Inhabiting the City: Envisioning Baptist Ways of Doing Theology amidst Pluralism

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Abstract:
This article[1] uses theological resources found in the work of James Wm McClendon, Jr to articulate a way for Christians, particularly baptists, to reconceptualise their purpose in a pluralistic and pluralising world. Two themes are highlighted as being especially important for such a context: a robust affirmation of the need for Christians to be receptive to others, rather than putting themselves in the position of perpetual teachers; and the importance of articulating a Christian conception of power that can counter the rise of authoritarian political movements throughout the West.

Keywords:
Pluralism; James Wm McClendon, Jr; Christology; political theology

Introduction

We live in a time of great unrest. Of course, people throughout history have believed the same thing about their own eras; and yet I do not think we are unwarranted in believing that this moment is, in fact, uniquely tumultuous. Global capitalism continues to reshape cities, pushing and pulling people around the world in search of a somewhat sustainable existence. These migrations force interactions between people within Western cities, and while some communities attempt to practise hospitality in whatever ways they can, others view new immigrant populations with fear and resentment — feelings that are often exacerbated by their own sense of economic precarity. Climate change

[1] This article was first presented as the 2020 McClendon Lecture, organised by the James Wm McClendon Chair of Baptistic and Evangelical Theology, Vrije Universiteit, in co-operation with IBTS Centre Amsterdam (Amsterdam, 13 November 2020).

promises only to accelerate these already troubling trends.[2] In the face of such daunting challenges (and others besides), many gravitate towards conspiracy theories that provide a hermeneutical key for unlocking the hidden secrets behind these complex and interlocking phenomena.[3] Others embrace nationalistic and authoritarian political movements that promise to restore forgotten greatness, strength, and to rid countries of undesirables — to restore 'order'. Whereas in the era just passed one could perhaps get away with believing that 'diversity' would inevitably, by some magical alchemy, transform people into loving and tolerant citizens of the world, today one should be painfully aware that people can recognise the reality of pluralism — and shudder.[4]

Needless to say, Christians have had a variety of responses to this situation — supportive of and resistant to authoritarian politics, critical of and trading in conspiratorial thinking. Some Christians attempt to remain neutral on political issues, positioning themselves as outside or above such partisan or divisive debates. Others push this kind of thinking even further, 'reminding' us that our focus should be on matters of the spirit (Jesus's kingdom is not of this world, they remind us) rather than 'earthly' things, which are (at best) of secondary importance, and anyway, are addressed by focusing on heaven, not earth.[5]

I must admit to finding such sentiments deeply misguided and unsuited for the world Christians are called to inhabit — for a time that

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[2] For a study of the way these factors are reshaping cities in the global south — leaving one billion people living in unstable urban centres—see Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (New York: Verso, 2006).

[3] In the United States, I have in mind the rise and popularity of the so-called 'QAnon' conspiracy, which is deeply resonant (but not synonymous) with American evangelicalism.

[4] Pope Francis addresses many of these themes in *Fratelli Tutti*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, 3 October 2020 <http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html> [accessed 1 November 2020].

[5] Consider this often-quoted passage from C. S. Lewis: 'If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. […] It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth "thrown in": aim at earth and you will get neither.' (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001; first published 1952), p. 134.)

I do not hesitate to call a *kairos* moment.[6] Indeed, my thoughts on this subject are well-expressed by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who sought to redescribe the task of theology for a society that faced its own set of unprecedented political and theological challenges. Writing from prison, Bonhoeffer straightforwardly noted the inadequacy of popular responses to authoritarianism, fascism, and *Herrenvolk* ideology more broadly: reclamations of 'reasonability', or turns to ethical 'fanaticism', or appeals to 'conscience' or 'duty' or 'freedom' or 'private virtue' as panaceas.[7] For Bonhoeffer, each response crashed against the rocks of what he termed 'stupidity', which could not be overcome by protests or force, nor instruction or rational argumentation — for the stupid rarely recognise themselves as such.[8] Bonhoeffer saw that each response failed to recognise that 'in the great majority of cases inward liberation must be preceded by outward liberation'.[9] That is, before personal, individual change can occur there must be a change in the society within which individual agency is expressed. Under these circumstances, Bonhoeffer notes, the question for the church is whether we will be of any use in bringing about such changes, or whether we will sigh and resign ourselves to 'ineffectiveness'.[10]

I happen to agree with Bonhoeffer that in a situation like his (and ours), the idea that one could play both sides, avoid taking stands, or address deep structural evil simply by reasoning it out with people (or focusing solely on the world to come) is a fool's errand. That move often collapses into false neutrality and acquiescence to evil. I also agree with Bonhoeffer that the goal for Christians must be instead to seek to act with responsibility and obedience to the concrete question and call of God, in this time and place.[11] As such, these thoughts from Bonhoeffer

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6 '*Kairos* time is the right or opportune time. It is a decisive moment in history that potentially has far-reaching impact. It is often a chaotic period, a time of crisis. However, it is through chaos and crisis that God is fully present, disrupting things as they are and providing an opening to a new future — to God's future. *Kairos* time is, therefore, a time pregnant with infinite possibilities for new life. *Kairos* time is God's time.' (Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2015), p. 206.)

7 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. by Eberhard Bethge (New York: Touchstone, 1997), p. 6.

8 Ibid., p. 8.

9 Ibid., p. 9.

10 Ibid., p. 4.

11 Ibid., p. 5.

bleed into my task here: to introduce a baptist way of doing theology that is 'of use' in a pluralistic world. In a time when previous visions of goodness, theological paradigms, and political set ups are failing, part of the theological task must include articulating a vision that can help guide people, Christian and otherwise, into an uncertain future.

