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Editorial

Ian Randall

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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

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[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

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[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 *JEBS* 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.

‘A Gathered Congregation of People which Is Built on Christ’: Core Ecclesial Principles Anabaptists and Early Baptists Held in Common

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Abstract
The Anabaptists of the Continental Reformation era and the early English Baptists a century later may have derived from different ecclesial-political and geographic settings, but they shared a number of theological sentiments. While several more theological parallels might be demonstrated, this article will focus on four major areas of overlap: ecclesiology, baptism, covenant, and religious liberty/freedom of conscience. Not only are these four distinctives significant for both traditions but these particular doctrines and practices also coalesce to establish a cohesive ecclesiological model that notably differs from other early Protestant traditions.

Keywords
Anabaptists; Baptists; ecclesiology; baptism; covenant; religious liberty

Introduction

The origins of the Anabaptist tradition in the sixteenth century and the Baptists in the seventeenth century are complicated, and various details of the beginnings of both movements remain disputed by historians. Attempts to analyse the degree to which the two movements connected then also prove complex. Regardless of the question of the historic ties and interactions between Anabaptists and early Baptists, as well as the potential influence of the seventeenth-century Continental Anabaptists on their British Baptist counterparts, a careful reader of both traditions can hardly question the significant parallels of a number of doctrinal convictions and ecclesial practices between the two movements. Anabaptists and Baptists have both been characterised as belonging to the same family of churches sometimes categorised as the ‘free church’ and the ‘believers’ church’ movements, even as both of those umbrella

classifications have sometimes been disparaged by scholars as complicated and contested monikers.[1] Regardless, this article will assume Donald Durnbaugh's definition of a believers' church as both a 'voluntary membership of those confessing Jesus Christ as Lord' and a 'covenanted and disciplined community of those walking in the way of Jesus Christ'.[2] The focus of this article, then, will be to address the similar theological and practical characteristics between Anabaptists and early Baptists connected to this distinctive ecclesiological framework, despite both movements' complex origins, development, and history of sporadic interactions.

Ecclesiology: A Visible Church

It can be conceded that the most visible similarity between Anabaptists and Baptists pertains to the theology and practice of believer's baptism, for which both groups were long embroiled in controversy with their respective Western Christian opponents, faced significant persecution, and even received their once-considered pejorative epithets which ultimately became their ecclesial names (literally 're-baptisers' and 'baptisers', respectively). Yet, one cannot properly understand their shared rationale for such a notorious church practice without first grasping its ecclesial context. That is to say, both Anabaptists and early Baptists were not simply attentive to what they believed was the proper timing of and candidates for Christian initiation, as important as the practice of baptism was for both traditions. Foundational to believer's baptism for both was a believers' church. Thus, the visible or believers' church ecclesiology — rudimentary to both groups — shall be discussed first.

The metal of the Anabaptist conviction of a believers' church was forged out of the refiner's fire of the tumultuous Protestant

[1] For a fuller discussion of the history of debate about both these terms, see especially Donald F. Durnbaugh's classic work, *The Believers' Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism* (Herald Press, 1985), pp. 3–33.
[2] See Durnbaugh, *The Believers' Church*, pp. 32–33.

Reformation of the sixteenth century. While the nascent continental magisterial Protestant traditions of Lutheranism and the Reformed churches, centred in Germany and Switzerland respectively, had separated from the Roman Church over significant theological issues such as justification by grace through faith alone and a conviction that the Scriptures were to be observed above the accumulated Western church's canon law, these Protestant traditions maintained the assumptions of the *Volkskirche*, a notion which perceived that inhabitants of Europe belonged to the church by virtue of their baptisms. Magisterial Protestants had politically broken free from Rome by transposing its spiritual authority into the hands of more local governmental jurisdictions. The magisterial Protestant movements in Lutheranism and Reformed Christianity thus maintained the *Volkskirche*. These forms of territorial Protestantism reasoned that, since faith was invisible, and God — and not the Pope and the Roman hierarchy — adjudicated the salvation of each person, the church on earth was comprised of both the 'wheat and the tares' (Matt 13:24–43), that is, genuine Christians along with the uncommitted. At the same time, such classical Protestants contended that a pure church, comprised of only true believers, was unattainable in this world until Christ's return in the *Parousia*. For the present time, they concluded, God alone knew his own.[3]

In contrast, the Anabaptists were more sanguine about the gathering of God's people in this world as separate from the corruptions of the state and the assumed obligations of Western European culture.

[3] E.g. Martin Luther wrote, 'We correctly confess in the Creed that we believe a holy church. For it is invisible, dwelling in the Spirit.' *Luther's Works*, V*ol. 27: Lectures on Galatians 2*, ed. by Jaroslav Pelikan (Concordia, 1964), p. 84. Likewise, John Calvin noted that the invisible church can be understood as 'that which is actually in God's presence, into which no persons are received but those who are children by grace of adoption […] [and comprised of] all the elect from the beginning of the world'. This church is contrasted with the present church on earth where there is 'mingled many hypocrites who have nothing of Christ but the name and outward appearance'. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. by John T. McNeill and trans. by Ford Lewis Battles (Westminster, 1960), 4.1.7, p. 1021.

These 'radicals'[4] were concerned with the church's adaptation to the configurations of Western society, with the church's hierarchical structure mirroring the medieval feudal structure and baptism into the state church often serving as a marker of national citizenship.[5] The church did not simply need to be reformed, they reasoned; it required restoration to the simplicity and deep convictions of its New Testament model(s). Thus, new communities comprised of those who voluntarily were convicted of the gospel — and its individual and communal demands to love and be discipled — needed to be formed, separated from what they viewed as equivocally Christian territorial churches. Only then might the church find the fullness of its spiritual renewal. Thus, for example, in the late 1520s, the Austrian Leonhard Schiemer wrote as follows:

> Church or ecclesia is a gathered congregation of people which is built on Christ and not on the pope, emperor, etc. Nor are the stone houses and towers the church. Paul says you are no longer pilgrims and strangers but fellow citizens and members of the household of God built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.[6]

Regardless of how old and established, neither the building nor its hierarchical leadership should be considered the church. As an Anabaptist, Schiemer reasoned that the true church is a 'gathered congregation of people which is built on Christ'. Only those who had wholeheartedly committed themselves by faith to its biblical, ecclesial

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[4] The term 'radical' or 'Radical Reformation' is derived from George Huntston Williams's 1962 volume, and this article assumes its definition which referred to Anabaptists and other sixteenth-century groups as those who 'believed on principle in the separation of their own churches from the national or territorial state' and who were 'often quite indifferent to the general political and social order'. See Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 3rd edn (Pennsylvania State University, 1995), pp. xxix–xxx.

[5] For further development of the early modern free church critique of the perception of the melding of church and culture, see Gunnar Westin's classic volume, *The Free Church Through the Ages,* trans. by Virgil A. Olson (Broadman, 1958), pp. 40–41; and Ernst Troeltsch's distinction between the early modern free church advocates whom he labelled 'sectarians' in contradistinction to the 'institutional' or 'established' church in his book, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*, trans. by Olive Wyon (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), esp. pp. 691–696.

[6] Leonhard Schiemer, 'A Letter to the Church at Rattenberg' (1527–1528), in *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources*, ed. by Walter Klaassen (Herald Press, 1981), pp. 104–105 (p. 104).

obligations could be part of the genuine church. On this point, the Dutch Anabaptist Dirk Philips would write in the early 1560s that the

> erection of the congregation of Jesus Christ has occurred […] through the right teaching of the divine Word, Rom. 10:18, by the faith that comes out of hearing of the divine Word, added to by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. For no one can enter into the kingdom of God, into the heavenly Jerusalem, that is into the congregation of Jesus Christ, except that he be improved in heart, Matt. 3:8; Gal. 4:7, repents truly, and believes the gospel.[7]

Philips's remarks underscored that those who comprise the church are not constituted by geographic area or even familial ties. The proper gathering of God's people is made up of those who have heard, believed, and been transformed by the gospel. For Anabaptists, the church, as the house of God, is then embodied by true and disciplined believers alone.

Philips would later develop this concept against the magisterial Protestant notion — that the church was instead invisible because it is a spiritual and not merely palpable community — by countering,

> The congregation of the Lord, although it is certainly based in Spirit and truth, is nevertheless visible. […] The reasons are as follows: First, the name 'congregation' thus shows that it is not only invisible but also visible, Eccles. 1; I Tim. 3:16. For it [is called] 'ecclesia,' that is, a gathering or meeting, and those who speak to the meeting are called 'Ecclesiastes.' […] Second, Christ Jesus himself chose his apostles and disciples and gathered them as a congregation, John 15:[16]. And he was, after all, not invisible to Jerusalem and Judah. Third, the apostles gathered a congregation according to the command of the Lord out of all the people through the preaching of the gospel in faith and truth, Matt. 28:[19–20]; Mark 16:[15–16], and through the true Christian baptism, power, and unity of the Holy Spirit. […] How is it then possible that it would all be invisible?[8]

The early Anabaptists, then, considered themselves a visibly gathered people, who assembled voluntarily — and uncompelled by the state — as a community of believers, mutually bound by a pledge to love and discipline one another to be the 'nucleus of God's kingdom on earth or

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[7] Dirk Philips, 'The Congregation of God', in *Enchiridion or Handbook of Christian Doctrine and Religion*, in *The Writings of Dirk Philips, 1504–1568*, ed. and trans. by Cornelius J. Dyck, William E. Keeney, and Alvin J. Beachey (Herald Press, 1992), pp. 350–382 (p. 357).

[8] Philips, 'Answer to the Two Letters of Sebastian Franck', in *Writings*, ed. Dyck et al., 455–466 (pp. 463–464).

its attempted realization'.[9] Persecuted by both Catholic and magisterial Protestant authorities for their distinctive practices, the Anabaptists saw themselves as replicating the New Testament church as a fellowship of genuine believers who endeavoured to live out their distinctive religious convictions.

Nearly a century later, English Baptists began to formulate their own self-understanding as a believers' church initially as a persecuted band of Christians who had separated from the Church of England. Those seventeenth-century English (formerly Puritan) Separatists who removed themselves to the Netherlands under John Smyth, along with the remnant who returned to their homeland under Thomas Helwys, accompanied by those who developed churches later that century in Britain — both in the General and the Particular Baptist streams — all considered themselves as faithful assemblies of genuine believers seeking to restore or re-embody the New Testament church. Beginning with Smyth, who led an assemblage of erstwhile Separatists to Amsterdam, these nascent Baptist groups regarded themselves as a "'gathered church," a body of professing believers which was bound together in a voluntary covenant of faith and obedience. The test of a regenerate church membership was a visible faith.'[10]

Leonard Busher, who accompanied Thomas Helyws from the Netherlands back to Spitalfields, near the stockyards of London, to establish the first British Baptist church, would boldly write against the English king and the monarch's continued maltreatment of any who might dissent from the Anglican church by stating in response,

> I do affirm, through the unlawful weed-hook of persecution, which your predecessors have used, and by your majesty and parliament still continued, there is such a quantity of wheat plucked up, and such a multitude of tares left behind, that the wheat which remains cannot yet appear in any right visible congregation.[11]

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[9] Robert Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism: An Interpretation* (Herald Press, 1998), p. 117.
[10] C. Douglas Weaver, 'Early English Baptists: Individual Conscience and Eschatological Ecclesiology', *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 38.2 (Summer 2011), pp. 141–158 (p. 141).
[11] See A. H. Newman, 'Baptists', in *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, vol. 1, ed. by Samuel Macauley Jackson (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908), pp. 456–480 (p. 460).

Not long after, the initial seven Particular Baptist churches in London formulated what would become one of the most influential Baptist confessions of faith for early Baptists in 1644, *The First London Confession*, a declaration which would inspire numerous subsequent Baptist statements of faith to the present day. In this document, these early Baptists professed

> that Christ hath here on earth a spirituall Kingdome, which is the Church, which he hath purchased and redeemed to himself, as a peculiar inheritance: which Church, as it is visible to us, is a company of visible Saints, called & separated from the world, by the word and Spirit of God, to the visible profession of the faith of the Gospel […].[12]

For Baptists, the necessity of separation from the Anglican Church was predicated on the formation of congregations comprised of sincere believers who both professed with their lips and manifested with their lives their belief in Christ. By definition, such churches could not be merely territorial or ambiguously composed of those both committed and uncommitted to the faith. Therefore, for both Anabaptists and Baptists, the church was to be the visible gathering of God's faithful people. As Theron Price once observed, 'The chief likeness of an early English Baptist to a continental Anabaptist congregation lies in the principle of the gathered and disciplined Church. […] The church is visible, because it is a cohering group of regenerated believers already embodying and manifesting the "Catholick [or universal] Church."'[13]

Initiation into the Visible Church: The Baptism of Believers

Having established that both Anabaptists and early Baptists held to the conviction of preserving a visible believers' church — a congregation comprised exclusively of genuine and committed Christians — it would follow that both movements would also maintain the practice of believer's baptism as the proper and exclusive initiation into the visible community. This rite, administered only to confessing Christians —

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[12] 'First London Confession (1644)', section XXXIII, in *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage*, ed. by H. Leon McBeth (Broadman, 1990), section 2.4, p. 49.

[13] Theron D. Price, 'The Anabaptist View of the Church', *Review and Expositor*, 51.2 (April 1954), pp. 187–203 (p. 202).

including those who had previously received infant baptism — became the most distinctive and controversial outward characteristic of both traditions. It was a practice for which both movements ultimately received their initially pejorative appellations, for which they spent much energy and ink defending, and for which they were severely persecuted.

Although modern scholars interpret the Anabaptist branch of the Reformation as originating in disparate locales in Europe in the 1520s, the Swiss Anabaptists notably started in Zürich in January of 1525 amongst a group of former disciples of the Reformed theologian Huldrych Zwingli. Commencing with the administration of believer's baptism to George Blaurock by Conrad Grebel, the practice spread among its adherents and subsequently to various communities especially outside the Swiss city. Both in the canton of Zürich and through much of Europe, those who practised this baptism on its devotees were labelled 'Anabaptists' (literally, re-baptisers) by authorities, reviving the moniker of a fourth-century heresy first applied to North African Donatists, a heterodoxy punishable by death.

For their part, the early Anabaptists saw believer's baptism as essential to restoring the New Testament church. Michael Sattler helped articulate this principle in the early Anabaptist *Schleitheim Confession*:

> Baptism shall be given to all those who have been taught repentance and the amendment of life and [who] believe truly that their sins are taken away through Christ, and to all those who desire to walk with him in death, so that they might rise with him; […] hereby is excluded all infant baptism, the greatest and first abomination of the pope.[14]

Similarly, the South German Anabaptist scholar Balthasar Hubmaier argued that 'whatever baptism we receive, even if we are a hundred years old, it is still not a rebaptism, since infant baptism is no rebaptism, nor is it worthy of the name. Because the child knows neither good nor evil, nor can he promise or pledge anything to God or the church.' Instead, as Hubmaier continued, believer's baptism was foundational to the believers' church:

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[14] Michael Sattler, 'The Seven Articles [of the Schleitheim Confession] (1527)', in *The Legacy of Michael Sattler*, ed. by John H. Yoder (Herald Press, 1973), pp. 34–43 (p. 36).

> Therefore, as much as one values the forgiveness of sins and the community of saints outside of which there is no salvation, so much should he value the baptism of water, through which he enters and becomes part of the universal Christian church. […] [But] where baptism of water according to the institution of Christ is not set up and used, there one does not know who his brother and sister is, there is no church, no brotherly discipline or correction, no ban, no Supper, nor anything like a Christian existence and reality.[15]

Thus, without proper baptism, Anabaptists contended, the church cannot be rightly restored. The initiation into the voluntary and visible community must itself be a free acceptance of the grace of God and a volitional submission to the congregation and its ongoing discipline in the faith. Moreover, infant baptism was interpreted by them to be absent in Scripture and as a later invention of the territorial church — a rite antithetical to the apostolic congregations.

A century later, English Baptists were concerned that the Anglican ecclesial practices were hardly closer to those of the ancient church than those found in Rome. In late 1608 or early 1609, John Smyth, pastor of the nascent first Baptist congregation in Amsterdam, felt so deeply about the corruption of paedobaptism in the state church that he initiated what he saw as the restoration of the ancient church practice of believer's baptism by first baptising himself before baptising his congregation.[16] In his fiery treatise primarily against Anglicanism entitled 'The Character of the Beast', Smyth wrote,

> The true constitution of the Church is of a new creature baptized into the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The false constitution is of infants baptized. We profess therefore that all those Churches that baptize infants are of the same false constitution, and all those Churches that baptize the new creature, those that are made disciples by teaching men confessing their faith and their sins, are of one true constitution.[17]

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[15] Balthasar Hubmaier, 'A Christian Catechism' (1526), in *Three Reformation Catechisms: Catholic, Anabaptist, Lutheran*, ed. and trans. by Denis Janz (Mellen Press, 1982), pp. 147–156 (p. 149).

[16] See Jason K. Lee, *The Theology of John Smyth: Puritan, Separatist, Baptist, Mennonite* (Mercer, 2003), pp. 71–77.

[17] John Smyth, 'The Character of the Beast', in *Baptist Roots: A Reader in the Theology of a Christian People*, ed. by Curtis W. Freeman, James Wm. McClendon Jr., and C. Rosalee Velloso da Silva (Judson, 1999), pp. 75–82 (p. 77).

Although subsequent Baptists did not follow Smyth's practice of self-baptism, an act he himself later regretted,[18] like Continental Anabaptists, early English Baptists demarcated their churches from others through believer's baptism. And like the Anabaptists, Baptists saw the restriction of Christian initiation to confessing adults as fundamental to the church's restoration. The earliest of Baptists also tended to practise a form of affusion for baptism, akin to the custom of most Anabaptists. Interestingly, this was likely the mode of both Smyth's Amsterdam and Helwys's Spitalfields congregations — even as the Anabaptist assembly of Waterlander Mennonites they encountered distinguished themselves by practising full immersion in their own Amsterdam church.

