond to his current work on Jamaican ecumenism.³⁵

Conclusion

The introduction of this article suggested that its title ‘Interdependency without Imperialism’ expresses the distinctiveness of Callam’s ecumenical vision: an ecumenism rooted in the ecclesial interdependence of Baptist ecclesiology, but which resists ecumenical imperialism. The title echoes language Callam employed in a *Baptist World* column titled ‘Reclaiming Baptist Interdependency’. It ends with this sentence: ‘Hardly can one identify a greater need of Baptists today than to rediscover Baptist interdependency — an interdependency that rejects cultural imperialism, paternalism and neo-colonialism, a true interdependency that is untainted by notions of empire.’³⁶ This has in mind intra-Baptist relationships, but it applies to ecumenical relations as well. There are ecumenical paradigms that amount to ecumenical imperialism: for example, ‘home to Rome’ (or Constantinople), or merger into the structure of a ‘super church’ (which is not the aim of the WCC, but there was enough worry that this was its aim that the New Delhi definition of ‘The Unity We Seek’ in 1961 took pains to dispel

³⁴ World Council of Churches, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper no. 214 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2013), p. 45.

³⁵ Callam, ‘F&O: A Perspective from the Caribbean’; Callam, ‘The Mission of the Church in the Perspective of the World Council of Churches’ Text on the Nature and Purpose of the Church’; Callam, *Ecumenism in Jamaica*.

³⁶ Callam, ‘Reclaiming Baptist Interdependency’; republished as Callam, ‘Why We Must Reclaim Baptist Interdependency’, *Good Faith Media*, 1 February 2017 <<https://goodfaithmedia.org/why-we-must-reclaim-baptist-interdependency-cms-23887/>> [accessed 6 January 2023].

such fears³⁷). There have, however, been manifestations of the previously noted pressure for ecclesiological minorities to converge toward majority positions on baptism and episcopacy. It must be noted that there have also been Baptist expressions of ecumenical imperialism that seemed to hold out the hope that unity might come about when the rest of the churches are converted to Baptist principles. In contrast, Callam has endeavoured to convince more Baptists that they have much to gain from the ecumenical movement and to persuade their ecumenical dialogue partners that the ecumenical movement has much to gain from Baptists — an ecumenical interdependency that makes space for the conversion of the churches toward the visible unity of the one body of Christ.

A fitting conclusion for this article is Callam's own conclusion to his plenary address to the Tenth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Busan, South Korea on 4 November 2014, which gives expression to his Baptist ecumenical vision of an ecclesial interdependence without imperialism. It includes a prayer from the Orders of Worship for the Sixth International Consultation of United and Uniting Churches that was held in Ocho Rios, Jamaica, 22–29 March 1995. Callam concluded his address in Busan thus:

As we go forward in the pilgrimage of unity, may we never disconnect the search for unity from the search for justice and peace! This is necessary if the church is to be faithful to God's great mission to gather the whole of creation under Christ's lordship into communion with God. The challenges are daunting, but the opportunities are immense for us to go forward with passion for the unity of the church. May our prayer continue to be: 'O God, holy and undivided Trinity, give us who are still divided the thirst and hunger for communion in faith, life, and witness. Keep us restless until we grow together into the fullness of the whole body of Christ, in accord with Christ's prayer that we who believe in him may be one.' Amen.³⁸

³⁷ World Council of Churches, 'Report of the Section on Unity', in *The New Delhi Report: The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1961* (New York: Association Press, 1962), pp. 116–135.

³⁸ Neville R. Callam, 'In Thanks and Hope', pp. 97–100. The prayer Callam quotes is from *Orders of Worship for the Sixth International Consultation of United and Uniting Churches, Ocho Rios, Jamaica, March 22–29, 1995*, p. 4.