While he is not perfect (no theologian is), I believe there are important resources for developing this theological approach in the writings of James Wm McClendon, Jr, who is popularly associated with the postliberal turn in theology, with its reclamation of the importance of *narrative* and *practices* in understanding distinctively Christian ways of speaking in and about the world.[12] I have elsewhere argued that McClendon shares much with postliberalism while remaining distinct in important ways, and so here I want to take for granted McClendon's commitment to narrative theology, his interest in Christians living into their convictions in public without translating them into another idiom, and his work on powerful practices.[13] Instead, I want to draw attention to other, equally important aspects of McClendon's theology, which (I hope to show) is not a balkanising or fideistic force, and in fact can directly challenge such tendencies among baptists writ large. I will argue that baptist theology is best done as Christians live and move in the city — emerging out of the social world of overlapping convictional communities where Christians share much with neighbours and strangers alike.[14]

To this end, I will explore two themes from McClendon's theology that help articulate a baptist way of moving within pluralistic, urban settings: the way his affirmation of the deep commonalities that exist between people couples with a rejection of hyper-individualistic conceptions of conversion; and his articulation of a cruciform sense of power that can

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[12] See George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1984); and Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974).

[13] On the similarities and differences between McClendon and postliberalism (also known as the Yale school), see Ryan Andrew Newson, *Inhabiting the World: Identity, Politics, and Theology in Radical Baptist Perspective* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2018).

[14] See Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), chapter 6, esp. p. 154; Jeffrey Stout, 'Response by Jeffrey Stout', in 'Pragmatism and Democracy: Assessing Jeffrey Stout's *Democracy and Tradition*', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78, no. 2 (June 2010): 413–448, (p. 442); and Newson, *Inhabiting the World*, pp. 117–18.

guide Christians in discerning which narratives within the life of the city we ought to listen to and which we should resist. The first set of resources suggests a type of engagement that is neither unidirectional nor inherently antagonistic; the second, a theological conviction that colours the form this engagement should (and should not) take.

Toward a Discerning Receptivity

Right from the start, it is important to note that some baptists will be wary of attempts to do theology in and for the complex urban settings within which so many of us find ourselves. Indeed, a particular inclination — properly called a temptation — haunts baptist approaches to this subject: namely, a wariness about participating at all, seeing such engagements as suspect in principle.[15] If baptists are to think about such matters, so the inclination goes, it should be in service to articulating a theology that is 'in but not of' the city, rather than seeing theology as a practice emerging out of the flows and movements that constitute any collective. Behind this inclination is a pessimistic picture about what Christians share with their fellow city-dwellers, and a belief that Christians' main goal should be to convert others to their form of life, all other considerations being secondary to this primary aim. Thus, articulating a faithful and effective (in the sense Bonhoeffer specified) way of doing theology for the city must directly subvert this inclination, as it will continue to do a lot of work behind the scenes if left unaddressed. We are always already involved in the life of our cities in myriad ways, whether we realise that or not. As such, our goal should be to describe the nature of our involvement *well*, and by so doing undermine the conceit that one even *could* avoid doing theology from within the complex web of interactions that make up social life.[16] We should allow this recognition to frame a better and more irenic theology

[15] I use 'temptation' here in the sense employed by Ludwig Wittgenstein — that is, a kind of intellectual trap that needs to be avoided and 'therapised'.

[16] McClendon reiterates the complex nature of social reality constantly in his work. See James Wm McClendon, Jr, 'Social Ethics for Radical Christians: Analysis and Program', in *The Collected Works of James Wm. McClendon, Jr., Volume 1*, ed. by Ryan Andrew Newson and Andrew C. Wright (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), § 14.

of conversion. And we should attempt to do all this without collapsing the distinction between church and world.

Of course, faced with pluralism and its attendant challenges (and opportunities), McClendon recognised that Christians may be tempted into a kind of retreat, however quixotic. That is, there are those who might recognise that pluralism is a reality — indeed, a reality that cuts right through each Christian heart — and seek 'to resolve that difficulty by abandoning the world and taking refuge in the church'.[17] McClendon certainly cares about the resources uniquely available to practising, worshipping communities. But he also consistently argues that Christian practices bleed into and always already imply cooperation with others, in a way that avoids an inherently antagonistic, Constantinian, or neo-colonial stance toward one's neighbours. McClendon is able, for instance, to say that those with whom Christians disagree are not evil, at least not necessarily. In a society marked by plurality, our interactions with one another will look different if

> I come to see those who differ with me, not merely as "fools" or "barbarians," but also as folk with flesh like my flesh, brain like my brain, soul like my soul. To that extent, though the justificatory task is still my own, it may draw upon sympathies, correspondences, insights that are not merely private or partisan. And therein lies our hope of transcending the convictional cellblocks to which we might otherwise be confined.[18]

Unfortunately, the move to retreat, either physically (as in a withdrawal to the woods) or, more likely, in stance — in the creation of alternative institutions meant to reinforce a unidirectional engagement with the city — is ascendant in many circles, including among those whom McClendon would label 'baptist'. Representative in the United States is the popularity of Rod Dreher, who is well known for pushing the narrative that conservative Christians in the West are being persecuted at the hands of 'totalitarian progressives', with a particular,

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[17] James Wm McClendon, Jr, 'Taking the Side of the World', in *The Collected Works of James Wm. McClendon, Jr., Volume 2*, eds. Ryan Andrew Newson and Andrew C. Wright (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), § 49 (p. 367). On the line between church and world passing through each Christian heart, see James Wm McClendon, Jr, *Ethics: Systematic Theology, Volume 1*, rev. edn (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002; first published 1986), p. 17.