A few decades later, the English Baptist minister Edward Barber may have been the first Baptist to advocate for immersion baptism for believers in his congregation. He would write in 1641 in *A Small Treatise on Baptisme, or Dipping* that

> we are commanded to stand in the way, and aske for the old pathes, which is the good way and walke therein. […] The old and good way under the Gospell is the Institution of Jesus Christ. […] But the dipping of beleevers is that good old way of Christ and Infants is not […]
>
> This is proved […] They onely are to be dipped in whom repentance and faith is manifested by hearing the Word preached. But in persons of yeares onely is repentance and faith wrought by hearing the Word preached. […] Therefore onely persons of years [and not infants] are to be dipped.[19]

Regardless of the mode for either tradition, the baptism of believers as integral to the recovery of the apostolic church was central for both Anabaptists and early Baptists. Baptism served a role both as a declaration of personal faith and as an initiation into the community of saints. The Anabaptist Hubmaier would state plainly, 'Baptism in water […] is nothing other than a public confession and testimony of internal faith and commitment by which the person also testifies outwardly and

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[18] See Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Broadman, 1987), p. 37; Lee, *The Theology of John Smyth*, p. 86; and John Smyth, *The Works of John Smyth, Fellow of Christ's College, 1594–1598*, 2 vols, ed. by William Thomas Whitley (Cambridge University Press, 1915), 2, p. 757.

[19] Edward Barber, 'A Small Treatise on Baptisme, or Dipping' (1641), in *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage*, ed. by McBeth, pp. 41–43 (p. 43).

declares before everyone that he is a sinner.'[20] And the 1742 Baptist *Philadelphia Confession of Faith* would resound the corollary notion: 'Those who do actually profess repentance towards God, faith in and obedience to our Lord Jesus, are the only proper subjects of this ordinance.'[21]

Congregational Compacts: Baptismal Pledges and Church Covenants

Along with the strong similarities both traditions have conspicuously carried with their theology and practice of water baptism is the close associations they placed between the rite of baptism and a pledge or covenant made in the midst of the congregation. As baptism served as the door into the visible church, so a baptismal pledge or communal covenant made with or in close proximity to one's baptism served for both groups as the baptisand's and church's mutual commitment to live in conformity to the ways of Christ within the congregation and, often, additionally as the member's voluntary submission to church discipline when he or she might stray from the covenant.

Early in the development of the Anabaptist tradition, various Anabaptists advanced the practice of a baptismal pledge, which was to be articulated by the neophyte during the baptismal rite. In his 'Christian Catechism' Hubmaier detailed this procedure:

> Thereupon one also has himself outwardly enrolled, inscribed, and by water baptism incorporated in the fellowship of the church […] before which church the person also publicly and orally vows to God and agrees in the strength of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that he will henceforth believe and live according to his divine Word. And if he should trespass herein he will accept brotherly admonition, according to Christ's order, Matt.

[20] Balthasar Hubmaier, 'On the Christian Baptism of Believers' (1525), in *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, [hereafter *Hubmaier*], ed. and trans. by H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder (Herald Press, 1989), pp. 96–149 (p. 100).

[21] 'The Philadelphia Confession of Faith' (1742), in *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms*, ed. by John A. Broadus, Timothy George, and Denise George (Broadman & Holman, 1996), pp. 56–93 (p. 89).

> 18:15ff. This precisely is the true baptismal vow, which we have lost for a thousand years.[22]

Here Hubmaier was likely differentiating his view from what he saw as the medieval Catholic replacement of the baptismal vow with 'monastic and priestly vows' and also Zwingli's early Reformed development, which retained infant baptism for the Swiss Protestants by tying it to the divine covenant made in the Old Testament practice of circumcision.[23]

Anabaptists generally saw baptism as a sign of the new covenant, and not the retention of the old. And the promise made in baptism combined the individual's confession of faith to God with his or her *Gelassenheit* (yieldedness to God's will) with brothers and sisters of the church.[24] On this point Hans Denck would write in 1527,

> In the same way that the covenantal sign, circumcision, was given without regard to human desire for it; all descendants of Abraham were duty-bound to the law […] But the new law is a matter of becoming God's children. Therefore, all who are under the new law are not forced to be there by other people. […] Baptism, the sign of the covenant, will only be given to those who by God's power through knowledge of true love are invited to it, who desire it and are willing to follow. They will be uncoerced by other members and relatives to remain in this love — only love itself may constrain them.[25]

Thus, as Hubmaier would further develop, initiates into the church properly seal their inner confessions of faith with a public declaration and promise to live obediently before both Christ and church:

> [W]hen a person now confesses himself to be sinner, believes on the forgiveness of sins, and has committed himself to a new life, then he professes this also outwardly and publicly before the Christian church, into whose fellowship he lets himself be registered and counted according to the order and institution of Christ. […] Then he lets himself be baptized with

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[22] Hubmaier, 'A Christian Catechism' (1526), in *Hubmaier*, ed. by Pipkin and Yoder, pp. 340–365 (p. 349).

[23] Brian C. Brewer, *A Pledge of Love: The Anabaptist Sacramental Theology of Balthasar Hubmaier* (Paternoster, 2012), pp. 109–110.

[24] For further development of *Gelassenheit*, see both Julia Qiuye Zhao, 'Suffering and Martyrdom', and Toivo Pilli, 'Discipleship', in *T&T Clark Handbook of Anabaptism*, ed. by Brian C. Brewer (T&T Clark, 2022), pp. 339–354 (esp. pp. 345–350) and pp. 405–421 (pp. 409–416), respectively.

[25] Hans Denck, 'Concerning True Love' (1527), in *Early Anabaptist Spirituality: Selected Writings*, ed. by Daniel Liechty (Paulist Press, 1994), pp. 112–121 (p. 116).

> outward water […] And if he henceforth blackens or shames the faith and the name of Christ with public or offensive sins, he herewith submits and surrenders to brotherly discipline according to the order of Christ, Matt. 18:15ff. […] This pledge, promise, and public testimony does not happen out of human powers or capacities […] It rather takes place in the name of God.[26]

Hubmaier was by no means alone among Anabaptists in associating a pledge to God and congregation with baptism. His contemporary, Hans Hut, would write as follows:

> Here baptism must be added […] in that a person consents to bear everything that will be imposed upon him by the [F]ather through Christ. And baptism gives him the task of abiding with the Lord and renouncing the world, and of accepting the sign of baptism as covenant of his consent before a Christian community which has received the covenant from God, and in the name of God. […] For this covenant is a consenting to obedience to Christ, with a demonstration of divine love toward all brothers and sisters with body, life, goods, and honor, regardless of the evil that the world may speak about him.[27]

Much of the biblical focus for the concept of a baptismal pledge may be derived from 1 Peter 3:21, where Luther's translation renders the passage, 'Baptism is a covenant [*Bund*] of a good conscience with God.' The baptismal covenant was binding in three directions: 1) a covenant between God and the believer, 2) a pledge between the believer and God, and 3) a promise between believer and the congregation (*Gemeinde*).[28] The covenant made in baptism is subsequently rehearsed at the commencement of each Lord's Supper service, thus necessitating congregational reconciliation before Communion.[29] This ongoing practice provided the mechanism to keep the visible church from corruption in open and public sins. Thus, in summary, Hubmaier would write,

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[26] Hubmaier, 'Summa of the Entire Christian Life' (1525), in *Hubmaier,* ed. by Pipkin and Yoder, pp. 81–89 (pp. 85–86).

[27] Hans Hut, 'On the Mystery of Baptism', in *The Radical Reformation*, ed. by Michael G. Baylor (Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 152–171 (pp. 161–162).

[28] Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism*, pp. 134–135.

[29] *The Schleitheim Confession*, likely under the authorship of Michael Sattler, directed that church discipline, based on Matthew 18, 'shall be done according to the ordering of the Spirit of God before the breaking of bread'. 'Schleitheim Confession', in *The Legacy of Michael Sattler*, ed. by Yoder, p. 37.

> Where there is no water baptism, there is no church nor minister, neither brother nor sister, no brotherly admonition, excommunication, or reacceptance. […] Now sisters and brothers, before they gather for the Supper, must be registered and have authority over each other. […] Where does this authority come from, if not from the pledge of baptism.[30]

This powerful ecclesial structure linking the sacraments to church discipline was so influential among the Anabaptists it may have even influenced the evolution of the Reformed understanding of covenantal theology and its congregational commitments.[31]

In their own attempt to inaugurate and sustain a believers' church, Early English Baptists made use of church covenants. On the advent of establishing the first Baptist congregation, the Separatist John Smyth wrote *Principles and Inferences* to institute 'the ordinances of Christ for dispensing the covenant since his death'. Observing that the church was not only invisible but also a visible community, he wrote, 'A visible communion of Saincts is of two, three, or more Saincts joined together by covenant with God & themselves, freely to vse al the holy things of God, according to the word, for their mutual edification, & Gods glory.'[32] Smyth, who had come from a Calvinist Puritan background, demonstrates here 'a shift in the meaning of covenant from Calvin's emphases on objective and gracious aspects of the covenant to understanding the covenant as a biblical pact or treaty that depended as much on human obedience to the laws of God as it did to the faithfulness of God in keeping the promises of the covenant'.[33] Scholars have observed, then, a shift in Smyth from an objective theology where God alone moves to a more subjective, experiential, and responsive faith

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[30] Hubmaier, 'On the Christian Baptism of Believers', p. 127.

[31] See Malcolm Yarnell III, 'The Covenant Theology of Early Anabaptists, 1525–1527', in *The Fourth Strand of the Reformation: The Covenant Ecclesiology of Anabaptists, English Separatists and Early General Baptists*, ed. by Paul S. Fiddes (Regent's Park College, 2018), pp. 15–62 (p. 16); and Timothy E. Fulop, 'The Third Mark of the Church? — Church in the Reformed and Anabaptist Reformations', *Journal of Religious History*, 19.1 (June 1995), pp. 26–42.

[32] Smyth, *Works*, 1, p. 252.

[33] Stephen Brachlow, *The Communion of Saints: Radical Puritan and Spiritualist Ecclesiology 1570–1625* (Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 31–32.

in its covenantal ecclesial framework, akin to Anabaptism.[34] Like the Anabaptists, the first Baptists understood covenant to be a binding pledge between God and the believer and between the believer and the others in the congregation. Also similar to the Anabaptists, this notion of covenant has implications for church discipline and excommunication. Said Smyth,

> Nay say we, the power of binding and losing is given to the body of the Church, even to two or three faithful people joined together in covenant, & this we prove evidently in this manner. Vnto whome the covenant is given, vnto them the power of binding & losing is given. The covenant is given to the body of the Church, that is to two or three faithful ones: For God is their God, & they are his people.[35]

Thus, Smyth sought for his emerging Baptist congregation to understand the communal covenant as foundational to maintaining its visible church ecclesiology.

Likewise, the early Particular Baptist *First London Confession* (1644) defined the church as those 'being baptized into that faith, and joined to the Lord, and each other, *by mutuall agreement*, in the practical injoyment of the Ordinances, commanded by Christ their head'.[36] Baptist congregants, then, were frequently bound to one another through mutual submission to a church covenant, a practice which has continued in various and diverse Baptist congregations for centuries. Nascent congregations of Early English Baptists often devised their own church covenants, notably those in Bristol (1640), Leominster, Herefordshire (1656), by Benjamin and Elias Keach (1697), and in Norfolk (1699). Consistent in these covenants was a sentiment of 'giving up [them]selves to the Lord and one another',[37] which inextricably ties their mutual 'self-giving' to edification, church discipline, and the proper

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[34] See William H. Brackney, 'Baptism and Covenant: A Survey of Early English General Baptist Ecclesiology', in *The Fourth Strand of the Reformation*, ed. by Fiddes, pp. 93–118 (p. 95).
[35] Smyth, *Works*, 2, pp. 388–389.
[36] 'First London Confession (1644)', section XXXIII, in *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage*, ed. by McBeth, p. 49; emphasis mine.
[37] 'Covenant of Great Ellingham Baptist Church, Norfolk, England' (1699), in *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms*, ed. by John A. Broadus et al., pp. 181–183 (p. 182).

worship of God. Such a sentiment closely resembled the *Gelassenheit* (yielding) found among early Anabaptists. Thus, what one scholar wrote of the Anabaptists may also apply to the early Baptists: that their 'faith is hardly individualistic, even though it is deeply personal'.[38] Said another scholar regarding the Baptists, 'It is a high churchmanship in its emphasis on the faith which is presupposed by the local covenant and by the rite of baptism.'[39] Anabaptists and Baptists thus both formed believers' churches which maintained their distinctive commitments through voluntary, congregational compacts.

Religious Voluntarism: The Freedom of Conscience and the Separation of the Church from the State

Anabaptists and Baptists have also stressed the importance of freedom for the individual to confess the faith according to his or her own conscience, rather than being externally compelled to a theological position by another, be it civil authority or ecclesial hierarchy. While differing in their contexts in sixteenth-century Continental Europe and in seventeenth-century England and American colonies respectively, Anabaptists and Baptists arrived at their conclusions out of defiance to significant pressures for religious conformity by those around them.

As the canton of Zürich was undergoing Protestant reform under the nascent Reformed theology of Huldyrich Zwingli, the reformer held a series of disputations to appeal to the Zürich town council to approve instalments of his Protestant reform policies. At the second of these disputations, in 1523, primarily addressing images and the Mass, one of Conrad Grebel's companions, Simon Stumpf, objected to the entire nature of the proceedings:

> Master Huldrych! You have no authority to place the decision [regarding the Mass] in Milords' hands, for the decision is already made: the Spirit of God decides. If therefore Milords were to discern and decide anything that is

[38] Thomas Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (IVP, 2004), p. 252.
[39] Ernest A. Payne, *The Fellowship of Believers: Baptist Thought Yesterday and Today* (Carey Kingsgate, 1952), p. 37.

> contrary to God's decision, I will ask Christ for his Spirit and will teach and act against it.[40]

Grebel, Stumpf, and a band of other erstwhile radical disciples of Zwingli, advocated for carrying out a programme of reform exclusively according to Scripture and by the leadership of the Holy Spirit, independent of the approval of the civil magistery. Yet, Zwingli and other magisterial Protestants were more sensitive to the state's sanction, as such patronage often protected the Reformation from Catholic ecclesial-political reclamation. Moreover, classical reformers persisted in the notion of geographic conformity to uniform religious convictions. A society which allowed for religious toleration invited chaos, not liberty, they reasoned. Yet, in the minds of these nascent Swiss Anabaptists of the Grebel circle, such capitulation merely exchanged one illegitimate regime for another to make claims over a spiritual realm that was not theirs to oversee. Consequently, Anabaptists were severely persecuted by both ecclesial and civic authorities in Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed territories, and many Anabaptists were martyred for refusing to recant their distinctive faith.

The year before he joined with the Anabaptists, Hubmaier penned what was likely the first treatise advocating the freedom of conscience in the modern era. In his 1524 'Concerning Heretics and Those who Burn Them', written while a refugee in Schaffhausen, the South German theologian would thoughtfully posit,

> So it follows that the slayers of heretics are the worst heretics of all, in that they, contrary to Christ's teaching and practice, condemn heretics to the fire. By pulling up the harvest prematurely they destroy the wheat along with the tares. […] A Turk or a heretic cannot be persuaded by us either with sword or with fire, but only with patience and prayer, and so we should wait patiently for the judgment of God.[41]

For Hubmaier, all Christian governments and, indeed, each claimant to the truth must allow room for the dissenter to mend their ways so as

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[40] 'The Second Zurich Disputation' (26–28 October 1523), in *The Sources of Swiss Anabaptism: The Grebel Letters and Related Documents*, ed. by Leland Harder (Herald Press, 1985), pp. 234–250 (p. 242).

[41] Balthasar Hubmaier, 'Concerning Heretics and Those who Burn Them' (1524), in *The Works of Balthasar Hubmaier*, trans. by George Duiguid Davidson and Walter Klaassen (microfilm in the Conrad Grebel College Library), pp. 31–32; cf. *Hubmaier*, ed. by Pipkin and Yoder, p. 64.

not to deny the lost person the opportunity for theological amendment and divine delivery. 'Hence to burn heretics is in appearance to profess Christ,' Hubmaier wrote, 'but in reality to deny him. […] [And] if it is blasphemy to destroy a heretic, how much more is it to burn to ashes a faithful herald of God, unconvicted, not arraigned by truth.'[42]

A decade later, Kilian Aurbacher, an Anabaptist minister from Austerlitz, would write to the notable magisterial reformer, Martin Bucer of Strasbourg:

> It is never right to compel one in matters of faith, whatever he may believe, be he Jew or Turk. Even if one does not believe uprightly or wants to believe so, i.e., if he does not have or want to have the right understanding of salvation, and does not trust God or submit to him, but trusts in the creature and loves it, he shall bear his own guilt, no one will stand for him in the judgment. […] And thus we conduct ourselves according to the example of Christ and the apostles and proclaim the gospel according to the grace that has been entrusted to us; we compel no one. But whoever is willing and ready, let him follow him […] Christ's people are a free, unforced, and uncompelled people, who receive Christ with desire and a willing heart, of this the Scriptures testify.[43]

For the next two centuries, the story of the Anabaptist people would be one of persecution and exile to the corners of Europe in search of a place for religious liberty. Appraising this journey, the twentieth-century Mennonite theologian Harold Bender reflected that 'there can be no question but the great principles of freedom of conscience, separation of church and state, and the voluntarism in religion […] ultimately are derived from the Anabaptists of the Reformation period, who […] challenged the Christian world to follow them in practice'.[44]

In the seventeenth century, in the year of his death (1612), John Smyth also articulated an argument for religious liberty, a view which

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[42] Hubmaier, 'Concerning Heretics and Those Who Burn Them' (1524), in *Balthasar Hubmaier: The Leader of the Anabaptists*, ed. by Henry C. Vedder (New York: AMS, 1971), pp. 84–88 (pp. 87–88).

[43] Killian Aurbacher, 'Hulshof' (1534), in *Anabaptism in Outline,* ed. by Klaassen, p. 293.

