

Editorial

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It is a great pleasure to be guest editor for this special issue of the *Journal of European Baptist Studies*. The focus of this issue is what Baptists and others might learn as we look at the beginning of Anabaptism 500 years ago, in 1525. In the first article, Brian C. Brewer, who is Professor of Historical Theology at the George W. Truett Theological Seminary, Baylor University, USA, examines core ecclesial principles which Anabaptists and early Baptists held in common. He argues that four principles were crucial: a church of believers or the holding of a visible ecclesiology; the practice of believer's baptism as the proper and exclusive initiation into the visible community; baptismal pledges and church covenants; and freedom of conscience and the separation of the church from the state. We are also indebted to Brian for his editing of the outstanding *Handbook of Anabaptism*.¹

The next article, by Uwe Swarat, retired Professor for Systematic theology and History of Dogmas at Elstal Theological Seminary, Germany, offers a detailed picture of theological discussions between Mennonites and Baptists, past and present. This offers valuable analysis of the significance of the documents exchanged between Dutch Mennonites and English Baptists in the seventeenth century; the new contacts that were made between Baptists and Mennonites in Russia and Germany in the nineteenth century; and the theological dialogue in the twentieth century between the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) and the Mennonite World Conference (MWC). It concludes with a plea for continued theological dialogue between the two traditions, identifying two themes — one historical and one theological — that could be explored in greater depth. It is good to have such signposts.

¹ *T&T Clark Handbook of Anabaptism*, ed. by Brian C. Brewer (Bloomsbury, 2022).

The theme of ‘After Christendom’ has been prominent in the work of Stuart Murray Williams, who is the director of the Centre for Anabaptist Studies, Bristol. He has written important books on church planting ‘after Christendom’ and he has argued that the way the church in Europe from the conversion of Constantine onwards pursued its mission was wrong-headed, with the Anabaptists an example to follow.² Here Stuart looks at Baptists and Anabaptists after Christendom and the opportunities for mutual learning, especially in the emerging post-Christendom context in western societies. After an account of the Baptist–Anabaptist interaction that has been evident in more recent history, three areas of learning are considered, which take in ethics, missiology, and ecclesiology. These are issues of war and peace, different approaches to evangelism and interpretations of the atonement, and participative communities and mutual accountability.

While the first three articles have the European context particularly, though not exclusively, in view, the article by Graeme Chatfield, President of the Baptist Historical Society of NSW, Australia, and member of the BWA Heritage and Identity Commission, provides an overview of Baptist and Anabaptist connections in a global context. There are three key areas Graeme explores: Anabaptist connection with Baptist origins; Anabaptist connection with Baptist identity; and Baptist affinity with specific Anabaptist ideals. All of these have their own regional variations within the global setting and the article moves to the Australian Baptist knowledge of and response to each of these themes. The conclusion reached is that while Australian Baptist leadership alerted Australian Baptists to all three themes, apart from a minority of Australian Baptists who identified passionately with some Anabaptist ideals, the Baptist leadership worked to maintain unity among Baptists so that they could corporately engage in evangelism and mission. Graeme has himself contributed to thinking about mission.³

Jacob Alan Cook is the only contributor to this volume writing from a Mennonite environment. He is Assistant Professor of Christian

² For instance, Stuart Murray Williams, *Church Planting: Laying Foundations* (Paternoster, 1998); *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World* (Paternoster Press, 2004); *Church After Christendom* (Paternoster Press, 2004).

³ *Mission: The Heart of Baptist Identity*, ed. by Graeme Chatfield (Morling Press, 2009).

Ethics at Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Eastern Mennonite University, Virginia, and also Senior Research Fellow at IBTS Amsterdam. His article is on believers' baptism as an ongoing practice of constellating identities. The article looks at how Anabaptist and Baptist leaders, operating roughly a century apart, became increasingly radical as their concerns about church practice and related reforms were rejected and as they were alienated from the ecclesial spaces authorised by state-church powers. Following historical probing of the struggle to distinguish between loyalties generated by the orders of church and state on the one hand, and the views of those well-adjusted to the prevailing social order on the other, this article has constructive and thought-provoking suggestions about discerning the tensions among modernity's many loyalties and navigating faithfully the concomitant pressures.