[18] James Wm McClendon, Jr and James M. Smith, *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994), p. 173. That McClendon writes this with Smith, an atheist, is significant.

almost obsessive focus on LGBTQ issues.[19] Dreher synthesised his approach to Christianity and pluralism in his widely read book *The Benedict Option*, the entirety of which is predicated on the idea that 'traditionalist' Christians are and will be persecuted for their beliefs, especially about LGBTQ matters, and that as such Christians must find resources to survive 'the new Dark Ages'.[20] That Christians of his ilk could be *doing* any persecuting of gay and transgender people seems not to concern him. Dreher constantly harkens to 'tradition' to justify his positions, but not in the more nuanced sense of Alasdair MacIntyre (ironically), in which one simply is traditioned as one goes about reasoning in the world and participates in an ongoing argument extended through time.[21] Dreher rather seems to use tradition to refer to an unchanging set of doctrines and moral positions. Indeed, in *The Benedict Option* one regularly finds Dreher referring to 'the' Christian position on sexuality, what 'we' all believe about same sex marriage, or what 'the' Bible 'says' about transgender issues, in a way that should make any theologian or biblical scholar (worth listening to) uncomfortable.[22]

I bring up Dreher here not because his work is particularly interesting or unique, but precisely because it is *not* unique. Dreher represents a popular form of Christianity that responds to pluralism with antagonism or withdrawal — whose major driving ethos is to protect

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[19] Just as a sampling, see <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/coming-oppression-of-christians-communism>;
<https://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/maya-forstater-totalitarian-transgenderism>; <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/ dreher/civil-rights-christopher-caldwell-totalitarianism>;
<https://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/transgender-cultural-marxism-liturgical-language> [accessed 1 February 2020].

[20] Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Sentinel, 2017), pp. 3, 170–71, 179–82. In a particularly revealing rhetorical flourish, Dreher writes that 'florists, bakers, and photographers [have been] dragged through the courts by gay plaintiffs' and suffer 'outright bigotry' for their anti-LGBTQ beliefs (ibid., p. 175). Dreher does not say a single word about the violence and discrimination suffered by LGBTQ people in his book, focusing instead on so-called 'blacklisting' of Christians (ibid., p. 182).

[21] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1988), p. 12. See also Aristotle Papanikolaou, 'I Am a Traditionalist; Therefore, I Am', *Public Orthodoxy* (February 19, 2019), <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2019/02/19/i-am-a-traditionalist-therefore-i-am> [accessed 9 February 2020].

[22] Dreher, *Benedict Option*, p. 12, and especially pp. 195–204.

itself from being defiled by an impure, secular world. Dreher represents a Christianity expressive of hegemonic power that nonetheless narrates itself in terms of persecution surrounding cultural trends, thus reinforcing a reflexive unreceptivity toward those outside the fold.[23] Insofar as his project is driven by fear and fantasies of persecution — particularly at the hands of the LGBTQ community, secularists, adherents of 'identity politics', so-called Social Justice Warriors, and naive 'liberal' Christians — Dreher embodies what Candida Moss calls 'the myth of persecution', which leads Christians like him to 'see themselves as persecuted, make their opponents into enemies, and equate disagreement with demonic activity'.[24] Dreher's project has an allure among some baptists: that in a society marked by thick pluralism, the response should be to discover new modes of communal life through which 'both morality and civility might survive the coming ages of barbarism and darkness', to quote MacIntyre.[25] For Dreher, this means protecting 'our' vision of 'traditional' morality (especially sexual morality), and refraining from communion with those outside ideological borders as a primary good.[26] All such engagements, if they occur, should involve bringing knowledge *to* others, with Christians

[23] That Dreher pushed this persecution narrative even with Donald Trump in the White House is astounding. Dreher thinks conservative Christians are 'politically homeless' after Trump, despite the fact that the vast majority supported his presidency (ibid., p. 80).

[24] Candida Moss, *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom* (New York: HarperOne, 2013), p. 260. For example, when Christian blogger Rachel Held Evans pointed out that conservative Christians are actually the ones who wield political power in this country right now, Dreher responded by saying his concern is to avoid a future in which 'the Evanses of the world' would be collaborating with the secular state to find and kill orthodox Christians hiding in basements. Dreher even compares Christians today who refuse to be allies with LGBTQ people with early Christians refusing to burn incense to Caesar. 'No, what I'm worried about is that far in the future, should the police come looking for dissident orthodox Christians hiding out from state persecution, the Rachel Held Evanses of the world will point helpfully and patriotically, and say, "They're in the basement, officer."' (Rod Dreher, 'Rachel Held Evans Dismisses Benedict Option', *American Conservative* (March 9, 2017), <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/rachel-held-evans-benedict-option> [accessed 1 February 2020]; and Dreher, *Benedict Option*, p. 180.)

[25] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd edn (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 263.

[26] Dreher, *Benedict Option*, pp. 16–19.

occupying the role of perpetual teacher. In this way, Dreher enacts what Baptist theologian Willie Jennings calls 'pedagogical imperialism'.[27]

In any case, McClendon provides a different approach for baptists to take, one that I think is more faithful to God and more suited to the world we find ourselves in. For starters, McClendon's theological methodology includes an affirmation of the 'fallibility principle', which he defines as the recognition that even one's most cherished and deeply held convictions might be wrong and in principle are subject to revision or reformulation or rejection.[28] Being willing to listen to and learn from others is thus incumbent upon anyone who knows their own epistemological limitations. Recognising one's own finitude, in this sense, fits well with an affirmation of pluralism as a gift that allows us to receive and learn from each other as we move in the world, at least in principle.[29] That there are different ways of living in (and as) the city can be welcomed and celebrated as such, rather than merely tolerated. In the realm of public theology, the fallibility principle pairs with a rejection of the imperialist drive to control and dominate others; so too does it reject the illusion of retreat. Rather, communities who read the Bible as people addressed *by God* are also called to listen to other inhabitants of the city, and to allow their theological insights to emerge from that dynamic space. For McClendon, 'the humble fact that the church is not the world' does not mean that Christians can or should opt out of their participation in the city as such, important as attending to our unique set of stories remains.[30] The church's boundary from the world is porous and narratival, and is thus marked by discursivity rather than purity. To forget this point would lead to a confessionalism that on McClendon's own account 'draws ever more tightly the lines of "fellowship," ever more narrowly those of cooperation, and therefore ever more pitiably the lines of influence […] upon the world'.[31]

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[27] Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020), esp. pp. 140–41; and Wille James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 112–16, 208.