[44] Harold S. Bender, 'The Anabaptist Vision', *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 18 (1944), pp. 67–88 (p. 68); revised and reprinted as *The Anabaptist Vision* (Herald Press, 1944), pp. 4–5; see also Brian Cooper, 'Religious Tolerance and Freedom of Conscience', in *T&T Clark Handbook of Anabaptism*, ed. by Brewer, pp. 387–403.

likely demonstrated Mennonite influence.[45] However, as one scholar observed, 'Although it is questionable whether it should be called a Baptist or Mennonite confession, in a sense it was both.'[46] Regardless of being Anabaptist or Baptist, Smyth's *Propositions and Conclusions Concerning True Religion* demonstrated his attempt to draw the boundaries between the role of the civil government and the individual's conscience regarding faith:

> That the magistrate is not by virtue of his office to meddle with religion, or matters of conscience, to force or compel men to this or that form of religion, or doctrine: but to leave Christian religion free, to every man's conscience, and to handle only civil transgressions (Rom. xiii), injuries and wrongs of man against man, in murder, adultery, theft, etc., for Christ only is the king, and lawgiver of the church and conscience (James vi. 12).[47]

Scholars have called this statement the 'first full claim for full religious liberty ever penned in the English language'[48] and 'one of the most complete statements of religious liberty of that generation'.[49] Yet two years later, Leonard Busher boldly addressed the English King James I in his 1614 *Religion's Peace*. In this work, the first Baptist treatise *entirely* devoted to religious freedom, this early Baptist intrepidly stated,

> May it please your majesty and parliament to understand that, by fire and sword, to constrain princes and peoples to receive that one true religion of the gospel, is wholly against the mind and merciful law of Christ, dangerous both to king and state, a means to decrease the kingdom of Christ, and a means to increase the kingdom of antichrist; […] And no king or bishop can, or is able to command faith; That is the gift of God, who worketh in us both the will and the deed of his own good pleasure.[50]

Under the Stuart kings, British nonconformists were forced to worship in secret. Others ultimately fled to America after the monarchs issued legislation hostile to religious dissent, such as the Conventicle Act

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45 Lee, *The Theology of John Smyth*, p. 91.
46 W. R. Estep, 'Anabaptists, Baptists, and the Free Church Movement', *Criswell Theological Review*, 6.2 (1993), pp. 303–317 (p. 313).
47 Smyth, 'On Religious Liberty', in *Propositions and Conclusions Concerning True Christian Religion*, art. 84 in *Sources*, ed. by McBeth, p. 70.
48 A. C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists*, 3rd edn (Carey Kingsgate, 1961), p. 42.
49 McBeth, *Sources*, p. 70.
50 Leonard Busher, 'Religion's Peace: Or a Plea for Liberty of Conscience' (1614), in *Sources*, ed. by McBeth, pp. 72–75 (p. 73).

(1664), which outlawed unsanctioned religious gatherings of more than five people. Yet, the colonies themselves often limited the worship of dissenting traditions from the official Christian tradition of each province. In this context, Roger Williams, the erstwhile Puritan turned Baptist minister, established the Providence Plantations, a colony later renamed Rhode Island, where he worked to make the future state a place for religious liberty for all people. Here he founded the first Baptist church in America at Providence. Responding to the persecution of Baptists and other non-establishment traditions in the colonies in his 1644 *Bloudy Tennet of Persecution*, Williams posited, 'An enforced uniformity of religion through a nation or civil state, confound the civil and religious, denies the principles of Christianity and civility, and that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.'[51]

Over a century later, as the colonies broke free from Britain to become states within a new, independent nation, several states struggled to shake the religious privilege which had formerly been granted to one Christian tradition over others. As Massachusetts drafted its own state constitution, apparently retaining some privileges for its Congregationalist church, the Massachusetts Baptist pastor Isaac Backus warned in his 1779 'Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty',

> What a dangerous error, yea, what a root of all evil then must it be, for men to imagine that there is anything in the nature of true government that interferes with true and full liberty […] The true liberty of man is to know, obey, and enjoy his Creator and to do all the good unto, and enjoy all the happiness with and in, his fellow creatures that he is capable of.[52]

For the state to interfere, then, with the consciences of the faithful, Backus argued, would be to place them under a 'soul-slavery', claiming the prerogative of divine laws as their own in determining God's worship and his ministers, and how such ministers are supported.[53]

Thus, both the Anabaptists and the Baptists urged civil government — whether controlled by a prince, magistrate, or town

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[51] Roger Williams, 'The Bloudy Tennet of Persecution' (1644), in *Sources*, ed. by McBeth, pp. 83–90 (p. 84).
[52] Isaac Backus, 'An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty' (1779), in *Baptist Roots*, ed. by Freeman et al., pp. 157–167 (p. 157).
[53] Backus, 'An Appeal', p. 162.

council — not to interfere in the religious realm. Drawing on the well-established doctrine of the two kingdoms, these believers' church traditions strenuously argued for consigning the magistery to oversee secular laws and affairs, while encouraging religious liberty both for the individual and for gathered congregations who may dissent from the theological outlook of others.

Conclusion

The four principles developed above constitute an ecclesial framework which distinguishes itself from other major denominational traditions, demonstrating the strong theological ties between the embryonic traditions from their Continental Reformation and Anglican contexts respectively. The principles of Christian liberty and the freedom of conscience necessarily coalesced with the underlying ecclesial structure of these free church movements of the visible church comprised of believers willingly brought together by a free faith. That one would submit to the congregational discipline of others required each person's volition, thus the initiation into such a community must also be exclusively voluntary. 'It was for this same reason,' Theron Price observed, 'that a Christian congregation, as a voluntary fellowship not co-terminous with the civil community, must be free of State control.'[54]

Undoubtedly, there are several additional areas of theological affinity which might be studied or further developed between early Anabaptists and Baptists. Scholars have previously considered the parallels of two movements regarding the Lord's Supper and their general sacramental thought,[55] their understandings of Law and Gospel,[56] and even how both groups originally exercised church discipline.[57] The aggregate of these observations is not to assert that

[54] Price, 'The Anabaptist View of the Church', p. 195.
[55] Brian C. Brewer, 'Free Church Sacramentalism: A Surprising Connection Between Baptists and Anabaptists', in *Interfaces: Baptists and Others*, ed. by David W. Bebbington and Martin Sutherland (Paternoster, 2012), pp. 3–28.
[56] W. R. Estep, 'Law and Gospel in the Anabaptist/Baptist Tradition', *Grace Theological Journal*, 12.2 (1991), pp. 189–214.
[57] Joe L. Coker, '"Cast Out from among the Saints": Church Discipline among Anabaptists and English Separatists in Holland, 1590–1620', *Reformation*, 11 (2006), pp. 1–27.

Anabaptists and Baptists were identical. Their ecclesial-political settings and motives for holding their respective views were far too incongruous to make such a claim. Winthrop Hudson prudently deduced that 'the Baptists and Anabaptists represent two diverse and quite dissimilar Christian traditions'.[58] And when studying the two movements, one should not convey their similarities without context and gradation in what Joseph Ban critiqued as 'an egregious example of the loose assemblage of superficial characteristics',[59] indolently concluding that one movement was essentially a duplication or extension of the other. Anabaptists and early Baptists doubtlessly had areas of nuanced difference and even significant contextual, theological, and practical dissimilarities. Yet on these core ecclesial principles as believers' churches they manifest a substantive measure of theological consistency.

[58] See Winthrop S. Hudson, 'Baptists Were Not Anabaptists', *The Chronicle*, 16.4 (1953), pp. 171–179.

[59] Joseph D. Ban, 'Were the Earliest English Baptists Anabaptists?', in *In the Great Tradition: Essays on Pluralism, Voluntarism, and Revivalism*, ed. by Joseph D. Ban and Paul R. Dekar (Judson Press, 1982), pp. 91–106 (p. 102).

Theological Discussions between Mennonites and Baptists Past and Present

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Abstract
The first Baptist congregation (John Smyth's congregation in 1609) did not emerge from the Mennonite community in the Netherlands, but sought out the Mennonites living there as its first dialogue partners outside its own Puritan-Separatist tradition. After describing the Baptist origins in Puritan Separatism, the article presents the documents exchanged between Dutch Mennonites and English Baptists. It also shows the parting of the ways between John Smyth and Thomas Helwys. The article then moves on to the nineteenth century, when new contacts between Baptists and Mennonites were established in Russia and Germany, and finally looks at 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, identifying two themes (historical and theological) that need to be explored in greater depth.

Keywords
Puritan separatism; Early Baptist confessions; Mennonite–Baptist relations; global ecumenical dialogues.

Introduction

Theological dialogue between Mennonites and Baptists began when the first Baptist congregation was formed — at the beginning of the seventeenth century in Amsterdam (the Netherlands). The first Baptist congregation did not emerge from the Mennonite community in the Netherlands, but it did seek out the Mennonites living there as its first dialogue partners outside its own tradition. We will describe this important fact in more detail below. We then skip over 200 years to the nineteenth century, when there were new contacts between Baptists and Mennonites, and finally look at a theological dialogue in the twentieth century. This dialogue emerged as a fruit of the ecumenical movement and was conducted on a global level. But first, let us look at the

theological tradition from which the first Baptist church grew. It was anything but Mennonite.

The Origin of the Baptists in Puritan Separatism, not Anabaptism

The Baptists emerged from the left wing of the Reformation — not of the *Continental* Reformation, however, but the *English* Reformation.[1] Mennonites and other Anabaptist groups known on the continent played no role in the English Reformation,[2] although during Duke Alba's bloody struggle against the Dutch Reformation (1567–1573) many Dutchmen, probably including individual Anabaptists, found asylum in England. The left wing of the English Reformation consisted of radical Puritans, that is Calvinists, and Puritan Separatists, and emerged during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I of England (reigned 1558–1603). The Baptists therefore grew out of the Anglican state church. To understand the differences between Mennonites and Baptists today, we need to be aware of this process.

The Anglican Church was founded by King Henry VIII of the House of Tudor, who broke the Church of England away from the jurisdiction of the Roman Pope and made himself its sole head in 1534.[3] Although the Church of England was thus free from the Pope, it was not yet Protestant. A significant step towards a Protestant Reformation did not take place until the reign of Henry's only son, Edward VI (reigned 1547–1553). As he was not of age, a duke effectively ruled as Lord Protector.[4] Church polity was determined by Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury.[5] Under the influence of Protestant Reformed theologians who had come to England from the continent

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[1] Cf. Walter Fleischmann-Bisten, 'Anabaptists, Mennonites, Baptists: How Are They Related?', *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 96 (2022), pp. 110–113.

[2] Cf. David Loades, 'Anabaptism and English Sectarianism in the Mid-Sixteenth Century', in *Reform and Reformation: England and the Continent c 1500–c 1750*, ed. by Derek Baker (Blackwell, 1979), pp. 59–70.

[3] Cf. Alec Ryrie, *The Age of Reformation: The Tudor and Stewart Realms 1485–1603*, 3rd edn (Taylor and Francis, 2024).

[4] Cf. Margaret Scard*, Edward Seymour, Lord Protector: Tudor King in all but Name* (The History Press, 2016).

[5] Cf. Susan Wabuda, *Thomas Cranmer* (Routledge, 2017).

(Martin Bucer, Petrus Martyr Vermigli, Johannes a Lasco), Cranmer drew up a new agenda in 1549, the *Book of Common Prayer*. It combined Catholic forms with Protestant content. After the early death of Edward VI, his half-sister Mary (known as 'Bloody Mary'), the wife of the Catholic Spanish King Philip II, was crowned and reversed both the independence of the English Church from the Pope and all Reformation measures. While Catholics loyal to the pope had been persecuted under Henry VIII and in some cases sentenced to death as high traitors, the persecution now hit the followers of the Reformation: over 300 Protestants (including Thomas Cranmer) were executed, and over 800 fled to the continent and formed exile communities in Frankfurt am Main, Strasbourg, Zürich, and Geneva, among other places.

When Mary Tudor died in 1558, her Protestant half-sister Elizabeth (known as 'the Virgin Queen') ascended the throne. During her long reign (45 years), the Church of England became definitively Protestant in doctrine, but remained Catholic in many forms. The Act of Supremacy of 1559 required the clergy to swear an oath of obedience to the Queen as supreme governor of the church, and the Uniformity Act of the same year made attendance at the services of the state church compulsory for all subjects. The Confession of the Thirty-Nine Articles, which Elizabeth declared mandatory for all clergy in 1571, is characterised by both Lutheran and Reformed theology. However, it also lists the royal supremacy over state and church as an article of confession (Art. 37). 'Certain Anabaptists' are mentioned in Article 38 because they wrongly practised the community of goods. The 39th article also distances itself from the content of an Anabaptist conviction, namely that Christians are forbidden to take any oath.

Queen Elizabeth fought all challenges to the Anglican Church she had established — both from Catholics and from those Protestants who wanted to further the reformation of the church. Quite a few theologians who had returned to England after the end of the persecution under Mary Tudor belonged to this Protestant movement. They wanted to complete the English Reformation insofar as they wanted to 'purify' the forms of piety and the church constitution of

everything Catholic and return it to the apostolic model.[6] This is why they were labelled with the derisive name Puritans. The Puritans did not consider that infant baptism or the right and duty of God-fearing governments to carry out a Protestant Reformation should be abolished, but they did consider that the office of bishop and royal supremacy over the church should be abolished. They demanded a presbyterial-synodal church order modelled on that of Geneva. They also wanted to see the strict church discipline customary in Geneva realised. When it turned out that they were unable to achieve their ecclesiastical political goals due to the Queen's resistance, some of them took the path of separation, in that they formed their own congregations independent of the state church.[7] For them, the English state church was a false church, even anti-Christian because of its Catholic traditions, with a worship service contrary to the Scriptures. The first Baptist congregation eventually grew out of this separatist movement.[8]

The leading theologian of the Puritan Separatists was the preacher Robert Browne (ca. 1550–1633). He had turned away not only from Anglican Episcopalianism but also from Calvinist Presbyterianism and regarded the independent local congregation, which was constituted by a formal covenant of true believers, as the visible form of the true church. For Browne, the leadership of the church lies in the 'gathered church', that is, the general assembly of all members of the local church. Each local congregation has the right and the duty to regulate its own affairs (including the election of pastors) without being subject to higher authorities. These principles of a congregationalist church order were

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[6] See Karin Maag, 'Calvin's Impact in Elizabethan England', in *Calvinus Pastor Ecclesiae: Papers of the Eleventh International Congress on Calvin Research*, ed. by Herman J. Selderhuis and Arnold Huijgen (Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 2016), pp. 365–373.

[7] See B. R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition: From the Marian Martyrs to the Pilgrim Fathers* (Oxford University Press, 1971).

[8] See John Briggs, 'Origin and Development of the Baptist Movement in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', in *Baptists Worldwide: Origins, Expansions, Emerging Realities*, ed. by Erich Geldbach (Cascade, 2022), pp. 3–12; Michael A. G. Haykin, 'Separatists and Baptists', in *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, Vol. I: The Post-Reformation Era, c. 1559–c. 1689*, ed. by John Coffey (Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 113–138; Stephen Wright, *The Early English Baptists: 1603–1649* (Boydell and Brewer, 2006); B. R. White, *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century: A History of the English Baptists, Vol. 1* (London: The Baptist Historical Society, 1996).

adopted by the first Baptist churches and are still generally recognised in the Baptist tradition today.

After Browne founded the first Separatist congregation in Norwich in April 1581, he was immediately imprisoned. To escape further persecution, he emigrated to Middelburg (in the Dutch province of Zeeland) with the majority of his congregation in 1582.[9] There, however, there were (for unclear reasons) violent disputes in the congregation, as a result of which Browne was expelled from it. The exiles were now 'Brownists' without Browne. Other Puritans formed a Separatist underground congregation in London in 1587 under the leadership of John Greenwood and Henry Barrow, both of whom were executed in 1593. The community, which had been given the name 'Barrowists', then went into exile in Amsterdam (in the Dutch province of North Holland). In 1592, they appointed the former Anglican priest Francis Johnson (1562–1618) as pastor, who was soon arrested and tried to serve his overseas congregation from prison until he was released in 1597 and also went to Amsterdam. The congregation prospered there, enabling it to acquire its own meeting house and grow from around 40 to around 300 members. When the Scottish King James VI of the House of Stuart became King of England and Ireland (as James I) after the death of Elizabeth I in 1603, the Separatists pinned their hopes on him because he had been brought up as a Puritan. However, the new king turned a deaf ear to most of the wishes of the church-going Puritans and even wanted to Anglicanise the Scottish Reformed Church.

The founding father of the first Baptist church, John Smyth (ca. 1570–1612), had been a student of Francis Johnson at Cambridge University and then an Anglican priest in Lincoln. In 1607, he renounced Anglicanism and became pastor of a Separatist church in Gainsborough (Lincolnshire), which followed the principles of Francis Johnson's church in Amsterdam.[10] After the state responded with the constant observation and arrests of church members, it was decided to

[9] Cf. Cory Cotter, 'The Dutch Republic: English and Scottish Dissenters in Dutch Exile, c. 1575–1688', in *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions,* ed. by John Coffey, I, pp. 163–181.

[10] See James R. Coggins, *John Smyth's Congregation: English Separatism, Mennonite Influence, and the Elect Nation*, Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History, 32 (Herald Press, 1991).

emigrate to Amsterdam in 1608. There, however, the new exiles did not join Johnson's congregation (now known as the Ancient Church), but kept to themselves because the practical organisation of their congregational life differed from that of the older congregation. In contrast to Johnson, Smyth understood the authority of the ministers (pastors or elders) as only temporarily delegated by the congregation. The greatest difference, however, arose from the fact that Smyth and his congregation became convinced that the infant baptism they had received in the Church of England was not a true baptism, because according to the apostolic model, only those who professed their faith could be baptised. Smyth now understood baptism as 'the mutual contract betwixt God & the party baptised expressed visibly in confession'.[11]

Robert Browne had already declared that because the churches of Rome and Canterbury are false churches, their baptisms are also false. However, he had nothing against infant baptism as such as long as it took place in a true, that is Separatist, church. He also did not consider repetitions of Anglican baptisms to be necessary. In this respect, Smyth's congregation thought differently from all other Separatists. For them, infant baptism was wrong in two senses: firstly, as a rite of a false church and secondly as a deviation from the apostolic pattern, which only permitted adult baptism. So it became clear to the church of Smyth that in God's eyes they were unbaptised people and thus obliged to follow the apostolic pattern of baptism. As they did not find anyone who had not received a false baptism or belonged to a false church (not even among the Mennonites), Smyth saw it as necessary at the beginning of 1609 to baptise himself first and then all his church members. These exiles from English Separatists had thus become the first Baptists. However, later Baptists regarded Smyth's self-baptism as unbiblical.

