

## Editorial

Many of the articles in this issue of *JEBS* relate to the gathering of theological educators at the Consortium of European Baptist Theological Schools (CEBTS) in June 2018. The geographical spread of authorship alongside a rich thematic scope and reflective depth combine to make a valuable contribution to discussions about the place and shape of theological education in general, and Baptist theological education in particular. The themes are both theological and practical, including discussion about the relationship of theological education to the secular academy, the specific nature of a Baptist approach to theological education and ministerial formation, and discussion about the challenges of delivering high quality theological education in various European contexts.

A paper by Jan Martijn Abrahamse introduces the discussion. In ‘The Clown of the Sciences: Theology at the Secular University’ he addresses the question of ‘the role of theology and theologians in a secular environment’. In this beautifully presented piece, Abrahamse draws on conversation partners William James McClendon and Stanley Hauerwas to argue that ‘theology is in the right place when it becomes the laughing stock at the university’. In response to the dominance of scientific secularism in the academy, theology should not seek to defend its position as the Queen of the Sciences (was this ever an appropriate position?) but, by developing ‘a healthy form of self-mockery’, it can act to invert totalising narratives (both secular and theological) and challenge vested interests by performing as the clown of the sciences.

Einike Pilli’s paper develops an essential dimension in the conversation about theological education by asking: ‘What makes Baptist theological education Baptist?’. She convenes a fascinating interaction by setting empirical observations gathered from conversations with fellow theological educators at CEBTS, BWA Theological Education Committee, and alumni of Tartu Theological Seminary alongside texts from Baptist theologians such as Hames, Fiddes, Wright, and Holmes. Focusing on the primary issues of ‘content’ and ‘method’ in education, Pilli underlines the importance of covenantal ecclesiology as the centre of Baptist theological education. That is to say that Baptist theology is to be ‘made visible’ or lived out in the life of the individual and the community of believers, and that educational method rooted in covenantal relationship – to God, the community of believers, and the world – is where theology is worked out.

The next two pieces focus on the relationship of ministerial formation to theological education. In the article ‘Ministerial Formation as Theological

Education in the Context of Theological Study', Simon Jones addresses the challenge of rapid change in church and society to theological education. How does the quality of our theological education match up to the challenge of forming those who can be 'midwives of new *ekklesia*'? Jones offers a number of pointers to this kind of mission-shaped education: in fast changing social, cultural contexts ministers might be formed as explorers (Alan Roxburgh) or entrepreneurs (Michael Volland); a renewed understanding of ministry in relation to ideas of vocation and work; a renewed understanding about how 'story' is the place where ministry formation and theology are intertwined for a world 'with increasing levels of anxiety and bafflement'. Drawing on George Monbiot, he argues that attention to gathering and telling of stories is a way forward for ministry formation that engages with deep questions of identity and hope. Not least is the gift of being a reflective practitioner – essential to which is the openness to reflect on situations that 'challenge (our) own settled theology' and to listen hospitably to the stories of those who live 'outside the centre of our culture'.

By drawing our attention to Baptist history and identity, Anthony Cross makes a passionate case that theological education has been and should remain a central part of ministerial formation within the Baptist church. He acknowledges the historical presence of 'anti educationalism' in Baptist circles identified, for example, by Spurgeon, who in 1882 reported the sentiment expressed by some that 'the less a minister knew the better, for there was more room for him to be taught by God'. However, Cross shows through cases such as the founding of The Bristol Academy in 1720 that rigorous theological education, which included the learning of languages, lay at the heart of the global Baptist movement. He lays down a challenge to the current process of ministerial formation amongst Baptists in the UK, where he discerns a lowering of the bar in relation to theological education and, by drawing on figures such as John Ryland, Cross argues that rigorous theological education is 'not just of benefit to ministers' but needs to be 'passed on to the church'.

Henrik Holmgaard brings a distinctively Danish insight to the conversation about the nature of theological education and the formation of ministers in the Baptist church. In 'Equipping the Saints Without a Theological Seminary' he tells how, against an historical background of uncertainty in relation to theological education, the millennial generation is experiencing a hopeful rise in numbers of Danish students studying theology at a Danish university. Holmgaard identifies, however, that university based – instead of seminary based – theological education has resulted in a critical gap between formal theology and ministerial formation. There is strong resonance here with other authors in this series of articles, such as Einike Pilli, in emphasising the role of the congregation as central to the Baptist

theological method. The Danish context conveys the practical challenges of achieving a sound process of Baptist theological formation apart from a seminary and Holmgaard offers an illuminating and hopeful account of the educational practices and organisational elements that have been put in place as a workable response to this challenge.