[28] McClendon and Smith, *Convictions*, p. 112.

[29] I explore the concept of receptivity or 'listening' as a fundamental feature of baptist theology in Newson, *Inhabiting the World*, pp. 19–26.

[30] McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 17.

[31] Ibid., p. 236.

Furthermore, McClendon is able to affirm the importance of receptive participation in the city without abandoning Christian convictions because of his markedly materialist vision of the Christian life. Internal to McClendon's method is an affirmation of our shared embodiment — that Christian convictions about God and politics are expressed by people who are organic entities, through and through.[32] For McClendon, this means that however different we may be from one another — however incommensurate our traditions — we are at least linked to our neighbours (and enemies) at the level of embodiment, which McClendon links to our being linguistic beings *as such*.[33]

Finally, McClendon pushes against the 'antagonistic and conversionist' model for moving in the city because he respects the nature of our plurality too much to speak in such overarching terms. McClendon rejects a 'generic' vision of the social world that would conceptualise participation or non-participation as a wholesale affair: *either* one participates, or one does not. Rather, McClendon rightly notes that cities are constituted by a complex interwoven network of practices that bundle together, such that there is always a degree of 'choosing' that happens as one moves in the world.[34] McClendon points to the importance of 'counter-practices' in navigating these complexities, and in enabling participation without being 'swallowed up' by any particular practice's habits and ends.[35]

I find these resources helpful for articulating a way of doing theology that is distinctively Christian and receptive to difference.

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[32] James Wm McClendon, Jr, 'Three Strands of Christian Ethics', in *Collected Works, Volume 2*, § 26.

[33] McClendon's own avenue into affirming embodiment came through language, recognising that to be human is to be shaped by language, and that language itself is an embodied affair. 'Language is spoken before it is written; it is sounds in the chest cavities, voice boxes vibrating together. It is, at one reach, a set of rhythmic and polypitched cries, song, poetry, sounds of play and of work and of love, the beat of life —and of death.' Of course, McClendon knew this meant that people were distinct, since clearly we do speak different languages. But it also meant that humans share a deep bond in our ability to speak *as such*. (McClendon, 'Homo Loquens', in *Collected Works, Volume 2*, pp. 127–28.)

[34] See James Wm McClendon, Jr, 'Ethics for a Career', in *Collected Works, Volume 2,* §45 (p. 323); and McClendon, *Ethics*, pp. 167–82. 'No one should, on Christian grounds, abandon hope in the costly work of witness to the structures of society, or indulge in a nonselective antipathy to whatever any government anywhere proposes.' (McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 181.)

[35] McClendon, 'Ethics for a Career', pp. 320–25.

McClendon never loses the sense that Christian identity is 'story formed', and this formation is intimately tied to participation in church practices.[36] Nor does he forget that living into this story happens as one participates in a shared world of powerful practices, within which people can converse across deep, convictional disagreement — even if only to a limited extent.[37] Nor still does he see the story-formed nature of Christian convictions as confining, even as it gives Christians news to tell that is good.[38] Rather, McClendon's theological approach resonates with a dialectic presented by James Cone — incidentally, a theologian to whom McClendon could have listened more deeply.[39]

We are creatures of history, not divine beings. I cannot claim infinite knowledge. What I can do is to bear witness to my story, to tell it and live it, as the story grips my life and pulls me out of nothingness into being. However, I am not imprisoned within my story. Indeed, when I understand truth as story, I am more likely to be open to other people's truth stories. As I listen to other stories, I am invited to move out of the subjectivity of my own story into another realm of thinking and acting. The same is true for others when I tell my story.[40]

A baptist approach to theology that takes these insights seriously will not proceed 'from above', discovering truths from abstract or theoretical heights that are then 'applied' to the world. The notion that Christians either could or should get their theology in order first *and then* move to engage the world is illusory — and likely leads to putting off

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36 McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 178.

37 McClendon and Smith, *Convictions*, pp. 1–7, 155–56, 176; James Wm McClendon, Jr, *Witness: Systematic Theology, Volume 3* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), pp. 298–99. McClendon is here discussing that communication is *possible* even across deep, convictional differences — while we may disagree on the nature of 'justice', we can at least gather around certain terms in order to argue about what we mean by them.

38 For an articulation of what it looks like to speak 'good news' in and through a postmodern, even relativistic world, see Brad Kallenberg, 'The Gospel Truth of Relativism', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 53, no. 2 (2000): 177–211.

39 See McClendon, *Doctrine*, pp. 53, 62. On reading Cone as a white person, with attention given to one of McClendon's central conversation partners, Stanley Hauerwas, see Kristopher Norris, *Witnessing Whiteness: Confronting White Supremacy in the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

40 James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, rev. edn (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997; first published 1975), p. 94.