In their exile in Amsterdam, John Smyth and his congregation held theological debates not only with the English Separatists already living there, but also with the Waterland Mennonites. The North Holland region of Waterland lies between Amsterdam and Purmerend.

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[11] *The Works of John Smyth*, vol. II, ed. by W. T. Whitley (Cambridge University Press, 1915), p. 671.

The Mennonites there formed a faction that was less rigorous in matters of church discipline than the other Mennonites; they also had their own congregation in Amsterdam. We will now take a look at Smyth's conversations with these Mennonites.

Early Baptist Confessions and the Conversations with Mennonites

The most important source collection of Baptist confessions was published in 1959 under the title 'Baptist Confessions of Faith' by William L. Lumpkin and reissued in 2011 in a second revised edition by Bill J. Leonard.[12] It begins with a chapter on 'Forerunner Confessions', in which six 'Anabaptist Confessions' and five 'Pioneer English Separatist-Baptist Confessions' are documented, before the 'London Confession' of 1644 appears in a new chapter as the first confession of an association of Baptist churches.

The section on 'Anabaptist Confessions' contains the following documents:

(1) *Eighteen Dissertations Concerning the Entire Christian Life and of What It Consists*, in German 'Achtzehen schlußrede so betreffende eyn gantz Christlich leben, war an es gelegen ist', by Balthasar Hubmaier from Waldshut from 1524, a text from Hubmaier's pre-Anabaptist period;[13] the first baptism of believers in the Anabaptist sense took place on 21 January 1525 in Zürich.

(2) The *Schleitheim Confession*; German: 'Schleitheimer Bekenntnis' or 'Schleitheimer Artikel' from 1527.[14]

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[12] *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 2nd rev. edn, ed. by William L. Lumpkin and Bill J. Leonard (Judson Press, 2011).

[13] The original German version in *Balthasar Hubmaier, Schriften*, ed. by Gunnar Westin and Torsten Bergsten, Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte, 29 (Bertelsmann, 1962), pp. 69–74.

[14] In German in *Bekenntnisse der Kirche: Bekenntnistexte aus zwanzig Jahrhunderten*, ed. by Hans Steubing (Brockhaus, 1985), pp. 261–267.

(3) The *Discipline of the Church: How a Christian ought to Live*; German: 'Ordnung der Gläubigen, wie ein Christ leben soll', created by Hans Schlaffer in 1527 according to Lumpkin and Leonard.[15]

(4) *Account of Our Religion, Teaching, and Faith*; German: 'Rechenschaft unserer Religion, Lehre und Glaubens' by the Moravian-Hutterite Anabaptist missionary Peter Riedemann from 1540.[16]

(5) *Brief Confession of the Principal Articles of the Christian Faith* (in 40 articles), which Hans de Ries and Lubbert Gerrits published in 1580 on behalf of the Waterland Mennonites.

(6) The *Dordrecht Confession* of 1632, which was intended to serve a union of Flemish and Frisian Mennonites and should not be confused with the Dordrecht Canons of the Dutch Reformed Church from 1619.

This inclusion of Anabaptist texts translated into English in a collection of Baptist confessions is commendable for practical reasons. However, if this gives rise to the idea that one cannot understand the Baptist confessions of faith without considering their 'forerunners' in continental Anabaptism, then the inclusion of these texts is misleading. The first Baptists around John Smyth knew only one of these six texts, namely the Waterland Confession of 1580 (no. 5 in the list above). Smyth had asked the Mennonites in Amsterdam in 1610 for a reprint of this confession in order to become better acquainted with their doctrine. The introduction of believer's baptism in his congregation had already taken place a year earlier.

The only real forerunner of the Baptist Confessions was the first text that Lumpkin and Leonard printed under the new heading 'Pioneer English Separatist-Baptist Confessions'. This is (1) the *True Confession of*

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[15] Original German text in Werner O. Packull, *Die Hutterer in Tirol: Early Anabaptism in Switzerland, Tyrol and Moravia* (Wagner, 2000), pp. 343–351.

[16] The German version was printed several times, e.g. as *Rechenschaft unserer Religion, Lehre und Glaubens: Von den Brüdern, die man die Huterischen nennt* (Berne: Verlag der Huterischen Brüder Gemeine, 1902); cf. Andrea Chudaska and Peter Riedemann, *Konfessionsbildendes Täufertum im 16. Jahrhundert*, Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte, 76 (Bertelsmann, 2003).

the Faith, which Francis Johnson's Separatist exile congregation (Ancient Church) drew up in Amsterdam in 1596.[17]

Even for the second text in this section, the term 'forerunner' no longer fits. It is (2) the *Short Confession of Faith in XX Articles*, which John Smyth formulated in 1609 after the introduction of believer's baptism in his Separatist church.[18] These twenty articles can justifiably be counted as the oldest Baptist confession. However, it must be remembered that Smyth addressed it to the Mennonite congregation in Amsterdam in order to demonstrate his orthodoxy and thus underpin his application for admission to the Mennonite community. Smyth had come to the conclusion that he should have asked the Mennonites to receive believer's baptism.[19]

Before we continue the enumeration of what Lumpkin and Leonard called the 'Separatist-Baptist Confessions', we must ask two historical questions that are closely related to this confession by Smyth. First, how does Smyth come to the conclusion that infant baptism is reprehensible and that only believer's baptism is scriptural? And secondly, how can it be explained that Smyth, having made the decision to introduce believer's baptism, did not ask the Mennonites to carry it out but later regretted this?

The fact that John Smyth's congregation in their exile in Amsterdam came to the unprecedented conviction among Puritan Separatists that infant baptism should generally be rejected and that baptism should instead be administered to confessors of Christ could be due to the fact that they had their meeting place in rooms behind a

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17 Johnson's congregation also translated this confession into Latin in 1598 and sent it to the most important Reformed theologian at Leiden University at the time, Franciscus Junius the Elder, in the hope of gaining his approval. In his reply, Junius did not address the content of the criticism of the Church of England, but instead criticised the Separatists' belligerence and called for peace. This did not convince the Separatists; see C. de Jonge, 'Franciscus Junius and the English Separatists at Amsterdam', in *Reform and Reformation*, ed. by Baker, pp. 165–173.

18 In the original Latin wording ('*Corde credimus*') in *The Works of John Smyth*, ed. by Whitely, II, pp. 682–684; English translation in *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, ed. by Lumpkin and Leonard, pp. 91–95.

19 The numerous changes in Smyth's theology and their continuities are discussed in Jason K. Lee, *The Theology of John Smyth: Puritan, Separatist, Baptist, Mennonite*, (Mercer University Press, 2003).

bakery owned by the Waterland Mennonite Jan Munter; in other words, that they came to the realisation of the New Testament baptism of believers through Mennonites. However, nowhere in his numerous writings does Smyth suggest that this was the case, even in the writings in which he later commended himself to the Mennonites as part of their community. Moreover, there is clear evidence that Smyth's congregation had come to reject infant baptism through their own Bible study and theological reflection without Mennonite influence. There was a general Separatist conviction that Catholic and Anglican baptisms were 'false' baptisms because they were practised by 'false churches'. From there it was only a relatively small step to the realisation that the practice of infant baptism itself, and not just its ecclesiastical context, was wrong. Accordingly, Smyth wrote to his Separatist brethren, 'The Seperation must either go back to England, or go forward to true baptisme'![20] In other words, he wanted to put an end to a previous half-measure of the Separatists. That he was not motivated to do so by the Mennonites is clear from the fact that he did not think of asking them for believer's baptism. At that time, he counted them among the churches that had fallen away from the Lord Jesus Christ, whose sins he did not want to partake in by accepting their baptism. However, he realised soon after his self-baptism that he was wrong. Until then, he had more prejudices than knowledge about the Mennonites. When he now realised that the Mennonites were to be regarded as a 'true church', he knew that he should have asked them to baptise him. Therefore, together with thirty-two of his church members (the majority of his congregation), he asked the Mennonites in Amsterdam for forgiveness and at the same time for acceptance into the fellowship of their churches.

In order to convince the Mennonite community of the orthodoxy of himself and his followers, Smyth presented them with the above-mentioned 'Short Confession of Faith in XX Articles' in 1609. In it, however, Smyth deals more clearly with intra-Calvinist disputes than with the ethics typical of Mennonites. There is no mention of refusal to take an oath, non-resistance, or renunciation of political office. However, he does advocate the defence of human free will in the

[20] *The Works of John Smyth*, ed. by Whitley, II, p. 567.

acceptance of salvation through Jesus Christ, which had been put forward by the Reformed professor Jacobus Arminius in Leiden since 1604 against the doctrine of double predestination[21] — for which Smyth could certainly count on the approval of the Mennonites.

However, the Mennonites wanted to ensure that the English actually shared the Mennonite faith and therefore asked Hans de Ries, the Mennonite elder from Alkmaar in North Holland, to draw up a short confession of faith that could be presented to the English. He did so and based this 'Short Confession of Faith' (with 38 articles) formulated in 1610[22] on the Waterland Confession (with 40 articles) drawn up by him and Lubbert Gerrits in 1580 (see document 5 in the list of 'Anabaptist Confessions' above).[23] De Ries's 'Short Confession' was soon signed by John Smyth and forty-two other Englishmen.

(3) This Mennonite *Short Confession of Faith* signed by Smyth and his followers was counted by Lumpkin and Leonard as the third among the 'Pioneer English Separatist-Baptist Confessions'. With their signature, Smyth's group formally accepted the Mennonite convictions of refusal to take an oath, non-resistance, and abstention from political office. In response, the majority of the members of the Waterland Mennonite congregation in Amsterdam agreed to recognise Smyth's group as an English-speaking Mennonite congregation. A new, this time Mennonite baptism was not required of the English; it was accepted that they had been baptised within the Reformed Church upon their confession of faith. Consultations also took place with other Mennonite congregations from the Bevredigde Broederschap (United Brotherhood) in the Netherlands, and when no protest came from there, the group around Smyth was accepted into the community of Mennonite congregations on 23 May 1610.[24] In return, Smyth shortly

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[21] See Thomas H. McCall and Keith D. Stanglin, *After Arminius: A Historical Introduction to Arminian Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2021); cf. Uwe Swarat, 'Für wen ist Jesus gestorben – für wenige, für viele, für alle?' (in a forthcoming *Festschrift*, 2026).

[22] Text in English in *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, ed. by Lumpkin and Leonard, pp. 96–105.

[23] Text in English in *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, ed. by Lumpkin and Leonard, pp. 42–61 (under 'Anabaptist Confessions').

[24] Thus Coggins, *John Smyth's Congregation*, 84. White, *English Separatist Tradition*, p. 140, however, understands the sources to mean that the Waterland Mennonites did not react favourably to Smyth's application for admission during his lifetime. The remaining followers of Smyth were

afterwards wrote nineteen 'Arguments against infant baptism'[25] (in Latin) and presented them to the Mennonites.

(4) The confessional text documented by Lumpkin and Leonard in fourth place is skipped here and dealt with below.

(5) When Smyth died in August 1612, the English Mennonite congregation lost its pre-eminent leader. The idea therefore arose of uniting with the Dutch Mennonite congregation to form a single congregation. In order to win over the Dutch, the English wrote a comprehensive confession of faith in English and Dutch, the *Propositions and Conclusions Concerning True Christian Religion,* which underwent several revisions in the years 1612–1614. This confession was included by Lumpkin and Leonard as the fifth and last among the 'Pioneer English Separatist-Baptist Confessions'. The desired merger of the two congregations actually took place on 20 January 1615. This meant that John Smyth's Mennonite congregation ceased to exist. The English-language church services were discontinued around 1640, when all the English members of the congregation had assimilated into the Dutch.

A minority from Smyth's Separatist congregation (around ten people under the leadership of Thomas Helwys) did not agree from the outset with the application for admission to the Mennonites. They complained that Smyth assumed an apostolic chain of tradition for true baptism, of which the Mennonites were the youngest link and into whose ranks they should therefore be incorporated. The group around Helwys continued to regard the new beginning of the Separatists as a Baptist congregation alongside the Mennonites as legitimate before God and excluded the group around Smyth from the congregation. They considered apostolic succession in both baptism and ordination to be an invention of the Roman Pope. They accused the Mennonites of supporting Smyth's error and thus establishing a new, man-made law for baptismal succession. Alongside that, the Mennonites seemed to be too lax for them in their treatment of biblical law, especially the Sabbath commandment.

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not accepted into the Mennonite community until January 1615. See also Wright, *Early English Baptists*, pp. 41–43.

[25] In *The Works of John Smyth*, ed. by Whitley, II, pp. 710–732.

(4) The remaining congregation around Helwys wrote their own confession of faith in 1611, *A Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam in Holland*. This confession was placed in chronological order by Lumpkin and Leonard as the fourth among the 'Pioneer English Separatist-Baptist Confessions'. It served the self-assurance of the small group, among other things by distinguishing it from Mennonite teachings. Above all, however, its purpose was to win over the Separatists who had remained in England to the changes in doctrine and practice that had taken place in the Amsterdam congregation and to prepare for the congregation's return to England. It is the first genuinely Baptist confession in history. In terms of content, it remains largely within the framework of Reformed orthodoxy. However, congregationalism is advocated, namely the conviction that every local congregation is the church in the full sense of the word and is allowed to determine itself. In contrast to the Calvinist-Separatist tradition, it is taught that baptism should take place upon the baptised person's confession of sin and faith and is therefore not intended for children. Also contrary to the Calvinist convictions of the other Separatists, but in agreement with Reformed Arminianism,[26] it is declared that Adam's sin was 'imputed' to all humans, so that all humans became mortal. As a sinner, every human is inclined to all evil and wants nothing good. However, every human can accept or reject God's saving grace. The predestination of God refers to the fact that all who believe in Christ will be saved and all who do not believe will be damned. Once you have received God's grace, you are not guaranteed it forever, but can lose it again. Implicitly directed against Mennonites are the statements that members of the magistracy, who wield the sword in this service according to God's will, can also be members of the congregation of believers and that one may take an oath according to God's law.[27]

[26] See note 21 above.

[27] Cf. Uwe Swarat, 'The Relationship between State and Church: Classical Concepts Examined from a Baptist Perspective', *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, 20.1 (2020), pp. 9–29; in German: U. Swarat, *Gnade und Glaube*: *Studien zur baptistischen Theologie* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlangsanstatt, 2021), pp. 210–231.

The theological dialogue between the first Baptist congregation and its neighbouring Mennonite congregation in Amsterdam was therefore over soon after it had begun in 1609, or basically did not take place at all. When John Smyth began the dialogue, he was already convinced that founding a Baptist congregation alongside a Mennonite congregation was a sin. He and his group of English exiles baptised as believers wanted to be recognised as Mennonites by the Waterland Mennonites and formulated the 'Short Confession of Faith in XX Articles' in 1609 with this intention in mind. The confession is therefore on the one hand the first confession of a Baptist congregation, but on the other hand it also documents a farewell to Baptist thinking. This farewell was finalised by the signatures of the group around Smyth under the Mennonite 'Short Confession of Faith' written by De Ries in 1610.

The much smaller part of John Smyth's congregation under the leadership of Thomas Helwys, which did not seek to join the Mennonites, did not engage in a doctrinal dialogue with the Mennonites, but returned to England soon after the split in Smyth's congregation — not to submit to the English state church, but to spread the newly developed Baptist congregational model in England. Despite fierce suppression, this actually succeeded; the large group of so-called General Baptists in England emerged from this one small congregation.[28] (The so-called Particular Baptists emerged independently of the General Baptists around 1640 from theological discussions in a London Separatist congregation.[29])

When in 1624 conflicts arose in the London Baptist congregation under Helwys's successor John Murton, an expelled group around Elias Tookey wrote to the Waterland elder Hans de Ries and asked to be accepted into the Mennonite community. However, the different attitudes towards taking the oath and assuming political office prevented this. Even the inclusion of other Baptist congregations in England in the dialogue did not result in a theological agreement, so this

[28] See White, *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*, pp. 15–58.

[29] See below in the section 'Continuation of the Theological Dialogue' under the discussion of an historical clarification.

discussion by letter between Waterland Mennonites and English Baptists was broken off in 1630.[30]

Baptist–Mennonite Contacts in the Nineteenth Century and the Emergence of the Mennonite Brethren

The relationship between the Baptists, who gradually spread worldwide from England, and the Mennonites, who also live in many countries today, has scarcely been researched to date. It seems that the two free churches barely knew each other and at least showed little interest in each other. Contact between them is only known from the nineteenth century. The correspondence and personal contacts between Johann Gerhard Oncken (1800–1884), the founder of European-Continental Baptist Churches, and Russian-German Mennonites and the visits by the Baptist missionary August Liebig (1836–1914) to German Mennonites in Ukraine were particularly significant.[31] At that time, quite a few Mennonites felt that their congregational life was comparatively rigid and formalistic. Like the Baptists, they wanted to have an evangelistic effect and aim for the conversion of individuals in their sermons. They also adopted baptism by immersion from the Baptists, rather than by sprinkling. At the same time, the original Anabaptist movement was to be revived through a stronger emphasis on church discipline and lay involvement.

Some of the Mennonites with this revivalist and missionary attitude were expelled from their community, while others left of their own accord. From 1860 they formed their own congregations, which they called Mennonite Brethren congregations.[32] The first supra-regional conference of the new Free Church was held in 1872, and a year later they adopted their own confession of faith, based on that of

30 See Wright, *The Early English Baptists*, pp. 61–64.

31 See Albert W. Wardin Jr. and August G. A. Liebig, 'German Baptist Missionary and Friend to the Mennonite Brethren', *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 28 (2010), pp. 167–186.

