

Editorial

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This issue of the *Journal of European Baptist Studies* brings together articles from different areas of research, demonstrating well that baptistic scholars are engaged in a wide variety of topics. Showing the rich spectrum of research is one of the reasons why *JEBs* seeks to present a range of volumes that encompass regional foci, such as previous volumes that represented Scottish or Dutch scholarly work, topical volumes, such as the one that focused on Baptist-Anabaptist theological relations, along with those such as the present issue, that fit under the general concept of *varia*.

Nevertheless, the articles in this volume are intertwined with a couple of topical threads. For example, the first two articles engage with themes of religious freedom and anti-racist practices — in short, with social-political questions. Job van Lobenstein uses Pakistan as a case study and example for exploring the understanding of freedom of religion or belief. The article argues that freedom of religion — or at least religious toleration — is not exclusively a Western concept. The author describes the complex situation when tensions arise between secular constitutional positions and religious legislation, but reminds the reader that discussing religious freedom in postcolonial countries requires taking into account the local historical and cultural contexts. The call for careful dialogue is likewise explicitly made by Paul Weller in touching upon another socio-political and religious issue — that of addressing the Far Right. Weller finds grounds in Baptist tradition and support from his own personal experience for opposing Far-Right ideologies and respective organisations, but at the same time keeping a

conversation open with individuals. The article is a response to a collection entitled *The Church, The Far Right and the Claim to Christianity*, edited by Helen Paynter and Maria Power (published 2024).

In addition to social and political themes within a theological framework, four articles look at ecclesiological realities from different angles, ranging from mission to New Testament leadership patterns. Fran Porter's article argues why the voices of female theologians should be paid careful attention in the church and what the implications of their theological work are 'for all theological endeavours'. The author discusses how the notion of 'tainted legacy' is 'refracted through gender power relations to apply differently to women than to men and how this hinders reception of women's theological contributions'. The article is written against the backdrop of the Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder's legacy of sexual assault perpetrated against women, and the text gives reasons why the theology women produce plays an important role specifically for the integrity of Anabaptist theology.

Graham Meiklejohn invites the reader to reconsider success criteria in missions. In fact, the author proposes to abandon success criteria altogether, and to talk about missions as a practice of faithful witness. Faithful witness, the text demonstrates, is not a passive attitude, but includes both prophetic vision and persistence as well as eschatological perspective. However, it has a liberating effect, as by 'acting as faithful witnesses, leaders and practitioners are released from the responsibility of outcomes and results'. In addition, the concept of *missio Dei* is a reminder that God's sovereign grace is active in faithful missional practice. Rosa Hunt and Edward Kaneen add another facet to the conversation in the field of ecclesiology. They also invite readers to find a fresh interpretative angle, asking to reimagine church membership in contemporary Wales. They, too, are dealing with a topic that is not only theoretical, but tightly connected with practical aspects of Baptist churches. Instead of seeing church membership as commitment to the organisation — as arguably is increasingly the case in Wales — Hunt and Kaneen encourage Baptist believers to commit to fellow believers

as a community on a journey and to Christ as the source of salvation. The article helpfully uses the image of pilgrimage (well known to non-conformist believers through the centuries) as a focal point of the discussion.

Andrew Williams and Sean Ray explore ministry and leadership concepts in the New Testament. As Baptists have always been keen to build their convictions on a biblical basis, this article brings inspiring and important aspects into the realm of Baptist or baptistic ecclesiology and practice. Analysing the roles of elders and bishops in the Scriptures, the authors demonstrate that a sharp distinction between these leadership positions was unlikely in the first-century Christian communities. Williams and Ray argue that early Christian church governance did not lean towards mono-episcopacy, which is a later development, but rather towards plural leadership ‘with multiple individuals leading simultaneously’.

The final article in this issue, written by Lee Spitzer, is an assessment of the significance of the 23rd Baptist World Congress that took place in Brisbane, Australia, from 7 to 12 July, 2025. The article explores the Congress’s key topics, and evaluates the projects and initiatives that the major Baptist gathering highlighted and confirmed, including a call for ‘collaborative global mission’. Spitzer, an expert in Baptist World Alliance history, ‘considers the significance of the event in light of the 120-year-old journey of the BWA’. Even if, from a historical point of view, it is too early to say anything definitive about the impact of the congress, some initial suggestions are offered by Spitzer, with awareness that this analytical overview may serve as a good point of comparison in the future.

The present issue of *JEBs*, publishing research from different areas of baptistic theology, tells symbolically the story of Baptist diversity. Let me draw your attention to the editorial plan to publish a similar *varia*-volume in Spring next year. Articles from Baptist and baptistic scholars as well as from others are welcomed for submission! Also, for the autumn issue for 2026, guest editor Dr Caleb Hutcherson will collect articles that concentrate on Middle-East theological reflection and practice. This special issue will come under the general

title 'Baptistic Theologies from the Middle East: Identity, Mission, and Practice in Wartime and Post-Conflict Upheaval'. Again, submissions for consideration are very welcome and more details can be found in the 'Call for Papers' included in this volume.