'engagement' or 'participation' or even 'ethics' indefinitely.[41] But so too is it illusory to think that Christians can abandon the work of theology altogether. Rather, on this view theology is done *as one lives* in the world, or perhaps as one proceeds along the way, participating and arguing and contributing to the life of the city. It is at the borders of encounter that we discover the (fluid, shifting) points of convergence and divergence between us.[42]

Of course, for some Christians it will be difficult to recognise the truth that our lives are mutually enmeshed in all sorts of intimate, complex ways, for they have built their identities around a much more antagonistic picture of reality. For these Christians, all such talk concerning what we may share with our neighbours is at best secondary to the primary goal of enacting what they understand to be 'conversion' in and for others — 'winning souls' for Christ. Inherent to this theology is a dualism that divides people into sharp, neat categories: saved and unsaved, Christian and non-Christian, good and bad. Conversion thus names getting an individual to move from one category into another. McClendon does not reject the inclination to preach good news to the world — far from it — but he does complicate it in important ways. For one, McClendon rejects any theology built on the presumption that people neatly occupy certain categories of good or bad, saved or unsaved, in any simplistic fashion. When he says that the line between church and world runs through each Christian heart, that is not a mere rhetorical flourish.[43] Further, McClendon argues throughout his work that salvation is not a matter of escaping to some other world, but rather living into the kingdom of God here and now, with all the attendant social and political implications associated with that turn.[44] Whatever it means to 'strive first for the Kingdom of God and his righteousness' (Matthew 6:33), it does *not* mean withdrawing or focusing on 'spiritual' matters to the exclusion of the social or material. Such a view betrays a

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[41] This is partly why McClendon famously begins his systematic theology with ethics: not because it is more important than other loci of investigation, but because it has so often been neglected or deprioritised in the history of Christian theological thought. See McClendon, *Ethics*, pp. 39–41.

[42] See Newson, *Inhabiting the World*, chapter 5.

[43] See ibid., chapter 4; and James Wm McClendon, Jr, 'Knowing the One Thing Needful', in *Collected Works, Volume 1*, §18.

[44] See McClendon, *Doctrine*, chapter 3.

fundamental misunderstanding of what Jesus even meant by 'the Kingdom of God'.[45] Rather, the Christian life, if one can even describe such a thing in singular terms, is a matter of living into a story, a narrative, a vision *now* — not merely converting individuals *or* reflecting upon the world but, as Gustavo Gutiérrez writes, becoming 'part of the process through which the world is transformed'.[46]

Similarly, when McClendon discusses individual conversion, he frames it as a process that happens over time, as one participates in practices that shape and reshape one's character.[47] Included in this process, of course, are moments of turning towards God in sudden, even dramatic fashion — but such moments take their place within a much wider and longer transformation; they are relativised but not abandoned as one remains open to further surprises from God. Crucially, this theology of conversion does not put Christians in the position of seeing the world from God's point of view, *sub specie aeternitatis*. Indeed, it undermines the entire logic behind the 'saving souls' paradigm precisely by putting Christians together with others as people in need of receiving, from God and others; Christians are robbed of their (largely self-given) status as perpetual gift-givers, and instead tasked with seeking to witness to and participate in the story of God, situating our witness in our vulnerability and receptivity, and tying hope for our own conversion to the ultimate change of the entire cosmos.[48]

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[45] See David P. Gushee and Glen H. Stassen, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016). As Ched Myers argues, any reading of the Gospels that posits a sharp division between the spiritual and the secular imposes 'etic' categories onto the texts, introducing distinctions that would have been foreign to the first-century audience. See Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), pp. 45–47.

[46] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988; first published 1973), p. 12. 'It is a theology which is open — in the protest against trampled human dignity, in the struggle against the plunder of the vast majority of humankind, in liberating love, and in the building of a new, just, and comradely society — to the gift of the Kingdom of God.'

[47] McClendon, 'Toward a Conversionist Spirituality', in *Collected Works, Volume 2*, §40. See also McClendon, *Doctrine*, pp. 137–44.

[48] See James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology*, rev. edn (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990; first published 1974), p. 170. My argument here is also resonant with the expansion of the concept of salvation found in Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, p. 85. Additionally, this line of reasoning has a natural affinity with the version of universalism argued by David Bentley Hart, though it does not necessitate

Insofar as this way of doing theology decentres the image of the individual Christian or Christian community unidirectionally offering gifts of salvation to a broken world, it is resonant with the work of Willie Jennings, who has shown how deeply Christians in the West have been shaped by habits of imagination that emerged within the colonial and post-colonial moment. These habits are chiefly manifest in the idea of 'incarnating' gospel truths in other lands or for other people, and seeing one's own people as the perpetual bringers of knowledge and blessing. European Christians taken in by this ideology forget that they come to the Christian story 'from without', as it were, as Gentiles.[49] As Mikael Broadway puts it, Anglo and European Christians confused 'white for light'.[50] By fostering a vision of the Christian life born of mutuality and receptivity, we are tracing the outlines of a theology that seeks to avoid reinforcing the same patronising, colonialist modes of interaction that Jennings shows are not just violent and exploitative, but idolatrous.[51]

Baptists should embrace the fact that we share our lives with others, and should cultivate a stance by which we are as prepared to 'be incarnated among' as to 'incarnate' truths. Regardless of any particular theological conclusions reached from this starting point, this way of doing theology is a first step in undermining movements that trade in making strong distinctions between 'saved' and 'unsaved', 'us' and 'them', or 'friend' and 'enemy' (à la Carl Schmitt).[52] A first step, but by no means a final or sufficient one.

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it. See David Bentley Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019).

[49] See Jennings, *Christian Imagination*.

[50] Mikael N. Broadway, 'Mistaking White for Light: Awakening to a Truthful Search for the Light', in *Sources of Light: Resources for Baptist Churches Practicing Theology,* ed. by Amy L. Chilton and Steven R. Harmon (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2020), pp. 63–75.

[51] As Gutiérrez puts it, Christians' stance in the world should not be about 'struggling for others', which 'suggests paternalism and reformist objectives, but rather of becoming aware of oneself as not completely fulfilled and as living in an alienated society'. (Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, p. 82.)

[52] Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. by George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005; first published 1922).