32 See Abram H. Unruh, *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde in Russland 1860–1945*, 2nd edn (Samenkorn, 2010); Johannes Dyck, 'Mennonite Brethren', in *A Dictionary of European Baptist Life and Thought*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought, 33, ed. by John H. Y. Briggs (Paternoster, 2009), pp. 320–321; J. H. Lohrenz, 'Mennonite Brethren Church', *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, ed. by Cornelius Krahn (Mennonite Publishing House, 1982), pp. 595–602.

the German Baptists. The Mennonite Brethren's best-known theologian was Jakob Kroeker (1872–1948), who, like three other Mennonite Brethren, had been trained at the German Baptist Seminary in Hamburg-Horn. In the course of the emigration of Mennonites to the United States of America, the 'Konferenz der Vereinigten Mennoniten-Brüder in Nord-Amerika' (Conference of United Mennonite Brethren in North America) was founded in 1889. A seminary was established in Hillsboro, Kansas. Foreign missions (especially in India and China) were also carried out, first under the auspices of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, then under its own responsibility. Since 1990 there has been an International Committee of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB), who published a new confession of faith in 2005.[33] To this day, the Mennonite Brethren congregations stand between the Baptists on the one hand and the so-called 'kirchliche Mennoniten' (English: ecclesiastical Mennonites) on the other.

In Germany, two Baptist pastors in particular sought contact with the Mennonites in the nineteenth century. They were Carl-Christian Tauchnitz from Saxony (1798–1884) and the Englishman William Henry Angas (1781–1832).[34] Both promoted among Mennonites the then still unfamiliar idea of world mission, specifically financial support for the English Baptist Missionary Society. Tauchnitz also supported the Mennonite Schulverein (School Society) and was instrumental in settling the internal Mennonite dispute over a new hymnal in the Palatinate.[35] Angas also worked for a short time with the Mennonites in the Palatinate and was crucial in helping them to see themselves as part of the whole of evangelical Christianity. The activities of these two Baptists did not lead to the founding of Mennonite Brethren congregations, but they indirectly gave the impetus for the

[33] 'What We Believe', International Community of Mennonite Brethren <https://www.icomb.org/what-we-believe/> [accessed 7 April 2025].

[34] See Astrid von Schlachta, '"Ach, daß wir doch alle dahin gelangen möchten": Der Einfluss des Baptismus auf die Mennoniten', in *Entgrenzungen: Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag von Andrea Strübind*, ed. by Sabine Hübner and Kim Strübind (Duncker & Humbolot, 2023), pp. 41–51; John D. Roth, 'William Henry Angas Encounters the Mennonites: How Nineteenth-Century Palatine Mennonites Became Protestant', in *Crossing Baptist Boundaries: A Festschrift to Honor William Brackney*, ed. by Erich Geldbach (Mercer University Press, 2019), pp. 242–262.

[35] For this German historical and geographical region, see 'Palatinate', Britannica <https://www.britannica.com/place/Palatinate> [accessed 19 May 2025].

emergence of Mennonite world mission organisations such as the Dutch Doopsgezinde Zendingsvereeniging (Mission Association of Baptism-minded People), founded in 1847. Overall, it can be said that the Baptists had a much greater influence on the Mennonites than the Mennonites on the Baptists.

Theological Dialogue Between Baptists and Mennonites in the Twentieth Century

There was no official theological dialogue in the nineteenth century, neither between Baptists and (ecclesiastical) Mennonites nor between Baptists and Mennonite Brethren. This situation changed with the progress of the ecumenical movement in the second half of the twentieth century. In the years from 1989 to 1992, official theological dialogues were held between the two free churches for the first time, at world level. The dialogue partners were the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) and the Mennonite World Conference (MWC), in which the so-called 'kirchliche' (ecclesiastical) Mennonites were united.

This was not the first ecumenical dialogue for either world communion. The Baptist World Alliance, founded in London in July 1905, had already held theological discussions with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (1973–1977), the Roman Catholic Church (1984–1988), and the Lutheran World Federation (1986–1989) before the dialogue with the Mennonites began. The Mennonite World Conference met for the first time in Basel in 1925, that is 400 years after the first believer's baptism in the Reformation in Zürich. The conference, which initially took place at irregular intervals, gradually developed into a worldwide institution. Before the dialogue with the Baptist World Alliance began, the Mennonite World Conference had already held ecumenical talks with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches between 1984 and 1989.

The final report of the Mennonite–Baptist dialogue is very formally entitled 'Theological Conversations'.[36] However, the text itself explains that the dialogue focused on 'matters related to our identity as believers' churches' (12).[37] It names three such matters, namely the 'authority in the Christian life', the 'nature of the Church', and the 'relationships between the Church and the world' (12.29). These three topics are discussed in more detail and each is concluded with overviews of 'convergences and divergences'. The entire report concludes with 'recommendations' to the commissioning world communions. The delegations were led on the Baptist side by William H. Brackney from Canada and on the Mennonite side by Ross T. Bender from the USA.[38]

On the nature and role of authority in the Christian life, the Mennonites explain in the dialogue report that they confess with the reformers of the sixteenth century the authority of Holy Scripture instead of church tradition (*sola scriptura*) and instead of the authority of the Pope the authority of the congregation (priesthood of all believers). Some Mennonites, however, understood the Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century as neither Catholic nor Protestant, but as a 'third way' (15). Like the early Anabaptists, the Mennonites placed more importance on following Christ than on true faith. The 'true test of faith' is ethical 'obedience to the written word of Scripture' (13). Within the Holy Scriptures, the New Testament has 'the priority' over the Old, and within the New Testament, Jesus's Sermon on the Mount is particularly authoritative (13). The person of Jesus is especially important to Mennonites because they regard his human life as a 'model for Christians' (13). According to Jesus's rule in Matthew 18:15–17, the leadership of the church takes place through 'mutual admonition' (14).

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36 Original English version in Baptist World Alliance, *Baptists and Mennonites in Dialogue: Report on Conversations Between the Baptist World Alliance and the Mennonite World Conference 1989–1992* (Baptist World Alliance, 2013).

37 The numbers in parentheses refer to the page numbers of the English version and are used for ease of reference throughout this section.

38 In addition to the chairman from Canada, the Baptist delegation included Richard Coffin (Canada), Beverly Dunstan Scott, Daniel B. McGee, and David M. Scholer (all from the USA) and G. Noel Vose (Australia). It is incomprehensible that no one from Europe was involved. In addition to the chairman from the USA, the Mennonite delegation also included Buelah Hostetler, Anna Juhnke, and Daniel Schipani (all from the USA), Abe Dueck (Canada) and Ed van Straten (Netherlands).

In the present, many Mennonites proclaim Jesus as 'the model and the power for a transformed world order' (15), thus seeing Jesus's life as a model not only for the church, but also for the world at large.

The Baptists define their understanding of authority as 'the right and power to command obedience in the context of responsible freedom' (15). Jesus Christ, 'our God and Saviour' (16), is named as the 'the sole and absolute authority' in this sense. Because Jesus is revealed in the Holy Scriptures, for Baptists the Holy Scriptures are also 'an important source of authority' (16). 'Scripture is viewed as having the last word' (16). In this sense, Baptists also profess the Reformation formula *sola scriptura*. From Hebrews 1:1–2 they conclude that within the Bible 'more attention' is given to the New Testament (16), and on the basis of 2 Timothy 3:16–17 they also acknowledge the authority of the Old Testament. Because Jesus Christ is not only revealed in Scripture, but is also present in the church, Baptists accept the authority of the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, the church is also a 'vehicle of authority' (17). When the church seeks the will of Christ through prayer in Scripture, individuals submit to the church. This submission is not always easy for Baptists because freedom is particularly important to them.

In the compilation of convergences and divergences on authority, the report counts the statement 'Baptists and Mennonites are non-creedal' among the convergences, and among the divergences it says, among other things, 'Baptists are concerned about "soul freedom" and individual accountability before God whereas Mennonites are concerned about accountability to God through community' (18, 19).

With regard to the church, Mennonites and Baptists, like all free churches, agree that the church is by nature a believers' church and should be visible as such. In the more detailed description, however, they emphasise different things.

Mennonites, the report says, draw their description of the nature of the church from 'two major sources', the New Testament and sixteenth-century Anabaptism (20); that is, not from Scripture alone but from Scripture and tradition. This results in five 'particular emphases' (20). Firstly, membership of the church is based on a voluntary confession of faith, followed by believer's baptism. Most Mennonite

congregations expect a believers' baptism for prospective members from other denominations if this has not yet taken place. Secondly, the church order is congregationalist. It was not until the nineteenth century that Mennonite congregations began to appoint trained, salaried, and mobile pastors. Before that, only lay people preached and only lay people were in charge. Thirdly, church discipline according to Matthew 18:15–22 used to be important. Today, the emphasis is on congregational fellowship and mutual support. Fourthly, the nature of the church of Jesus also includes suffering for the sake of Christ and non-resistance. Fifthly, Mennonite worship services are generally neither liturgical nor charismatic, but Christocentric; the mood is characterised by the earnestness of following Christ. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are described as 'ordinances' of Jesus and are not understood as 'sacramental channels or re-enactments of that grace', but as 'signs and symbols of the grace of God' (23, 24).

According to the dialogue report, Baptist views of the church are characterised by the local church, in which all the means to salvation are available and which is endowed with all needful power and authority, as well as by the concept of a voluntary church, which comes about through a written covenant of the church members and through jointly recognised confessions of faith in the sense of theological statements of consensus. Baptists emphasise the autonomy of local congregations in dynamic tension with their interdependence in the form of congregational associations and unions. Baptist church services are partly centred on the sermon, partly on songs and prayers, and often also on the evangelistic invitation to follow Jesus. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are also described by many Baptists as 'ordinances' of Jesus; however, they are often ascribed a 'sacramental' nature (26). Immersion at baptism not only portrays obedience to Christ, but also death and resurrection with Christ according to Romans 6:1–4. For most Baptists, the Lord's Supper is a '"memorial feast" open to all true believers' (27).

Among the convergences between Baptists and Mennonites, in addition to the free-church and congregationalist understanding of the church and the simple style of worship and the Lord's Supper, is, of course, baptism. The report states the following:

> Baptists and Mennonites practice believer's baptism which is regarded as the sign and symbol [two terms also used in relation to the Lord's Supper] of a person's response in faith and obedience to God's free offer of grace and forgiveness in Christ. Baptism is expected of believers and is generally viewed as entry into church membership and a commitment to follow Christ. (28)

But baptism is also mentioned in the divergences, namely with the sentence 'Baptists view immersion as the proper mode of baptism to represent the believers' identification with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Mennonites practice several modes of baptism' (28).

The Mennonite side of the dialogue summarises the relationship between the church and the world in three terms: Mission, Peace, Politics. The mission of the church includes 'both the commission to make disciples […] and ministries of compassion and service' (29). Mennonites see it as their mission in the world to make peace in the sense of non-resistance and love of enemies. However, there were and are Mennonites who did not refuse military service. As far as holding political office is concerned, Swiss Mennonites are still against it, while Dutch Mennonites are open to it.

The Baptist side regards evangelism and missions as a primary task of the church. There are differences among Baptists not only in the motives for mission, but also in mission styles, for example in the distinction between churches that send missionaries and churches that receive missionaries. In terms of the substance of the mission effort, some Baptists respond primarily to people's 'spiritual' needs, while others also respond to their 'social, economic and physical' needs (36). Regarding Christian involvement in politics, the report lists several different Baptist positions, ranging from withdrawal from the world to a 'theocratic view' in which Christians seek to enforce God's will on earth through politics (38). When it comes to war and peace, most Baptists hold to the just war tradition, while some only accept non-violence.

Among the convergences between Mennonites and Baptists about the mission of the church in the world, the report affirms the conviction that 'neither the church nor the state is to dominate the other (separation of church and state)' (39). Among the divergences, the

following is mentioned in first place: 'Baptist identity is shaped more by concern for proclamation, whereas Mennonite identity is shaped more by service' (39).

The entire dialogue report concludes with eleven 'recommendations'; for example, 'that the leaders and staff of the BWA and MWC regularly seek each other's advice and support on matters of mutual concern' (40). It is also recommended that Baptist–Mennonite 'consultations' be convened on the topics of mission and the church's peace witness as well as just war and biblical pacifism. It also encourages 'continued research into the 1608–1640 period of Baptist-Mennonite intersection' (40).

Continuation of the Theological Dialogue?

I am unable to say whether any of the recommendations of the Mennonite-Baptist dialogue have been implemented to date. However, I am certain that it would be useful for both sides if the dialogue could be continued either at the world level or at the European level. This would be useful because the 1992 dialogue report contains some historical and theological statements that are not as clear and precise as they should and could be. Further joint historical and theological work would hopefully enable progress to be made on both sides. Two examples of this will be briefly presented here.

Firstly, a necessary *historical* clarification. In two places in the report (8.27), the Baptist side of the dialogue wrote that the so-called Particular Baptists, who (without influence from the first Baptist congregation led by Thomas Helwys) had emerged from internal discussions in a London Separatist congregation around 1640, had come to the insight of believer's baptism by immersion on the basis of consultations with the Rhynsburg Collegiants in the Netherlands. It is explicitly mentioned that the Rhynsburgers also included Mennonites, so the impression is created that at least the Particular Baptists came to baptismal insight under Mennonite influence. However, this impression is misleading. Richard Blunt, a Dutch-speaking member of the London Separatists, did indeed travel to Rhynsburg (near Leiden) between 1640 and 1642 to learn about the practice of immersion baptism there.

However, Blunt had already concluded that immersion was the true, biblically based form of baptism before this journey and had put it up for discussion in the Separatist church.[39] Moreover, although some Mennonites belonged to the Rhynsburg Collegiants, the group itself had been founded by Remonstrant church elders (i.e. Reformed Arminians). Because the group did not want to be a church, it admitted members of all denominations. It rejected church confessions and ordained ministries. It had adopted believer's baptism by immersion from Polish Socinians, not from Mennonites.[40] Puritan Separatists could therefore only have a practical interest in this Dutch group. Mennonite baptismal practice was definitely not learnt in Rhynsburg, as the Mennonites baptised by pouring over and not by immersion. It is therefore likely that both the General Baptists (who emerged from the Helwys congregation) and the Particular Baptists arrived at their practice of believer's baptism without Mennonite influence. Both streams also attached great importance to not being confused with the Anabaptists. They did not share typical Anabaptist convictions such as non-resistance, refusal to take an oath, and the community of goods. If the recommendation of the dialogue report to 'continued research into the 1608–1640 period of Baptist-Mennonite intersection' (40) is implemented, this fact should be taken into account.

And now for a necessary *theological* clarification. The report recommends further discussion between Baptists and Mennonites on the topics of mission and the church's peace witness as well as just war and biblical pacifism. This is certainly worthwhile. However, statements that the report recognises as points of agreement also require further clarification. This includes, for example, the claim that Mennonites and Baptists are 'non-creedal' — a statement that we might see and hear elsewhere. What does this formula mean?

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[39] See White, *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*, pp. 60–61; Wright, *The Early English Baptists*, pp. 81–89.

[40] Hans Schneider, 'Rijnsburger Kollegianten', *Religion in Geschichter und Gegenwart* (RGG), vol. 7, ed. by Hans Dieter Betz, Don Browning, Bernd Janowski, and Eberhard Jüngel, 4th edn. (Brill, 2004), p. 519; translated in *Religion Past and Present Online* (Brill, 2011) <https://referenceworks.brill.com/display/entries/RPPO/SIM-024988.xml.> [accessed 20 May 2025].

The English word 'creed' means 'religious belief' and 'profession of faith'. 'Non-creedal' would therefore be churches that have no religious beliefs or do not expect a profession of faith from their members. For churches such as the Mennonites and the Baptists, who baptise people 'upon the confession of their faith', this is a surprising assertion. The personal confession of Christian faith is even fundamental for them. But perhaps 'non-creedal' is only meant to express that these churches recognise personal oral confessions of faith, but not written ones that are supposed to apply to the whole church. Though we find such a fundamental rejection of denominational creeds among the Quakers and the Rhynsburg Collegiants, we do not among Mennonites and Baptists. As we have seen above, the first contacts between Mennonites and Baptists in Amsterdam consisted, among other things, in the exchange of written confessions of faith. The Waterland Mennonites demanded that John Smyth's congregation sign a Mennonite confession of faith so that they could be recognised as Mennonites. Numerous Baptist confessions have survived, fourteen in total from the century of their origin. In North America, ten confessional texts have been produced since the eighteenth century.[41] In Europe, there are only a few Baptist unions that do not have their own confession of faith.[42] It is therefore not true that the Baptists are without written denominational confessions. This is not a bad thing either, because unwritten traditions are generally even stronger and more resistant to criticism than written texts, and therefore often have greater *de facto* authority than written texts. Anyone who is concerned that written confessions could be placed alongside or even above Holy Scripture in terms of their authority must be even more worried about confessions that have only been handed down orally. But whether oral or written, there is no being a Christian and no being a church without confession.

So, what does the description of Mennonites and Baptists as 'non-creedal' mean? In what sense could it apply? Does the formula mean that these free churches indeed value their own confessions but do not recognise the confessions of the early church (such as the Nicene

[41] See *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, ed. by Lumpkin and Leonard.
[42] See G. Keith Parker, *Baptists in Europe: History & Confessions of Faith* (Broadman Press, 1982).

Creed, the so-called Athanasianum, the Christological dogma of Chalcedon, and the Apostles' Creed)? For the Baptist side, this assertion would be wrong in any case.[43] Baptists recognise the early church confessions just as much as their own. Or is the formula 'non-creedal' intended to say that Mennonites and Baptists have formulated and accepted confessions, but that these confessions are not understood as divine revelations or as propositions that must be confessed if one wants to be saved? That would be a demarcation against the Catholic understanding of church dogmas and as such would be completely correct. However, Mennonites and Baptists share this demarcation with all Protestant churches. For all churches that emerged from the Reformation, confessions are not infallible texts of revelation but formulate the faith that the Christian community has professed in response to God's revelation. Protestant confessions of faith are therefore capable of error and, if necessary, can also be changed. In this sense, all Protestant churches are 'non-creedal'.