In 'Discipleship Without Borders: Anabaptist Lessons for Baptists Rejecting the Idea of a Christian Nation', Joshua T. Searle, who is a Baptist minister in the German Baptist Union (BEFG), a Founder Trustee of Dnipro Hope Mission, and Professor of Mission Studies and Intercultural Theology at Elstal Theological Seminary, Germany, offers an Anabaptist-informed critique of the tendency in contemporary politics in some countries to conscript Christian identity into the service of nationalistic agendas. Among his books, Joshua has written on forming prophets for a post-Christian world.⁴ Here he argues that the idea of a 'Christian nation', while it has a seductive appeal in certain circles, is what he terms 'a profane illusion and a self-contradiction'. This article seeks to call Baptists today to a transformative engagement with the world that is grounded in radical discipleship and can be inspired by shared Baptist–Anabaptist convictions, such as freedom, dignity, and a commitment to living out our faith as Baptists in a way that transcends political and national boundaries.

My article in this volume continues an interest I have had for some time in Robert Robinson (1735–1790), a very influential Baptist minister at St Andrew's Street Baptist Church, in Cambridge. Having

⁴ Joshua T. Searle, *Theology After Christendom: Forming Prophets for a Post-Christian World* (Cascade Books, 2018).

lived in Cambridge for a considerable number of years, and been involved in the ecumenical Cambridge Theological Federation, I have seen the place of Baptists in this university city as noteworthy.⁵ A certain amount of what has been written on Robinson takes up the question of his supposed unorthodoxy, but so far nothing has examined an aspect which he saw as of central importance to his wide-ranging theological enterprise: his major work on baptism, and specifically, within that, ‘anabaptistical’ (as he put it) views. These convictions were for Robinson integral to a wider conviction he held strongly about freedom of conscience.

The final article, by Keith Jones, is a reconsideration of his book *A Believing Church*.⁶ Keith is a British Baptist minister who served from 1998 to 2013 as Rector of IBTS, and is currently part of the leadership team at Shipley Baptist Church, West Yorkshire, and chairs the Luther King Partnership Educational Trust in Manchester. He is President of the Baptist Historical Society in the UK. The first part of this article describes his own journey towards discovering the meaning and relevance of Anabaptist tradition for the present day. The second part of the article explores some of the issues in *A Believing Church*, and seeks to re-evaluate those insights for baptistic Christians in 2025. Appropriately, having raised some issues for consideration, Keith ends with a fine testimony in which he speaks of the period from 1984 to the present as one in which many of a baptistic inclination, Baptists and those from other communions, have gained a range of powerful insights in their attempts to follow Jesus, and he adds that for himself, his Christianity has been clarified and radicalised by what he understands to be his baptistic foreparents.

In the course of seeking articles for this special issue, Toivo Pilli and I have been in contact with a range of those who might have been able to contribute. We are very appreciative of those who have said ‘yes’, but it has been a sadness that all the women we approached, each of whom would have had much to offer, were unable because of other

⁵ Ian Randall, ‘Changing Spiritual Identity: St Andrew’s Street Baptist Church, Cambridge, from the 1730s to the 1920s’, *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, 22.1 (2022), pp. 169–193.

⁶ Keith G. Jones, *A Believing Church: Learning from Some Contemporary Anabaptist and Baptist Perspectives* (Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1998).

commitments or circumstances to write for this issue. It is very welcome that the place of women and men in Baptist life is being studied by historians, including outstanding female historians.⁷ I would like to dedicate this issue of *JEB S* to Oksana Raychynets, who graduated from IBTS, Prague, in 2006. In 2008, a volume was published of master's dissertations by students at IBTS who had undertaken historical studies in Baptist–Anabaptist areas. Oksana was one, and indeed three of the six essays were by women.⁸ Oksana and her husband Fyodor, also an IBTS research student, went from Prague to undertake mission service in Bosnia-Herzegovina and then subsequently returned to their native Ukraine, to serve in Kiev. To our great sadness, Oksana died in 2021. We honour her memory.

⁷ For a recent example of work on the place of women in Baptist churches, see *Baptists and Gender*, ed. by Melody Maxwell and T. Laine Scales (Mercer University Press, 2023).

⁸ Oksana Raychynets, 'Baptist Mission Efforts in Bosnia-Herzegovina: 150 Years of Discontinuity and Struggle', in *Counter-Cultural Communities: Baptistic Life in Twentieth-Century Europe*, ed. by K. G. Jones and I. M. Randall (Paternoster, 2008), pp. 228–30.