Power and the Cross: Christ the Rosetta Stone

There is much to be said *after* one accepts that baptist theology should be done with a full awareness and affirmation of one's situatedness within the complex matrices that make up social (and personal) life. But given the re-emergence of authoritarianism and xenophobic ideologies throughout the West — movements which often enjoy Christian support — I want to spend the second part of this article articulating a Christologically oriented vision of power that can guide baptists in resisting and countering these trends. Using resources in McClendon's work, I will sketch a baptist vision of power that is not squeamish about power-talk in general, nor acquiescent to hegemonic power, but rather feeds into an anti-authoritarian understanding of power rooted in the God of Jesus Christ.[53] This task is tricky, of course, because certain Christian theologies have bolstered the very authoritarian trends I seek to counteract. Indeed, among evangelicals in the United States, the combination of whiteness, masculinity, and Jesus has produced a particularly potent sacralisation of authoritarian power that is not easily defeated. We must admit that many Christians do not *compromise* to support authoritarian leaders and policies, but rather find in them a *genuine* expression of their theological sensibilities.[54] It is for just this reason that I think the attempt to articulate an alternative, baptist vision of power is worthwhile: it may undermine one of the roots driving Christians, at least, to support such political programmes.

As such, in this section I will describe McClendon's cruciform, Spirit-driven conception of divine power (and God's action in the world more generally). From here, I will argue that this theological conviction should guide baptists in discerning which narratives of the city we should affirm and 'hook into', and which we should resist; it aids us in articulating the *kinds* of engagement Christians should participate in that are neither controlling nor thin. Granted that we should work for goods in common, this investigation helps us name which goods are truly *good*.

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[53] On the distinct uses of the term 'power', see Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Routledge, 1946), pp. 180, 294–96.

[54] On this point in the United States context, see Kristin Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York: Liveright, 2020).

Put simply, McClendon's vision of God's power in Christ provides a theological 'Rosetta Stone' for Christians as we inhabit the city.[55]

As is well known, McClendon situates himself within a diverse theological tradition that is neither Catholic nor Protestant, which he labels 'baptist' (with a lowercase 'b'). The awkwardness of this term is intentional, as it names a wide-ranging group who do not neatly fit within any one expression of Christianity. For McClendon, the central marker of baptists is their commitment to reading the scriptures as addressed *to them*, and living in the world as a community before Jesus as teacher and Jesus as eschatological judge — in a phrase, baptists read as though 'this is that', and 'then is now'.[56] Described thusly, baptists cut across a variety of sub-traditions, denominations, and theological inclinations; the term names a distinct and diverse way of being Christian. And while the baptist vision is principally a hermeneutical perspective, 'beyond that it is a kind of Christian practice: it means finding in Scripture what we are to do now, God's people with an open Bible, ready to follow. This perspective and practice most simply defines the distinctive theological standpoint of baptists.'[57]

Because McClendon works within this theological paradigm, his insights regarding divine power — and the ways these insights bleed into expressions of power in the city — are similarly 'strange', neither Catholic nor Protestant.[58] McClendon resists expressions of divine sovereignty that baptise the status quo or automatically identify with those in power; so too does he resist theologies that claim Christianity should focus on 'spiritual' matters to the exclusion of 'political' ones. Instead, McClendon sees the full expression of God's power in the peaceable life and witness of Jesus Christ; the power of God is manifest in a crucified Messiah, humiliated and penetrated by imperial might (1

[55] The image of Christ the Rosetta Stone is from H. Richard Niebuhr, held up in Glen H. Stassen, 'Concrete Christological Norms for Transformation', in *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture*, ed. by Glen H. Stassen, D. M. Yeager, and John Howard Yoder (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), pp. 179–80.

[56] McClendon, *Ethics*, pp. 30–32.

[57] James Wm McClendon, Jr, 'A baptist Millennium?' in *Collected Works, Volume 1*, p. 301.

[58] McClendon typically frames the baptist vision in this way; as such, he assumes a Western focus that cuts out Orthodox theology as another 'option' in the tradition.

Corinthians 1:18–25).[59] For McClendon, this conviction about Jesus is a 'master picture' that should guide Christians as we navigate the world and, indeed, the multifaceted witness of the scriptures themselves.[60] And while the New Testament provides us with multiple, irreducibly distinct portraits of Jesus, there is no blue note that presents Jesus as the opposite of crucified and resurrected — a Jesus who takes up the sword or refrains from confronting evil and injustice in the world.[61] As such, for McClendon the question to ask concerning Jesus and power is not 'How might powerfulness be avoided' but rather, 'What kinds of power are in conformity with the victory of the Lamb?'[62]

McClendon highlights the connection between the cross, power, and divine nature throughout his work, but perhaps nowhere with more lucidity than when he reflects upon the so-called 'Christ hymn' in Philippians 2:5–11. McClendon notes that many theologians interpret this passage as describing the divine, pre-incarnate Christ 'emptying himself' of divinity, not grasping after 'the form of God' but rather descending to earth; it is about a 'heavenly being who laid aside his trappings to take up human existence'.[63] Understood in this way, the passage celebrates a kind of divine saga that would be difficult to identify with or emulate. However, McClendon interprets this passage differently, though his reading is not without precedent in the Christian tradition. Following Origen and Cyprian, McClendon sees in this passage not the story of a divine emptying (thus avoiding thorny metaphysical questions about how deity could 'empty' itself), but a way of describing the kind of power that Jesus embodied *on earth*. Rather than a 'Miltonian tale of a heavenly God who refused to rebel', he sees

> a reference to the human Jesus's earthly temptations — which the Gospels condense into a single story that unfolds at much greater length. […] If we read Paul this way, he refers here to a Jesus who might have been made a king […], but who instead identified himself and his cause with servants and

[59] See Brian J. Robinson, *Being Subordinate Men: Paul's Rhetoric of Gender and Power in 1 Corinthians* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2019).
[60] McClendon, *Doctrine*, pp. 88–89.
[61] These themes are sometimes explicit in the text itself, but otherwise it is very much present but implicit and subtle. For a helpful discussion of how these themes can be present without being immediately noticeable to contemporary readers, see Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*.
[62] McClendon, *Ethics*, pp. 181–82.
[63] McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 266.