In the dialogue report with the Mennonites, the Baptists profess the Reformation's *sola scriptura* (i.e. an ecclesiastical confessional formula) and explain this formula with the words, 'Baptists do not accord any official authority to creeds' (16). But what does 'official' authority mean? An authority that is equivalent to Holy Scripture? In fact, it is precisely this idea that the Reformation formula *sola scriptura* is intended to ward off. When the Baptist side in the dialogue report summarises its understanding of authority in the sentence, 'Scripture is viewed as having the last word' (16), then it agrees with Lutherans and Reformed. So, are Lutherans and Reformed also 'non-creedal churches'? If not, what is meant by the fact that Mennonites and Baptists see themselves emphatically as 'non-creedal'? Greater clarity is needed here in the terminology and in the definition of the relationship between Scripture, confession, and creed. It would be pleasant if Baptists and Mennonites could create this clarity together.

[43] For more details, see Uwe Swarat, 'Schrift und Bekenntnis nach baptistischem Verständnis', in *Gnade und Glaube*, pp. 29–41.

Baptists and Anabaptists after Christendom: Opportunities for Mutual Learning

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Abstract
Although early Baptists differentiated and distanced themselves from Anabaptism for a number of understandable reasons, these traditions have much in common as a recent Baptist/Mennonite dialogue demonstrates. But there are also divergencies and opportunities for mutual learning, especially in the emerging post-Christendom context in western societies. This article reflects on examples in the areas of ethics, missiology, and ecclesiology. Contemporary Baptists and Anabaptists can learn from each other in relation to issues of war and peace, different approaches to evangelism and interpretations of the atonement, participative communities and mutual accountability. An acknowledged limitation of this article is its western focus. It concludes by recognising that both traditions have much to learn from Baptists and Anabaptists in and from the Majority World.

Keywords
Post-Christendom; ethics; ecclesiology; missiology

Introduction

Although early Baptists differentiated and distanced themselves from Anabaptism for a number of understandable reasons, these traditions have much in common as a recent Baptist/Mennonite dialogue demonstrates. But there are also divergencies and opportunities for mutual learning, especially in the emerging post-Christendom context in western societies. This article reflects on examples in the areas of ethics, missiology, and ecclesiology. Contemporary Baptists and Anabaptists can learn from each other in relation to issues of war and peace, different approaches to evangelism and interpretations of the atonement, participative communities and mutual accountability.

English Baptists and Anabaptists: Early History

Although church historians continue to debate the extent to which the continental Anabaptist movements[1] influenced the emergence and development of the early English Baptists, many early Baptist leaders insisted that they were certainly *not* Anabaptists. There were understandable reasons for their persistent attempts to differentiate and distance themselves from Anabaptism.

First, for some decades before the formation of the first Baptist congregations, the term 'Anabaptist' had appeared in official documents that attempted to suppress what was initially perceived as a foreign intrusion into England and then, rather more worryingly to the authorities, a small but growing presence of English Anabaptists. As early as 1538, Henry VIII received from two Protestant German princes, Philipp of Hesse and John Frederick of Saxony, a letter written by the Lutheran reformer Philip Melanchthon, warning him that continental Anabaptists were infiltrating his kingdom. Henry issued two proclamations prohibiting Anabaptist literature and banishing from his kingdom anyone who had been rebaptised. In the following year, he excluded foreigners from a proclamation of pardon to all 'heretics' in his realm, indicating that he regarded Anabaptism (and perhaps other supposed heresies) as an unwelcome external influence. However, in 1540, a further proclamation of pardon to 'heretics' within his realm explicitly excluded 'Anabaptists' from this provision, perhaps indicating an awareness that there were now some English Anabaptists.

Throughout the rest of the sixteenth century, government and ecclesiastical documents continued to express concern about the presence and influence of 'Anabaptists' in England. A number of individuals can be identified — Joan Bocher, Henry Hart, Robert Cooche, Humphrey Middleton, Nicholas Sheterden, George Brodbridge, and others — and there may have been informal gatherings, but it seems unlikely that there were any congregational expressions of Anabaptism in England in this period. There were some Anabaptist martyrs, though relatively few by comparison with those executed

[1] It is now generally accepted that continental Anabaptism consisted of several movements with a common core of beliefs and practices but also significant differences.

elsewhere in Europe. But concern about the influence of Anabaptist ideas persisted and there were further proclamations intended to suppress these.

Despite the very limited number of English Anabaptists, it is clear from official church documents that Anabaptist ideas were regarded as sufficiently threatening to be identified and denounced. Anabaptists were named in the *Ten Articles* (1536), *The Bishop's Book* (1537), *The King's Book* (1543), and the *Forty-Two Articles* (1553). In the better-known *Thirty-Nine Articles* (1562), Article 38 stated that 'the riches and goods of Christians are not common […] as certain Anabaptists do falsely boast', and other articles were worded in such a way as to exclude Anabaptist beliefs. The Presbyterian Confessions of 1560 and 1647 both excoriated Anabaptist convictions. There were also thousands of polemical treatises and pamphlets that presented the Anabaptists in the worst possible light.

Unsurprisingly, when Baptist churches emerged from the dissenting maelstrom of the early seventeenth century, they (like the Congregationalists) denied vehemently that they were Anabaptists. This term continued to appear frequently in lists of those the government or the state church were trying to suppress.[2] Despite their links with the Dutch Mennonites and even an abortive attempt in 1626 to unite with the Amsterdam Waterlanders, Baptists rejected the application of this term to their movement.

Second, the shadow of events in Münster in the mid-1530s continued to hover over perceptions of Anabaptism. Insurrection, violence, polygamy, and enforced sharing of possessions had alarmed earlier generations, convincing many that this was the true nature of Anabaptism. This malign legacy helps to explain the fear and hostility that characterised responses to Anabaptism nearly a century later. Although Anabaptists did advocate mutual aid in ways that were threatening to English notions of private property, including the

[2] For examples, see Michael Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 87, 98, 100, 223.

'common purse' practices of the Hutterites, it is more likely the enforced sharing of possessions practised in Münster that lies behind Article 38 of the *Thirty-Nine Articles*. English Baptists, very understandably, distanced themselves from these associations.[3]

Third, they were also aware that some of the anti-Anabaptist propaganda focused on the heterodox Christology associated with Melchior Hofmann and endorsed by some Mennonites. Known as the 'celestial flesh' heresy, this taught that Jesus brought his human flesh with him from heaven and did not derive this from his mother, Mary. It seems that this idea originated among the German Spiritualists and was an attempt to protect the perfection of Christ from contamination, but it was widely and rightly regarded as contrary to biblical teaching and theological orthodoxy. Today it would also be regarded as based on false physiological assumptions. Although this Christology was rejected by most other Anabaptists, just as the events at Münster were rejected by most other Anabaptists, their Catholic and Protestant opponents had little interest in differentiating between the various Anabaptist movements and positions. English Baptists did not subscribe to this approach to Christology and rejected any association with those who did.[4]

The early English Baptists may, then, have had legitimate theological, as well as political, reasons for rejecting identification as 'Anabaptists', including their rejection of Anabaptist prohibitions on bearing arms, swearing oaths, and becoming magistrates.[5] But this does not mean that the earlier continental movements had no influence on their development. This influence was rather less significant among those who became known as Particular Baptists and drew much of their

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[3] See F. J. Powicke, *Henry Barrow, Separatist (1550?–1593) and the Exiled Church of Amsterdam (1593–1662)* (Cambridge: J. Clarke & Company, 1900), pp. 112–114. See further, Thomas Crosby, *The History of the English Baptists* (London: privately printed, 1738), I, p. lvii.

[4] In 1673 Thomas Monck published *A Cure for the Cankering Error of the New Eutychians*, warning Baptists against this Melchiorite heresy. See Watts, *The Dissenters*, p. 299. See also, Crosby, *History*, I, pp. 267–268.

[5] See Watts, *The Dissenters*, p. 50.

inspiration from the Puritans and Calvinism, but those who became known as General Baptists not only had strong personal and institutional links with Anabaptists in the Netherlands but also shared many of their convictions and practices.[6]

English Baptists and Anabaptists: More Recent History

During the next three centuries, Anabaptism was variously relegated to a footnote in Reformation studies, interpreted through the writings of its opponents, or associated almost exclusively with the atypical events in Münster. Most Baptists, if they were aware of Anabaptism at all, accepted these evaluations of its significance. But this was not true of all Baptists. Some became convinced that Anabaptism was more important than a historical footnote and that Münster was an aberration. Ian Randall has traced the varying assessments of Anabaptism made by leading Baptist historians between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries.[7] He gives examples of historians who wrote positively about the Anabaptists and were insistent that they were forebears of the English Baptists. However, these historians tended to focus on Anabaptist figures they found more congenial, especially Menno Simons and Balthasar Hubmaier, the latter espousing views on the sword and the magistracy that were more acceptable to Baptists. During the early decades of the twentieth century, assessments of Anabaptism and its influence on the early Baptists were mostly less positive, with some historians vehemently denying significant influence and choosing to highlight the more mystical and apocalyptic branches of Anabaptism.

From the mid-twentieth century, however, especially through the efforts of Mennonite historians, the writings of several early

[6] See further, James Coggins, *John Smyth's Congregation: English Separatism, Mennonite Influence and the Elect Nation* (Herald Press, 1993) and Paul Fiddes, *The Fourth Strand of the Reformation: The Covenant Ecclesiology of Anabaptists, English Separatists and Early General Baptists* (Oxford: Centre for Baptist History and Heritage, 2018).

[7] Ian Randall, 'A Believing Church: Baptist Perspectives on Anabaptism', *Baptistic Theologies*, 5.1 (2013), pp. 17–34.

Anabaptist leaders were recovered, translated, and made available, encouraging a reassessment of Anabaptist convictions and practices.[8] Mennonite leaders became convinced that their Anabaptist heritage offered an attractive vision for their denominations and congregations, albeit choosing to emphasise certain aspects of this heritage more than others.[9] And some English Baptist leaders came to believe that the Anabaptist vision might also prove to be a source of renewal for their communities. Influential among these was Ernest Payne, general secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain from 1951 to 1967.[10] Not all agreed, notably Barry White, the leading Baptist historian in the 1970s, who insisted that the Baptists had roots in English Puritanism, not Anabaptism.[11]

During the 1980s and 1990s, through the influence of the London Mennonite Centre and later the Anabaptist Network (now renamed the Anabaptist Mennonite Network following a merger with the London Mennonite Trust),[12] British Christians from many traditions became interested in Anabaptism and its potential to offer fresh perspectives on discipleship, mission, and church life. This coincided with a growing awareness of the accelerating demise of Christendom and the need to grapple with the challenges and opportunities of post-Christendom. No longer concerned to distance themselves from accusations of being 'Anabaptists', as their forebears had been, Baptists have been at the forefront of this rediscovery of a marginalised tradition. Centuries earlier, Anabaptists had rejected the ideology of Christendom, insisted that Europe was not a truly Christian society, and critiqued the

[8] See especially the 'Classics of the Radical Reformation' series, containing documents translated and annotated under the direction of the Institute of Mennonite Studies and now published by Plough Publishing House.

[9] The seminal document was Harold Bender's *The Anabaptist Vision*, first published in 1944 by Herald Press.

[10] See Ernest Payne, *The Baptist Movement in the Reformation and Onwards* (Kingsgate Press, 1947) and *The Anabaptists of the 16th Century and Their Influence in the Modern World* (Carey Kingsgate Press, 1949).

[11] B. R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition: From the Marian Martyrs to the Pilgrim Fathers* (Oxford University Press, 1971).

[12] See Anabaptist Mennonite Network <https://amnetwork.uk> [accessed 2 April 2025].

collusion of the church with wealth, power, status, and violence. Baptists and others suspected that this tradition might be unusually well-equipped to offer insights and resources for an emerging post-Christendom culture.

Although some Baptists who identified more strongly with Reformed theology were suspicious of this interest in Anabaptism, influential Baptist theologians, historians, and church leaders encouraged the integration of Baptist and Anabaptist approaches to ecclesial and missional issues. Among these were Nigel Wright, Ian Randall, Keith Jones, Brian Haymes, Ruth Gouldbourne, and Anne Wilkinson-Hayes. During the 1990s, there were faculty members in all the English Baptist colleges who identified with or were deeply sympathetic to Anabaptism. Spurgeon's College introduced a master's programme on Baptist and Anabaptist theology. Baptist ministers were disproportionately represented within the emerging Anabaptist Network and in its theology forum. Some of these wholeheartedly embraced an Anabaptist identity; others preferred to describe themselves as 'hyphenated Anabaptists'. In 1997, Urban Expression was founded as a mission agency with Anabaptist values committed to working in marginalised urban neighbourhoods.[13] The founders were Baptists and many of the coordinators, team leaders, and mission partners in the past twenty-eight years have been Baptist ministers.

The interaction of Baptist and Anabaptist perspectives has continued in the first quarter of the twenty-first century. When the London Mennonite Centre ran out of money and was forced to close in 2011, the library was gifted to Bristol Baptist College. Steve Finamore, then the principal, suggested that this resource might enable the establishment of a Centre for Anabaptist Studies. Since 2014, this has offered taught master's modules and supervision for doctoral students exploring a range of Anabaptist topics. The Centre has had more Baptist students than from any other tradition. In February 2025, to celebrate the 500th anniversary of Anabaptism, a conference was held in Oxford,

[13] See the Urban Expression website <http://www.urbanexpression.org.uk> [accessed 2 April 2025].

'Beyond 500', jointly sponsored by the Centre for Anabaptist Studies, the Centre for Baptist Studies, and the Baptist Historical Society.[14]

In 2023, the Incarnate Network, which had for over twenty years provided a support network for mainly Baptist church planters and pioneers, came under the auspices of the Anabaptist Mennonite Network, which provided funding for two Baptist ministers to offer coaching to emerging pioneers.[15] After some decades in which no attempts had been made to plant Anabaptist or Mennonite churches in Britain, the Incarnate Network represents a strategic change of direction, prompted in part by the many opportunities for church planting in post-Christendom Britain and in part by the need to embody Anabaptist convictions and practices in communities that wholeheartedly embrace this tradition. The Network also continues to resource existing churches (Baptists and others) that are interested in incorporating Anabaptist practices. A book published in 2024 to support this initiative, *The New Anabaptists: Practices for Emerging Communities*, had contributions from three Baptist ministers.[16] Two other major projects of the Network, Peaceful Borders and Soulspace, are led by Baptist ministers.[17]

Interest in Anabaptism has not been limited to English Baptists. The two main staff members of the Scottish Baptist College until this year were strongly influenced by Anabaptism, and the college hosted a public lecture in March 2025 to celebrate the 500th anniversary of Anabaptism. Ruth Gouldbourne addressed the question 'What did the

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[14] Two of the presentations can be accessed through YouTube: Joshua Searle, 'Discipleship without Borders' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PrkyNOoLlCI> [accessed 16 May 2025], and Sally Nelson, 'Porous Church' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxAPJcVuwUk> [accessed 16 May 2025].

[15] See 'incarnate', Anabaptist Mennonite Network <https://amnetwork.uk/incarnate/> [accessed 2 April 2025]. The Anabaptist Mennonite Network developed from a merger between the London Mennonite Trust and the Anabaptist Network. The trustees of the Network are the custodians of the funds released by the sale of the London Mennonite Centre.

[16] Stuart Murray, *The New Anabaptists: Practices for Emerging Communities* (Herald Press, 2024). The contributors were Alexandra Ellish, Juliet Kilpin, and Karen Sethuraman.

[17] See 'Peaceful Borders' <https://amnetwork.uk/peacefulborders/> and 'Soulspace' <https://amnetwork.uk/soulspace/> [accessed 2 April 2025], both on the Anabaptist Mennonite Network website.

Anabaptists ever do for us?'.[18] Faculty members of South Wales Baptist College have also been influenced by Anabaptism. In Northern Ireland, although most Baptists are Reformed in their theology and ecclesiology, Irish Baptist Networks, which encourages connections between Irish Baptists and the global Baptist community, has Anabaptist leanings.[19] There has long been a focus on Anabaptism at the International Baptist Theological Seminary (formerly based in Prague and now in Amsterdam, renamed as the International Baptist Theological Study Centre) under the influence of Keith Jones, Ian Randall, Toivo Pilli, and others. And some American Baptists have produced influential publications advocating the continuing engagement of Baptists with Anabaptist resources.[20] In light of this, it is perhaps not surprising that the editor of a recent very substantial handbook on Anabaptism is a Baptist.[21]

Commonalities and Differences

This level of interest in and identification with Anabaptism among contemporary English Baptists is not surprising. The early Baptists might have focused on their differences and disagreements with the continental Anabaptists and any of their English followers, but their reasons for doing so are of little relevance today. No longer is 'Anabaptist' used widely as a term of abuse; Melchiorite Christology has been repudiated by Anabaptists; and, at least by responsible historians, Anabaptism is no longer associated primarily with the appalling events in Münster. Divorced from that polemical context, the commonalities between Baptist and Anabaptist theology and practice are very apparent.

Contemporary Baptists and Mennonites have affirmed many commonalities in their traditions. Although somewhat dated now, there

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[18] The lecture can be accessed on YouTube: Ruth Gouldbourne, 'What Did the Anabaptists ever Do for Us?' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pafSqR9EMp4> [accessed 16 May 2025].

[19] See the website, IBN <https://www.ibnetworks.org/> [accessed 2 April 2025].

[20] See, for example, Malcolm Yarnell, *The Anabaptists and Contemporary Baptists: Restoring New Testament Christianity* (B&H Academic, 2013).