A recurring theme in the papers presented in this issue of *JEBS* is the centrality of Scripture for Baptist theological education and ministerial formation. In ‘Resilient Readers: Spiritual Growth and the Bible’ Marion Carson draws thoughtfully on faith development theory to explore how the practice of reading the Bible might develop in a way that is commensurate with a maturing faith. Helpfully grounded in her own personal experience, she focuses on the need for ministers to be educated in Biblical Studies so that they are able to lead congregations away from foundationalist and immature approaches to Scripture. She encourages the use of a more sophisticated method of interpretation which includes self-awareness, the role of experience, the importance of context, and an open ethos which encourages discussion and exploration. Ultimately, the maturity of a resilient reader lies in the ability to live with uncertainty and the self-knowledge that their own understanding is incomplete.

In his paper Stuart Blythe discusses what constitutes ‘effective research supervision’ for doctoral research students by presenting a summary and findings from his own research based at IBTS Centre. The paper deals thoroughly and honestly with the practical issues of achieving a high quality of Baptist theological education at a doctoral level, whilst also reflecting in its findings many of the key elements mentioned in other papers in this series about what makes Baptist theological education Baptist. A notable example is the importance placed on the relational element of supervision, which goes beyond the knowledge and skills of the supervisor. Blythe draws on the notion of a ‘fiduciary relationship’, one that is based on trust and the recognition of mutual obligations in the research journey. As well as the practical challenges of doing doctoral research on a part-time basis in a dispersed community, Blythe also identifies the specific question about how doctoral research is theological and how this relates to the journey of spiritual formation for the researcher. These are indeed valuable insights for the current director and staff team of IBTS Centre as we seek to improve the effectiveness of research supervision.

Whilst not a participant in CEBTS, Roger Jasper addresses a theme which is of direct concern for those involved in undertaking or supervising research degrees. In ‘Hans-Georg Gadamer and the Mind of Christ’ Jasper explores the problem encountered by many within the field of practical theology about the appropriate place of social scientific knowledge. Jasper reflects critically on the use of Gadamer’s hermeneutical theory in the work

of Don Browning and of John Swinton and Harriet Mowat and presents some fresh perspective to the discussion about ‘integrating knowledge gained from the social sciences with theological beliefs’. He proposes that integration might be predicated on the Baptist tradition of discernment, which includes a prayerful, communal practice of seeking the mind of Christ. This approach introduces traditional Baptist practices into the process of research that explicitly embody a faithfulness to Christ himself.

In November 2018 we were privileged to host Dr Reggie Williams at IBTS Centre, Amsterdam to deliver the biennial Nordenhaug lecture and Professor Nancey Murphy to present a response. We include full texts of these presentations as our final two articles in this edition of *JEBS*.<sup>1</sup> In ‘Christ-Centred Concreteness’ he explores how the activism of Harriet Tubman, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Martin Luther King, which was directed against a totalising ‘Christian imagination that defined humanity according to hegemonic norms, for whites only’, might guide Christian leadership today. In an insightful and well-presented argument, Williams challenges claims of ‘intrinsic Christian virtue’ (normally defined from a white male perspective) by exploring the different hermeneutics of each of these Christian leaders and how those hermeneutics were employed in opposing ‘ideological hegemonies that typically support harmful politics’. The essay presents fascinating insights, not least of which is the effect on Bonhoeffer of the time he spent in the United States as part of Harlem’s Abyssinian Baptist Church and the influence on his own theology caused by the Harlem Renaissance in a period of global turbulence.

Nancey Murphy’s response to Williams is framed by the work of James Wm McClendon Jr, her late husband. Murphy, who was herself one of Williams’ professors at Fuller Theological Seminary, presents a fascinating and insightful analysis of the parallels in Williams’ presentation with the theology of McClendon. Murphy notices ‘less obvious parallels’ between the two theologians that take on a fresh dynamic in Williams’ paper; these are the use of story in theology (including the biographies of women), a ‘special concern for the injustices done to black people in America’, and a particular focus on presence or ‘being there’ as a Christian virtue. In the second part of her commentary, Murphy discusses the practice of non-violent resistance as a response to institutional and societal injustices which have deep ideological roots. By contrasting the contexts of Bonhoeffer and King and by drawing on studies of non-violent resistance, Murphy presents a hopeful, Christ-centred vision for Christian engagement in worldly realms dominated by ideological and physical violence.

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<sup>1</sup> A video of the 2018 Nordenhaug lecture can be viewed on the IBTSC website: <https://www.ibts.eu/research/nordenhaug-lecture/>

As editor, I am fascinated by the resonances and connections between the articles presented here and I leave you with a concluding thought. There is, I suggest, an intriguing synergy between the first and final two articles, namely Abrahamse's exploration of the place of theology in the secular university and Murphy's final observation from Williams about 'the poisoning of theology by a white aesthetic'. Whether the context is dominant secularism or 'white aesthetic', the challenge for theology (and theological communities) is to position itself in relation to a social-cultural settlement that claims 'epistemological ownership'. Abrahamse, Williams, and Murphy offer thoughtful insights about how such a position might be achieved. The challenge for those in theological education is about how such ideas might be implemented in our organisations and practices.

**Revd Dr Mike Pears (Editor)**