> serfs, outcasts and victims, to a degree that led the authorities to arrange his death — an outcome that is just the cost of obeying God in this world.[64]

Read as such, McClendon sees in this short passage a beautiful expression of the kind of power that Christians should emulate: a power marked by cooperativeness (not motivated by 'selfish ambition or conceit') and self-emptying (*kenosis*). It is *that* kind of life that is marked out as authoritative. Here is a paradoxical affirmation of the non-sovereign sovereignty of Christ, that neither refuses powerfulness nor expresses power in 'lordly' terms. It signals a divine 'subreignty', a rule from below. Jesus's kingdom, in other words, is not marked by autocratic rule; it is rather 'a kingdom-at-hand characterized by an alternative, indeed a countercultural, life-style, one whose keynotes were *expectancy* (he was an eschatological *prophet*), *openness* (practicing a *priest*-like penetration of the barriers that divide us from God and one another), and *creativity* (thus disclosing himself a numinous *king*-in-waiting)'.[65] Thus, McClendon allows Christ to colour what is said about God's power more generally, and I find this instinct quite helpful.

Of course, taken on their own these theological reflections could tap into and reinforce a version of the 'unidirectional' critique that I noted above, this time expressed through a vision of heroic martyrs unilaterally bringing light to the world through their service.[66] Additionally, any invocation of 'self-limitation' must be careful to avoid the criticisms brought to this concept by feminist theologians.[67] As such, it is crucial to combine this insight about divine power and *kenosis* with a second affirmation: namely, that the kenotic power of God is consonant with and in fact chiefly manifest in a communal context marked by plurality and reciprocity, rather than uniformity, fear of difference, and 'order'. God is not powerful in the way an autocratic (male) ruler is powerful, seeking to impose order upon difference from above in a way that hoards power and is deeply terrified of any

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[64] Ibid., p. 267.
[65] Ibid., p. 269.
[66] See Jennings, *After Whiteness*, p. 75.
[67] See Sarah Coakley, '*Kenosis*: Theological Meanings and Gender Connotations', in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. by John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 192–210.

purported 'disorder'.[68] Without collapsing the distinction between creator and creature or saying more than can be said about the divine nature, McClendon affirms a vision of God's power and God's action that works with and for creation, celebrating difference, diversity, and empowerment rather than tyranny.[69] God's power is shared. God, for McClendon, is of course the beginning and end of all things, the source of ongoing blessing and strength to struggle against forces that contravene God's will.[70] But this affirmation is coupled with an understanding of the universe as dynamic, emergent, open, and relational. Within such a world, the conviction that God is the ground of all being means that God loves, wills, and enjoys creation as interactive and unfolding — all the way down and all the way up.[71] Paraphrasing Romans 8:28, McClendon argues that 'in everything, as we know, [God] co-operates [*sunergei*, "synergizes"] for good with those who love God and are called according to his purpose'.[72]

And so, we see in McClendon resources for a theological affirmation of power that is not autocratic but cruciform — that works in and through multiple strands in creation rather than overwhelming it from on high. What difference does this make to baptists seeking a theology of the city — or a way of inhabiting the city that is consonant with our theological convictions? Throughout Europe and the United States, neoliberalism continues to dominate our political and economic landscape, privatising everything it can and taking away even the possibility of talking about goods held in common.[73] These forces have gone largely unchecked over the past forty years, which coincides with a resurgence of authoritarian, xenophobic, reactionary ideologies across the West. Marked in particular by a heightened fear of immigrants and

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[68] See the reflections on the 'fear of chaos' or *tehomophobia* in many theological traditions in Catherine Keller, *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

[69] See Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1988).

[70] McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 149.

[71] Ibid., p. 166. See Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), chapters 5 and 6, esp. pp. 169–77.

[72] McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 169.

[73] See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Bonnie Honig, *Public Things: Democracy in Disrepair* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017). As a force that does spiritual as well as material damage, see Bruce Rogers-Vaughn, *Caring for Souls in a Neoliberal Age* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016).

a desire to reclaim past glory, these movements seek control and domination over others, and insofar as they are the opposite of the form of power held up by Paul in Philippians, I do not hesitate to call them anti-Christ.[74]

Baptists are in no way immune from supporting these movements; those who do so apply the 'this is that' hermeneutic, but to biblical texts like the stories of David, or King Cyrus, or Nehemiah — the equivalent of reading Genesis 10–11 as justification for apartheid.[75] McClendon himself describes how the baptist vision can be used in this way if it is decoupled from an affirmation of Christ as the 'master picture', the type of types that enables one to judge between different visions of goodness, political programmes, and strands within the scriptures.[76] My simple suggestion here is that if baptists truly believe that the nature of divine power is fully revealed in Christ, then we *should* resist movements that trade in authoritarian power. Christians are called to follow a Jesus who is our teacher, and whose teaching is 'embedded in his learning'.[77] Christ is the centre, as Bonhoeffer quipped; Christianity is indeed 'life lived out under the governance of a central vision'.[78] But the Christ *at* the centre is not a stagnant or self-contained

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[74] See Elizabeth Dias, 'Christianity Will Have Power', *New York Times* (August 9, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/09/us/evangelicals-trump-christianity.html> [accessed September 1, 2020].

[75] McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 467. For further exploration of the way 'this is that' can go wrong in this way, see Newson, *Inhabiting the World*, chapter 7.