[21] *T&T Clark Handbook of Anabaptism*, ed. by Brian Brewer (T&T Clark, 2021). Some of the contributors are also Baptists.

is a summary of shared convictions in 'Baptists and Mennonites in Dialogue: Report on Conversations Between the Baptist World Alliance and the Mennonite World Conference 1989–1992'.[22] The dialogue focused on three subject areas — authority, ecclesiology, and missiology. Among the 'convergences' they identified were the ultimate authority of the Christ of the Scriptures; the Scriptures as God's written word; the church as a voluntary community of baptised believers; the congregation as the main locus of discernment and decision making; the interdependence of congregations; separation of church and state; Jesus as the sole means of salvation; and witness to Jesus Christ in word and deed. Discussions of these and other subjects have continued in the nineteen Believers Church conferences that, since 1967, have been held in various locations in the USA and Canada. The twentieth conference will be held in Europe for the first time, in Amsterdam in June 2025, to mark the 500th anniversary of the Anabaptist movement.[23] Mennonites and Baptists are strongly represented on the planning committee and the panel of presenters.

The report of the Dialogue also listed various 'divergencies' between Mennonite and Baptist perspectives on authority, ecclesiology, and missiology. These included the Mennonite emphases on suffering and simplicity as marks of faithfulness; the Baptist affirmation of participation in politics; and the tendency of Mennonites to prioritise the synoptic Gospels and of Baptists to prioritise John and Paul. It is worth noting that other Anabaptist groups were not involved in these conversations, within some of which — the Mennonite Brethren, for example — these divergencies are less marked. Furthermore, this largely North American dialogue did not adequately recognise the global diversity of both Anabaptist and Baptist communities, some of which in the Majority World exhibit different convictions and priorities. Nevertheless, many of the differences between the participants

[22] This document was published by the Baptist World Alliance in 2013. However, no British Baptists were involved in this dialogue (only Americans and one Australian).

[23] See the conference website <https://believerschurchconference.com/> [accessed 2 April 2025]. See further, Teun van der Leer, *Looking in the Other Direction: The Story of the Believers Church Conferences* (Pickwick Publications, 2023).

summarised in the report are familiar to those with experience of both traditions.

Although the report made some reference to cultural and philosophical changes that were impacting the beliefs and practices of Baptist and Mennonite churches (designated as 'modern scientific and intellectual developments'), there is no mention of the transition from Christendom to post-Christendom that was already apparent in Europe at that time, although perhaps less obviously so in America. But this ongoing transition has very significant implications for churches in the dissenting or 'free church' tradition and is the emerging context in which it is helpful to explore some of the differences between the Anabaptist and Baptist traditions and what each might learn from the other. Both traditions have insisted on the separation of church and state, contrary to the arrangement that sustained the Christendom system, so a post-Christendom culture should be congenial to both. Past and present Anabaptists have trenchantly critiqued many features of the Christendom era, generally failing to appreciate its positive contributions, whereas some Baptist writers have offered a more nuanced assessment.[24] Listening to the perspectives of each tradition might enable mutual learning about the mixed legacy of the Christendom era and some of the challenges and opportunities of post-Christendom.

Space precludes any attempt to be comprehensive, so the remainder of this article offers representative examples from the areas of ethics, missiology, and ecclesiology.

War and Peace

A significant difference between the two traditions is their approach to issues of war and peace. Although there was some diversity among first-generation Anabaptists, some of whom had been participants in the

[24] For example, Nigel Wright, *Disavowing Constantine: Mission, Church, and the Social Order in the Theologies of John Howard Yoder and Jürgen Moltmann* (Paternoster, 2007), and Brian Haymes and Kyle Gingerich Hiebert, *God after Christendom?* (Cascade, 2017).

German Peasants' War,[25] very soon Anabaptists adopted a settled position of commitment to non-violence. Anabaptists and Quakers are primary representatives of the historic Peace Church tradition. Not all members of Anabaptist congregations have remained true to this position, especially in times of war, but confessional statements through the centuries have consistently endorsed a principled commitment to peace. In recent decades, this commitment to non-violence has been reinterpreted to embrace forms of active and creative peace-making, some of these very costly. A well-known example is the accompaniment and advocacy ministry of Christian Peacemaker Teams.[26] The Peaceful Borders project of the Anabaptist Mennonite Network is another.

Such a commitment to peace — whether non-violence or active peace-making — has not featured as strongly in the Baptist tradition. The report of the Baptist/Mennonite dialogue asserted that Baptists 'generally identify with the just war tradition' and that Baptists 'are often sympathetic to national patriotic concerns', although this latter point might reflect the influence of American Baptists in the dialogue. Since the late 1920s, the Baptist Peace Fellowship has represented a different perspective,[27] which undoubtedly has been embraced by many individual Baptists, but this is not a topic that is often addressed at congregational, regional, or denominational gatherings. It is not that most Baptists are unconcerned about outbreaks of local or global violence or uninterested in practices of peace-making, but a commitment to peace-making is not generally perceived as a central gospel issue, whereas for most Anabaptists it is a primary mark of faithful discipleship. As one of the core convictions of the Anabaptist Mennonite Network states, 'Peace is at the heart of the gospel. As followers of Jesus in a divided and violent world, we are committed to

[25] See James Stayer, *The German Peasants' War and Anabaptist Community of Goods* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991).

[26] See their website <https://cpt.org/> [accessed 2 April 2025]. This organisation has recently renamed itself as Community Peacemaker Teams and embraced a multi-faith approach.

[27] See Baptist Peace Fellowship <http://www.baptist-peace.org.uk/pdfs/OldDocuments/membership_old_1.pdf> [accessed 2 April 2025]. The BPF covenant dates from 1931 but the Fellowship was formed in the 1920s.

finding non-violent alternatives and to learning how to make peace between individuals, within and among churches, in society and between nations.'[28]

Perhaps our emerging post-Christendom context offers an opportunity to review these positions. During the Christendom era, state churches operating territorially frequently endorsed or even encouraged the use of violent means to achieve the aims of the state. The just war position was adapted from its classical antecedent in the early Christendom era as an attempt to limit such violence without precluding it. But this rarely succeeded and was often paid only lip-service by political and church leaders, including leaders of most dissenting groups. Warfare in the twenty-first century is radically different in nature and scope from the context in which the just war approach was developed. Despite efforts by Catholic and Protestant theologians and ethicists to reinterpret just war theory,[29] there is a growing consensus that it is unrealistic to attempt to apply its remarkably stringent criteria to conflict scenarios today. When the Roman Catholic Church is in the process of dissociating itself from the long-held just war position,[30] surely Baptists and other dissenting traditions should do the same. Might this open up fresh opportunities to reflect theologically and biblically on war and violence and explore ways of integrating creative peace witness into our mission strategies?

It is encouraging that some Baptists have been engaging in such reflection. One example is the development of an approach known as 'just peace-making' that is an attempt to move beyond arguments about just war and pacifism. Developed in the 1990s by twenty-three scholars from various denominations, it advocates ten peace-making practices that might help to prevent wars. One of the leading figures was a Baptist, Glen Stassen, whose book, *Just Peacemaking,* introduces some of these

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[28] See 'Core Convictions', Anabaptist Mennonite Network <https://amnetwork.uk/convictions/> [accessed 2 April 2025].

[29] See, for example, *The Price of Peace: Just War in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Charles Reed and David Ryall (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[30] See Monica Miller, 'Pope Francis and the Scrapping of the Just War Theory', *Crisis Magazine*, 24 March 2022 <https://crisismagazine.com/opinion/pope-francis-and-the-scrapping-of-the-just-war-doctrine> [accessed 16 May 2025].

practices and gives examples of their implementation.[31] Some Anabaptists contributed to a later book edited by Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War*,[32] but others have objected to the apparent polarisation of peace and justice in this initiative and to the readiness to consider violence as a last resort; nevertheless, this approach has attracted considerable support. Another example is the Centre for the Study of Bible and Violence, based at Bristol Baptist College and founded in 2018 by Helen Paynter, which has done ground-breaking work on issues of violence, justice, peace-making, and biblical interpretation.[33] Fresh thinking by Baptists on these issues might challenge Anabaptists to resist the temptations of passivity and withdrawal and to continue to reflect on the relationship between peace and justice and on ways of engaging non-violently but responsibly in a violent and conflicted world.

Evangelism

The early Anabaptists were passionate and courageous evangelists, rejecting the Christendom assumption that most Europeans were already Christians, travelling widely to share the gospel despite fierce and sustained persecution, proclaiming the gospel to all who would listen despite outraging those who objected to this unauthorised preaching, baptising those who responded, and planting new churches.[34] Evangelistic activity was not limited to outstanding leaders like Hans Hut or George Blaurock. The classic story of Margaret Hellwart[35] introduces us to a zealous female evangelist whom the authorities chained to her kitchen floor to stop her sharing her faith with her neighbours. Some evangelistic activity was organised, especially among the Moravian Anabaptists; much of it was spontaneous. However, as

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31 Glen Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1992). Revised and updated versions are available.

32 *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War*, ed. by Glen Stassen (Pilgrim Press, 1998).

33 See 'Centre For The Study Of Bible And Violence', Bristol Baptist College <https://www.bristol-baptist.ac.uk/study-centres/csbv/> [accessed 2 April 2025].

34 See Alan Kreider, *Tongue Screws and Testimony* (Elkhart: Mennonite Mission Network, 2008).

35 Her story appears in *Profiles of Anabaptist Women: Sixteenth-Century Reforming Pioneers*, ed. by C. Arnold Snyder and Linda Huebert Hecht (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996), pp. 64–67.

time went by and persecution took its toll, this evangelistic fervour waned and eventually Anabaptists became known as 'the quiet in the land' as they refrained from verbal evangelism and concentrated on living faithful lives and passing on their faith to subsequent generations. Some Mennonites negotiated tolerance in exchange for refraining from sharing their faith with others. Many contemporary Anabaptists, at least in western societies, have adopted a quietist approach, hoping that distinctive lifestyles will be an effective witness and draw others into their communities. This has also been the approach of many Anabaptist mission agencies, which have focused on relief and development, peace-making, working for justice, education, and other activities that do not prioritise (and sometimes avoid) sharing faith in these contexts.[36]

While lifestyle witness is undoubtedly important and authenticates any other form of witness, and while this quietist approach may be occasionally effective by itself, the divorce between verbal evangelism and lifestyle witness is inappropriate and unhelpful in post-Christendom. Arthur McPhee, former professor at the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, rejects the idea that 'our acts of mercy, work for justice, efforts at peacemaking, advocacy of the poor, care for creation, and other expressions of our new life in Christ are, by themselves, testimony enough'. He insists that 'by deeds alone we only point to ourselves'.[37] In a post-Christendom context, most people have no way of interpreting lifestyle witness or connecting this with the good news of Jesus Christ. Verbal evangelism is needed.

Evangelism has been important for Baptists throughout their history. Although their critique of Christendom assumptions has been less trenchant, Baptists have mostly assumed that a primary component in their participation in God's mission is sharing the gospel with others who are not yet Christians. This has involved organised strategies,

[36] See, for example, Mennonite Central Committee <https://mcc.org/> [accessed 2 April 2025].

[37] Arthur McPhee, 'Authentic Witness, Authentic Evangelism, Authentic Church', in *Evangelical, Ecumenical and Anabaptist Missiologies in Conversation: Essays in Honor of Wilbert R. Shenk,* ed. by James Krabill, Walter Sawatsky, and Charles van Engen (Orbis, 2006), pp. 130–139 (p. 133).

campaigns and programmes, and persistent encouragement of church members to share their faith with family members, friends, neighbours, colleagues, and others. In recent years, evangelists have been accredited alongside pastor-teachers as Baptist ministers and support has been offered to church planters. And Baptists have also been at the forefront of world mission. The Baptist Missionary Society, formed in 1792, pioneered an approach to mission across the globe that many other denominations adopted.

Baptists, like Anabaptists, generally acknowledge that mission is much broader than evangelism. Churches and missionaries have engaged in a wide range of activities that involve working for justice, responding to human needs, caring for creation, and much else. But many Baptists are much less reluctant to combine these activities with evangelism, which is often seen as the priority. According to a statement on the website of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, 'It is a core principle of the Baptist Union to evangelise the world. This it does through both living and speaking the gospel. We are committed to evangelism and making Jesus known through word and deed.'[38] Like Anabaptists, Baptists recognise the importance of lifestyle witness, of deeds as well as words, but there is usually a much stronger emphasis on verbal evangelism. And some Baptists are reluctant to support mission activities that do not accord with their narrow definition of evangelism.[39]

If conversations between Baptists and Anabaptists might be mutually beneficial in developing a truly holistic approach to evangelism, these might also give attention to a theological issue that has been highly contentious in recent years. Many Baptists, in common with most Evangelicals, subscribe to an understanding of the atonement that prioritises the motif of penal substitution. Although other biblical images are also acknowledged as valid, this is the primary interpretation.

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[38] See 'Evangelism', Baptists Together <https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/310263/Evangelism.aspx> [accessed 2 April 2025].

[39] This has been the case, for example, with funding provided by the Baptist Insurance Company.

Challenges to this provoke outrage and accusations of heresy, as evidenced by responses to certain statements in *The Lost Message of Jesus* by Steve Chalke and Alan Mann.[40] The debate around this issue highlighted for many Baptists and others their discomfort with the notion of penal substitution. This explanation of the significance of the death of Jesus may have been acceptable and persuasive in the Christendom era, but many realise that it is ill-suited to evangelism in post-Christendom cultures. Furthermore, there are serious theological and ethical problems with this understanding of the atonement.

Contemporary Anabaptists (among others) have engaged in critical reflection on this issue and have suggested other ways of interpreting the death of Jesus. Some retain a nuanced version of penal substitution; others reject this as inauthentic and propose alternative explanations.[41] An approach that has received both approval and critique is 'narrative Christus Victor', a revision of a classic theory of the atonement propounded by Mennonite theologian J. Denny Weaver.[42] As the title of his book (and his other writings) makes clear, one of his main concerns is to understand the atonement in light of his commitment to non-violence. Although not all have been persuaded by Weaver's approach, Anabaptists have been antipathetic to ways of interpreting the atonement that appear to involve divine violence. Another Mennonite author who has explored various dimensions of the atonement is John Driver, whose concern is to demonstrate its significance, not just for individual salvation, but for the emergence of reconciled and reconciling communities and the renewal of all creation.[43] Perhaps further reflection by both Baptists and Anabaptists might help us to find ways of interpreting the atonement that are biblically founded, theologically and ethically appropriate, and able to communicate good news in post-Christendom societies.

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[40] Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Zondervan, 2004). Members of the Anabaptist Network offered support to the authors in the debates which followed.

[41] See, for example, *Consuming Passion: Why the Killing of Jesus Really Matters*, ed. by Simon Barrow and Jonathan Bartley (Darton, Longman & Todd, 2005).

[42] J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Eerdmans, 2011). See also J. Denny Weaver, *God Without Violence: A Theology of the God Revealed in Jesus* (Cascade, 2020).

[43] John Driver, *Understanding the Atonement for the Mission of the Church* (Wipf & Stock, 2005).

Multi-Voiced Church

A distinctive feature of early Anabaptist congregations was the expectation that all members of their communities were gifted by the Holy Spirit and would contribute to their gatherings. Across the different groups that comprised the various Anabaptist movements, 1 Corinthians 14 was a frequently quoted text with its encouragement that everyone had something to offer when the church met together. Church leaders facilitated hermeneutical communities, in which different perspectives were shared and discussed. Members of the community contributed songs, prayers, and insights, and in some places exercised various spiritual gifts. An anonymous early Swiss Brethren tract gave several explanations as to why they refused to attend the state churches, but the primary reason was domination by the priest or minister:

> When someone comes to church and constantly hears only one person speaking, and all the listeners are silent, neither speaking nor prophesying, who can or will regard or confess the same to be a spiritual congregation or confess according to 1 Corinthians 14 that God is dwelling and operating in them through his Holy Spirit with his gifts, impelling them one after the other in the above mentioned order of speaking and prophesying?[44]

Not all early Anabaptist communities expected or allowed such multi-voiced participation, but evidence from various places suggests that many did and that women took part alongside men.[45] A fascinating example from 1576 is a hostile account of an Anabaptist gathering by a Lutheran minister who had crept into the meeting. He comments disdainfully on its multi-voiced nature.[46]

Another expression of multi-voiced ecclesiology in the Anabaptist tradition has been a commitment to practise 'mutual admonition' on the basis of Matthew 18:15–20 and other New Testament texts. A further reason early Anabaptists gave for not attending the state churches was their failure to exercise proper church

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[44] Paul Peachey, 'Answer of Some Who Are Called (Ana)baptists Why They Do Not Attend the Churches: A Swiss Brethren Tract', *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 45 (1971), pp. 5–32 (p. 7).
[45] See, for example, Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline* (Herald Press, 1981), p. 124, and *The Radical Reformation*, ed. by Michael Baylor (Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 224–225.
[46] Elias Schad, 'An Anabaptist Meeting, Strasbourg, 1576', *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 58 (July 1984), pp. 292–294.

discipline, resulting in low moral standards. Church discipline in the Christendom era, it seems, was either absent or punitive if the authorities detected heresy or disloyalty. Anabaptists sought an alternative approach that was non-violent, persuasive, and restorative. This was often exercised unwisely and was corrupted by legalism, harsh attitudes, and discord, but it was a courageous attempt to restore a practice advocated by many New Testament writers.[47] Baptism for early Anabaptists involved a commitment to give and receive mutual admonition in recognition that following Jesus faithfully required the support of a community of disciples.

The early Baptist congregations also exhibited multi-voiced characteristics, although many Baptists today seem unaware of this. Christopher Hill provided several examples of multi-voiced practices in early Baptist churches: Mrs Attaway encouraged the congregation to ask questions and make objections after hearing her sermon; Henry Denne asserted that it was a rule among the General Baptists 'that it shall be lawful for any person to improve their gifts in the presence of the congregation'; and Hanserd Knollys created 'several riots and tumults' by going around churches and speaking after the sermon.[48] And Michael Watts noted the influence of 1 Corinthians 14 on John Smyth:

> Smyth's conception of worship, derived from 1 Corinthians 14:30–1, was the spontaneous out-pouring of the Holy Spirit through prophesying, and so the Bible was laid aside and a speaker rose to propound 'some text out of Scripture, and prophesieth out of the same, by the space of one hour or three-quarters of an hour'. Then a second speaker stood up 'and prophesieth out of the said text the like time and space', and after him a third, a fourth, and a fifth 'as the time will give leave'.[49]

Although a commitment to mutual admonition did not feature in their baptismal services, Baptists also exercised a form of church discipline similar to that of the Anabaptists. Meetings of church members dealt with various strategic and practical matters, as they do today, but a substantial amount of time was spent dealing with

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[47] For example: Rom 15:14; 1 Cor 5:1–13; Gal 2:11–14; Phil 4:2 3; Col 3:16; 1 Thess 5:14; 2 Thess 3:6, 14, 15; 1 Tim 5:19, 20; Tit 3:10; James 5:19.

