

Editorial

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This volume of the *Journal of European Baptist Studies (JEBS)* comes in the 75th anniversary year of the International Baptist Theological Study Centre (IBTS). The Centre, previously known mainly as the Seminary, was founded in 1949 in Rüschtikon, Switzerland. In 1997 this theological institution moved to Prague, and in 2014 to Amsterdam. On its journey, the focus of the study centre has transformed: from offering bachelor and master degrees to concentrating on supporting research at the doctoral level. The *Journal of European Baptist Studies* has been reflecting IBTS's research interests and theological exploration for almost twenty-five years, beginning in 2000. This issue adds to the wealth of previously published articles with additional research that demonstrates the varied scope of present Baptist or baptistic academic probing and search for understanding.

As IBTS has defined three areas — Baptist identity, contextual missiology, and practical theology — as its priorities, *JEBS* has published a considerable number of articles in these fields. However, the publication often also includes Biblical topics, historical studies, and others, as *JEBS* functions as a platform for both Baptist scholars as well as scholars writing on issues enhancing Baptist theological discussion.

The articles published in the present issue fall into two categories. Firstly, three authors remind the reader of the role of the Bible in Baptist and — more widely — free church thinking. While secondly, the rest of the articles highlight some areas where, when inspired by the biblical message, action needs to be taken. Action, for example, in engaging with issues of race and racism, developing theologically informed acts of compassion, ministering to the marginalised, and seeking ways for conflict resolution. The geographical

scope of authors in this volume represents different countries: Finland, Norway, the United Kingdom, Romania, and Bulgaria. It is a goal of IBTS to strengthen academic conversations and enhance the development of an international research community. In this regard, *JEBS* is not only a channel for publishing in order to inform readers about the results of recent research, but it is also a forum for authors (and readers) to communicate with each other and raise awareness of belonging to a wider academic community.

The volume begins with a youthful note. Roald Zeiffert has researched how reading the Bible contributes to a meaningful life for young Evangelicals in Norway. ‘In theories about what brings meaning to life, religion is often among the most important factors,’ the author claims. The picture, however, is not monochrome, and the author has found and clarified different approaches regarding expectations related to reading the Bible. The Coherent group read the Bible often and find it offers meaning for their lives. The Frustrated group believe that the Bible is important, but they read it much less and experience a conflicted relationship with the Bible. The Distanced group finds neither meaning nor frustration from the Bible, and is not much interested in the text. In his article, Radostin Marchev asks the question how two different traditions — Orthodox and Protestant — might find better mutual understanding in discussing the theological authority. The author argues that the Protestant ‘teaching of the witness of the Spirit’ is one of the several means that could be used in the complex and nuanced discussion of theological authority between the two traditions. Marchev also claims that the Scriptures help to distinguish between divine Tradition and human traditions. If both sides agree on this, it would be much easier for Protestants to ‘appreciate the Orthodox perspective of the Bible as part of the Tradition’, the author concludes. The third article that, from another angle, touches upon the topic of the Bible is a historical analysis of the life and ministry of George Henry Borrow, written by Ian Randall. This piece of research examines Borrow’s work in St Petersburg and his engagement in the translation of the New Testament into the Manchu language in the nineteenth century. Borrow was not a Baptist, but the article gives the reader a glimpse into his Christian faith, ‘an aspect which has been ignored or misinterpreted in much of the literature about him’. In his efforts to make the Bible accessible, and working in cooperation

with the British and Foreign Bible Society, this gifted scholar added significantly to the Protestant picture of Bible-centred faith.

The next four articles discuss theological and practical aspects of baptistic faith. Julian Gotobed raises the question as to what extent British Baptists have identified racism as a significant problem ‘impacting British society and Baptist Churches’. The author analyses why, in the 1990s, the discourse about race and racism remained limited in scope and depth, and he argues that remaining unaware of deep realities of racism is what produces ‘flawed readings of Christian doctrine and deficient social analysis and social engagement’. Re-telling the story of British Baptists, race, racism, and the church’s witness gives the reader helpful insights for evaluating both the present situation as well as looking further into the twenty-first century. Thomas Sears focuses on another aspect of baptistic witness and explores the organising of relief efforts for those affected by war in Ukraine. The article describes practical steps and theological reflection related to the Ukraine Relief Fund established by TCM International Institute, an educational organisation based in Indianapolis, USA, with study groups in other countries. However, despite its primary educational aims, with Russian aggression in Ukraine in the background, TCM became a channel of donations, including monetary help, food, and medicine. The author locates this practical work into the framework of Oliver Davies’ theology. Specific acts of financial giving function as a lived-out theology of compassion, which is rooted in ontological reality: God is compassionate. The following author, Victoria Aleksandravicene, offers another aspect to the topics Gotobed and Sears have explored, though Aleksandravicene’s research emerges from a different context: it deals with mission and ministry among a marginalised group — the Bulgarian Roma. The article seeks ‘patterns of transformation’ which become evident in the process of the church’s engagement with the marginalised and in efforts to make a difference in the lives of the Roma in the surrounding community in Bulgaria. Baptist mission — taking a holistic approach — has helped to bring transformation into the individual lives of Roma people as well as assisting in meeting the social, educational, physical, and spiritual needs of this group.

Jari Portaankorva takes the reader into the midst of conflict in Nigeria and Sierra Leone. The article is not directly about Baptist efforts to meet the political and cultural challenges in these countries, even if Baptist presence is part of the story. However, analysing Muslim-Christian relations in seeking solutions to conflicts and discussing ‘faith-based peace building in just peace using non-violent means’, the discourse is highly illuminating for baptistic theologians who meet similar challenges in African or in other countries. Peaceful co-existence of religious communities, different religious conflict resolution strategies, building stronger links between governments and local social forces — these are questions that should be analysed thoroughly, by Christians in general and baptistic believers in particular. Portaankorva offers material for further reflection and discussion. Some lessons for Baptists have been delineated in his concluding remarks, such as the necessity of mediating peace with neutrality to both sides of a conflict or helping to re-integrate migrated and displaced people anew into the society.

This issue of *JEBS* brings together a variety of topics and ideas. Some are directly engaging with Baptist theological research, others step into discussion as conversation partners, so to say, from a helpful distance. Both types of articles bring valuable material ‘to the round table’ where ideas, questions, and research results are shared and tested. This is a baptistic way of doing theology, which IBTS has implemented and developed through seventy-five years of its existence.