[76] McClendon, *Doctrine*, pp. 482–87. McClendon well knew that other visions of Christ could lead to other 'stances' in the world, and not all invocations of Christ were equal. The Ku Klux Klan in the United States could also claim that 'the living Christ is a Klansman's criterion of character'. For the Klan, Christ was committed to his own 'klan', the Jewish Nation — even establishing his own klan post-resurrection — and thus was a model Klansman himself, especially in his willingness to sacrifice himself for the greater good. Or more recently, the neoconservative Christian group known as 'The Family' seeks political power and influence guided by a simple phrase: 'Jesus plus nothing'. Thus, to speak of Christ as a moral criterion requires further investigation of what one means by 'Christ' and 'Christlikeness'; otherwise, such terms signal the projection of one's desires onto the social order and little else. See Kelly J. Baker, *Gospel According to the Klan: The KKK's Appeal to Protestant America, 1915–1930* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2011), pp. 48–54, 74–75; David Cunningham, *Klansville, U.S.A.: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 45; and Jeff Sharlet, *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008).

[77] Willie James Jennings, 'Overcoming Racial Faith', *Divinity* 14, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 5–9 (p. 9).

[78] McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, p. 125.

'thing' (or principle), but a wild, kenotic, and still-speaking person.[79] In Jesus, we see a God who is the ground not of being, but of adventure,[80] who works 'synergistically' with creation, and who thus funds a political imagination marked by cooperative power sharing and discerning receptivity. If *this* Jesus is truly guiding one's vision, then one's life will be marked by a kind of gospel instability rather than orderliness — since Jesus himself was radically open to tax collectors and zealots and even the occasional Roman, founding a community whose borders were ever expanding, gradually calling into question all barriers humans erect for themselves in service to the liberating work of God (see Luke 4). This community seeks to hear the *presently spoken* word of God, even as that word presses against the word of God spoken in the past.[81]

I would think this would be a natural move for adherents of the baptist vision. Baked into this hermeneutical principle is an affirmation of multiplicity and unity-in-difference — celebrating light that issues from many sources.[82] Indeed, McClendon's articulation of the baptist vision is drawn from the story of Pentecost found in Acts 2, in which people are enabled to listen to each other in their native tongues. This moment — fleeting as it is — suggests that the movement and presence of God is marked by multiplicity and intimacy through difference.[83] In any case, in the face of rising authoritarian movements in cities across the West, the response from Christians cannot be to avoid talk of power altogether, as if all invocations of 'power' are equal, or as if one could simply reason one's way through the competing interests and political visions we are facing. Authoritarian answers to our crises are neither

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79 As Cone writes, 'the resurrected Christ is not bound by first-century possibilities. Though the Jesus of yesterday is important for our ethical decisions today, we must be careful where we locate that importance. It is not found in following in his steps, slavishly imitating his behavior in Palestine. Rather, we must regard his past activity as a *pointer* to what he is doing now. His actions were not as much examples as *signs* of God's eschatological future and the divine will to liberate all people from slavery and oppression.' (Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, p. 205.)

80 James Wm McClendon, Jr, 'The God of the Theologians and the God of Jesus Christ', in *Collected Works, Volume 2*, p. 197. See McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 285.

81 Willie James Jennings, *Acts* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2017), pp. 119–20.

82 I am here invoking the language of Amy Chilton and Steve Harmon in *Sources of Light*.

83 For more on this point, see Jennings, *Acts*, pp. 27–33. It also suggests the necessity of what McClendon calls 'gospel contextualism', meaning that the good news of Jesus is always found within particular cultures. In a phrase, 'the gospel's living waters is only drunk from earthen vessels' (McClendon, *Witness*, p. 195). On gospel contextualism, see McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 35.

good nor Christian, but they are at least *answers*; they speak to the challenges we face today, even if these answers are antithetical to the gospel. They do not simply appeal to process or decorum, or act as though everything is already great. Christians will either acquiesce to and support such reactionary movements, or counter them with a power that is shared, organised, egalitarian, and non-coercive in principle.[84] To organise such power is to work toward the kind of 'outward liberation' that Bonhoeffer spoke of in *Letters and Papers* — and insofar as this involves working against authoritarians, it is to work for *their* ultimate good too, though they will not recognise that as such.[85] By tying talk of power to the witness of Jesus, McClendon both reminds baptists of a central guide in discerning *how* to go about this work, and also points toward a more robust vision of what it might look like to 'seek first the Kingdom of God' than (at best) vague allusions to ecclesial practice. Rather than pitting the kingdom of God *against* the work of justice (or contrasting the former with 'eternal' matters), one might come to see working against authoritarianism as part of what it means to pursue God's reign on earth as it is in heaven — as a way of living into *what lasts*, rather than simply hoping for what *is last*.[86]

At the end of the day, what I have laid out here is primarily a 'negative' resource for baptists, because it provides a lens through which we can name narratives and ideologies we should *reject*, rather than spelling out in advance precisely what our movements in the city will look like. We inhabit the city with everyone else, and that is to be affirmed; but there are parts of the city that we do not enter.[87] This willingness to say 'no' may put us at odds with our neighbours and even our fellow Christians; it may also put us in alliance with people we

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84 See Luke Bretherton, *Christ and the Common Life: Political Theology and the Case for Democracy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019), p. 398.

85 'It is the same for the oppressors: they never recognize that the struggle of freedom is for all, including themselves. […] As bearers of liberation — of the realm of health in a sick society — the oppressed must therefore fight against oppressors in order to fight for them. This is what Jesus meant when he said, "The Son of man […] came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45 RSV). The service would not be understood and would lead to his death.' (Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, p. 139.)

86 McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 96.

87 See William T. Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), chapters 2 and 3.

thought were strangers or even enemies. But as Curtis Freeman has shown, baptists should at least be used to playing the role of dissenters in service to the wider health of the community.[88]

To put the matter as bluntly as I can: baptists should not hesitate to join the fight against white supremacy, authoritarianism, and xenophobia in our cities. Our place is in the streets, and our theological reflection should follow from this action. To paraphrase a proverb that was often quoted by the recently deceased US Congressman, Civil Rights leader, and Baptist minister John Lewis, 'When you do theology, move your feet.'

[88] Curtis W. Freeman, *Undomesticated Dissent: Democracy and the Public Virtue of Religious Nonconformity* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017).