[48] Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (Penguin, 1972), pp. 104–105.

[49] Watts, *The Dissenters*, pp. 74–75.

behavioural issues and the disciplining of those who had fallen short of ethical or relational standards.[50] As with the Anabaptists, this could result in the exclusion of recalcitrant members from the congregation, although with the hope of restoration in due course.

Multi-voiced worship and biblical interpretation rather quickly gave way in both traditions to monologue preaching and more formal gatherings, as Anabaptists and Baptists conformed to the more traditional expressions of church that had dominated the Christendom era. Echoes of early Anabaptist practices can still be found in some Mennonite churches and the charismatic movement restored multi-voiced worship to many Baptist churches, albeit often only temporarily. Mutual admonition survived much longer in the Anabaptist tradition but struggles for acceptance in a culture of individualism and 'toleration'. However, in post-Christendom culture both practices might be essential if churches are to nurture faithful disciples.[51] Participative and disciplined communities are more likely to survive, thrive, and be effective in mission in this context. Perhaps Anabaptists and Baptists can encourage each other to reappraise and recover these aspects of their early history.

Conclusion

The three issues introduced in this article are indicative of areas in which Baptists and Anabaptists might profit from interaction and reflection on their past and present practices. Several others could be suggested, including attitudes to and involvement in politics, aspects of economic discipleship, understandings of ministry, and a range of hermeneutical issues. Our post-Christendom context might open up many opportunities for fresh thinking and creative developments.

A serious limitation of the above discussion is the absence of perspectives from the Majority World. Baptists and Anabaptists are now

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[50] See, for example, Roger Hayden, *English Baptist History and Heritage* (Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2005), p. 32.

[51] See further, Sian Murray Williams and Stuart Murray Williams, *Multi-Voiced Church* (Paternoster, 2012).

members of global communities in which growth is taking place elsewhere, rather than in their original heartlands. And Baptist and Anabaptist churches in western societies, struggling with decline, are being strengthened, enriched, and challenged by brothers and sisters who arrive from Africa, Asia, and Latin America as missionaries, students, immigrants, or employees. Some bring with them polities and practices that were exported from Christendom in previous generations and their churches will take time to adapt to our post-Christendom context. But they also bring fresh insights and a spiritual vitality that we desperately need. If Baptists are to learn and grow together, and make a missional impact on their societies, they will need to wrestle with the challenges of post-colonialism as well as the challenges of post-Christendom.

Exploration of these issues is well beyond the scope of this article, but it is likely that Baptists and Anabaptists in and from the Majority World will have fresh perspectives to offer on ethical, missional, and ecclesial issues, such as those we have considered above. They may also encourage us to look afresh at other issues. The Anabaptist vision of a multi-voiced church is applicable not only within local congregations but between traditions and across the globe as we learn to listen out for the voice of the Holy Spirit through the diverse contributions of many people and communities.

Baptists and Anabaptists: The Australian Experience in its Global Context

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Abstract
The article provides an overview of Baptist and Anabaptist connections in a global context, followed by detailed exploration of three key areas: Anabaptist connection with Baptist origins, Anabaptist connection with Baptist identity, and Baptist affinity with specific Anabaptist ideals. The Australian Baptist knowledge of and response to each of these themes is outlined. It is concluded that while Australian Baptist leadership alerted Australian Baptists to all three themes, apart from a minority of Australian Baptists that identified passionately with some Anabaptist ideals, the leadership essentially remained focused on maintaining unity among Baptists so they could corporately engage in evangelism and mission.

Keywords
Baptist origins; Baptist identity; Anabaptist influence; Noel Vose; Ken Manley

Introduction

The research for this article commences with a survey of Baptist and Anabaptist interaction as evidenced in general works on Baptist history and theology. Baptists were those who self-identified as Baptists, although the meaning of the term varied across the 400 years of the writings consulted. Anabaptists were identified as such by others. Initially Anabaptists were identified as 're-baptisers' from the sixteenth century Reformation period along with their spiritual descendants such as Mennonites, Swiss Brethren, Hutterites, and Amish. During debates about Baptist origins and identity both definitions changed. Towards the end of the twentieth century, it became apparent that Anabaptist authors were influencing Baptist theology and practice in discrete areas rather than just concerning the overall question of Baptist identity. While Baptists in Australia were geographically remote from the

transatlantic loci of these debates, the leadership were not only aware of the global discussions but at times contributed to them.[1]

The global context is developed by examining publications known to be available and utilised by those who advocated or taught Baptist history and theology in Australia. Themes identified from this review are interrogated against the Australian experience as identified in Australian Baptist publications or international publications by Australian Baptists. These publications are principally Baptist newspapers and state Baptist Union year books (1882–2005). Australian Baptists' contributions to Baptist World Alliance commissions and publications also acted as valuable sources. Material produced by Baptist theological colleges and by Australian Baptist academics in the post-World War Two era proved essential to this project, especially after 1991 when *The Australian Baptist* newspaper ceased publication.

Finally, my personal engagement and correspondence with many of the people involved in this post-World War Two period of Australian Baptist life provided insights to what Australian Baptists were aware of beyond the printed text.

It is also reasonable that I make a disclaimer at this point about my personal experience of this topic. My introduction to Anabaptist studies commenced as an undergraduate at the University of Western Australia in 1974 and was reinforced through personal involvement with Drs Noel and Heather Vose. My doctoral studies (1989–1992) in the United Kingdom on Balthasar Hubmaier brought Anabaptist studies into sharp focus, as did conversations with Alan and Eleanor Kreider and others at the London Mennonite Centre at that time. Subsequently, I undertook research at IBTS in Rüschlikon and Prague, as well as

[1] 'A Baptist Library', *Truth and Progress*, May 1868, pp. 102–103. The author reported to the South Australian Baptist readership the arrival of 'an almost complete series of "The Baptist Magazine"', the first in the series being from 1809, along with the series 'Baptist Mission Periodical Accounts and Annual Reports […] the earliest volumes go back to 1792'; G. N. Vose, 'A Personal Journey in Understanding', *Baptists and Mennonites in Dialogue: Report on Conversations Between the Baptist World Alliance and the Mennonite World Conference 1989–1992* (Baptist World Alliance, 2013). Vose was Principal of the Baptist Theological College of Western Australia (1963–1990), President General of the Baptist Union of Australia (1975–1978) and President of the Baptist World Alliance (1985–1990).

teaching church history and historical theology to evangelical pastors and church workers from Eastern Europe through TCM International Institute in Austria. All these interactions have shaped my views and biases.

The primary research questions for this project are 'What did Baptists in Australia know about the role of Anabaptists in the debates about Baptist origins, Baptist identity, and influences on Baptist faith and practice, and how did they respond'? The article is structured using these three headings. What follows is an exploration of what Baptists in Australia knew about these debates and the influence of Anabaptist theology among Australian Baptists.

The Global Context: Origins

Leon McBeth in *The Baptist Heritage* (1987) provides a summary of four views of Baptist origins: the outgrowth of English Separatism; Anabaptist influence; continuation of biblical teachings; and succession of Baptist churches.[2] However, taking the debates chronologically entails exploring the early nineteenth century interaction between what became those who supported the idea of the succession of Baptist churches (promoted as Landmarkism from about 1855) and those who argued for the succession of biblical teaching on the church.

J. R. Graves, the leading advocate of Landmarkism, wrote in 1855 an introductory essay to the republication of G. H. Orchard's work of 1838. Following Orchard, Graves asserted that the Baptist Church began when John the Baptist baptised Jesus and continued in unbroken succession through groups that opposed infant baptism, practised baptism of believers, preferably by immersion, and formed Baptist churches only comprising those baptised believers.[3] McBeth reduced the Landmarkist list to four representative groups, the 'Donatists (fourth

[2] H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Broadman Press, 1987), pp. 48–60.

[3] J. R. Graves, 'Introductory Essay' in *A Concise History of Baptists from the Time of Christ their Founder to the 18th Century*, by G. H. Orchard (Lexington, KY: Ashland Avenue Baptist Church, 1956), pp. iii–xxiv (p. xiv). This is a re-publication of the original from 1838. McBeth identifies other Landmarkist authors including J. M. Cramp, *Baptist History: From the Foundation of the Christian Church to the Close of the Eighteenth Century* (American Baptist Publication Society, [1869]).

century), Cathari (eleventh century), Waldenses (twelfth century), and Anabaptists (sixteenth century)'.[4] McBeth dismissed the claims of Landmarkism stating, 'No major historian today holds to the organic succession of Baptist churches […] [since it was] based on inadequate sources, was more polemical than historical, and made large assumptions where evidence was lacking."[5]

In the late nineteenth century, advocates of the 'continuation of biblical teaching' hypothesis for Baptist origins challenged the Landmarkist position. In 1892, H. C. Vedder clearly differentiated this approach from the Landmarkists.[6] He proposed a hermeneutical rule which he applied only to the New Testament and proceeded to identify a series of principles which define the visible churches. Contra to the Landmarkists, it was not enough that a group opposed infant baptism and practised baptism of believers. For Vedder, true New Testament or apostolic or evangelical churches should meet all the principles he identified.[7] While it is possible to draw from Vedder the same list of groups identified by the Landmarkists as the true church, the Baptist Church, Vedder only claimed 'these successive revolts constituted a gradual and effective preparation for […] the Reformation, and for the rise of modern evangelical bodies', whereas Orchard claimed 'the Baptists'[*sic*] had been *the only Christian community* which has stood since the days of the apostles preserved pure the doctrines of the gospel through the ages'.[8]

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[4] McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, p. 58.
[5] McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, p. 60.
[6] H. C. Vedder, *A Short History of the Baptists*, 2nd edn (Judson Press, 1907).
[7] Vedder, *A Short History of the Baptists*, chapter 2, pp. 24–34. 'New Testament churches consisted only of those who were believed to be regenerated by the Spirit of God, and had been baptized on a personal confession of faith in Christ'; 'no more time should separate baptism from conversion than is necessary to ensure credible evidence of a genuine change of heart'. Only those baptized are to be admitted to the Lord's Supper. 'The congregations chose each its own pastor', there was 'no idea of the division into "clergy" and "laity" […] the universal priesthood of believers is unmistakably taught'. 'Sacerdotal ideas are not found.' 'Simple in organization and democratic in government, the New Testament churches were independent of each other in their internal affairs,' yet 'not independent of external obligations.' Worship is on the Lord's Day and not to be confused with the Sabbath as 'the Sabbath is treated as typical and temporary, like circumcision, and done away with as were all the ordinances of the law'.
[8] Vedder, *A Short History of the Baptists*, p. 111. Orchard, *A Concise History of Baptists*, p. 340.

A. H. Newman (1897) defended the claim that Baptists 'in doctrine and in polity' were 'in substantial accord with the precepts and example of Christ and the apostles' as contained in the New Testament while at the same time opposing Landmarkism.[9] He concluded that English Baptists were heirs of the apostolic succession of doctrine and polity derived directly from the New Testament and had their origins in the English Separatist tradition, with no influence from Anabaptists.[10]

Debate about Baptist origins during the first three decades of the twentieth century continued to echo the differences between Landmarkism and advocates for the New Testament basis of Baptist origins. After the formation of the Baptist World Alliance (1905), a more appreciative view of Anabaptists, particularly Mennonites, found expression in the familial terms used by J. H. Rushbrooke to describe the relationship of Anabaptists and Baptists.[11]

During World War Two the origin debate took a new direction. In 1943, Mennonite author Harold Bender claimed that sixteenth-century Anabaptists declared and practised 'the great principles of freedom of conscience, separation of church and state, and voluntarism, so basic to American Protestantism'.[12] However, Bender summarised 'The Anabaptist Vision' under three emphases that exclude many groups previously included under the name Anabaptists. These emphases were discipleship, church as brotherhood, the ethic of love and non-resistance, and the associated corollaries of each emphasis.[13] Franklin Littell in *The Anabaptist View of the Church* (1957) and the revised

[9] A. H. Newman, *A History of Anti-Pedobaptism: From the Rise of Pedobaptism to A.D. 1609* (American Baptist Publication Society, 1897), pp. 1–2.
[10] Newman, *A History of Anti-Pedobaptism*, pp. 386–391. However, Newman does admit that English General Baptists adopted 'Socinian anti-Augustinian theology' mediated through Mennonite influence (p. 393).
[11] F. Townley Lord, *Baptist World Alliance: A Short History of the Baptist World Alliance* (The Carey Kingsgate Press, 1955), pp. 15–21.
[12] Harold S. Bender, 'The Anabaptist Vision', in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision: A Sixtieth Anniversary Tribute to Harold S. Bender*, ed. by Guy F. Hershberger (Herald Press, 1957), pp. 29–54 (p. 30).
[13] Bender, 'The Anabaptist Vision', pp. 42–52.

edition *The Origins of Sectarian Protestantism, a Study of the Anabaptist View of the Church* (1964) 'included recent European research on Anabaptists not readily available to English readers'.[14] For Littell, 'the doctrine of the church affords the classifying principle of first importance' for those groups that can truly be identified as Anabaptists.[15] Littell acknowledges his debt to Ernst Troeltsch's definition of 'sect-type' Christianity and used this in his assessment of the Anabaptist view of the church.[16]

A. C. Underwood (1947) also adopted Troeltsch's understanding of 'sect-type' Christianity, utilising it in his discussion of connections between English Baptists and their Anabaptist forebears.[17] Ernest Payne (1940) responded to contemporary scholarship that denied Jesus founded the church while he cited with approval W. T. Whitley's claim that for Baptists 'their distinctive claim is the doctrine of the Church'. He nevertheless disagreed with Whitley's conclusion that Anabaptists contributed nothing to the origins of Baptists.[18] Robert G. Torbet (1950) explored Payne's 'plausible' assertion that Anabaptists 'affected both Congregational and Baptist development' and concluded that 'Anabaptist ideas […] influenced the English Separatists from whom the early English Baptists emerged'.[19] However, Torbet also noted as 'plausible' the theory that English Baptists originated solely from Separatist congregations as argued by William H. Whitsitt, Augustus Strong, John H. Shakespeare, Winthrop S. Hudson, and Mervyn Himbury.[20] This debate continued through the 1960s and 70s.

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[14] Franklin Littell, *The Origins of Sectarian Protestantism: A Study of the Anabaptist View of the Church* (Macmillan, 1964), p. xiv.
[15] Littell, *The Origins of Sectarian Protestantism*, p. xviii.
[16] For a full description of the differences between the 'church-type' and 'sect-type' see Ernest Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, trans. by Olive Wyon, vol. 1 (Harper Torchbooks, 1960), pp. 331–332.
[17] See A. C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists* (Kingsgate Press, 1947), pp. 15–27.
[18] Ernest A. Payne, *The Fellowship of Believers: Baptist Thought and Practice Yesterday and Today*, enlarged edn (Carey Kingsgate Press, 1952), p. 12.
[19] Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists*, 3rd edn (Judson Press, 1963), pp. 21, 25.
[20] Torbet, *A History of the Baptists*, p. 21.

While William Estep (1963) advocated an Anabaptist contribution, British authors Barington R. White (1971) and Erroll Hulse (1973) presented the counter argument.[21]

In *The Baptist Heritage* (1987) McBeth provided a summary of the debate about Baptist origins which included a specific section on Anabaptists.[22] This debate continued over the remainder of the twentieth century and into the new millennium. David Bebbington (2010 and 2018), in his summary of the debate about origins, argues in agreement with Newman that the only Anabaptist influence on English Baptist origins was the adoption of Arminianism by the 'earliest General Baptists'.[23] Anthony Chute, Nathan Finn, and Michael Haykin (2015) acknowledged the continuing value of McBeth's 'magisterial work' for students of Baptist history and provide a summary of the origin debate for both English and American Baptists.[24]

Concerning European Baptists, McBeth commented, without further elaboration, that the 'origin of European Baptists was apparently independent of English sources'.[25] Brackney (2005) provided some detail, but tellingly only in a footnote.[26] Bebbington did not engage with the debate about European origins though he does acknowledge the 'eclectic origins' of Baptists in the Russian Empire.[27] However, the history of European Baptists, including issues of origins and the

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21 William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story,* rev. edn (Broadman Press, 1975; first published 1963); Barington R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition: From the Marian Martyrs to the Pilgrim Fathers* (Oxford University Press, 1971); Winthrop S. Hudson, 'Baptists were not Anabaptists', *Chronicle*, 16 (October, 1953), pp. 171–179; Mervyn Himbury, *British Baptists: A Short History* (Carey Kingsgate Press, 1963). Himbury at the time of publication of *British Baptists* was Principal of the Victorian Baptist Theological College. Also, Erroll Hulse, *An Introduction to the Baptists* (Carey Publications, 1973) is a popular level book but influential as it was frequently cited in student essays when I taught at Morling College (1993–2007).

22 McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, pp. 48–63.

23 David W. Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries: A History of a Global People* (Baylor University Press, 2010), p. 41.

24 Anthony A. Chute, Nathan A. Finn, and Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement* (B&H Academic, 2015), pp. 2, 13–35.

25 McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, p. 62.

26 William Brackney, 'Baptists and Continuity', in *Distinctively Baptist: Essays on Baptist History, A Festschrift in Honor of Walter B. Shurden*, ed. by Marc A. Jolley with John D. Pierce (Mercer University Press, 2005), pp. 39–57 (p. 49).

27 Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries*, p. 245.

potential influence of Anabaptists, has been consistently addressed since the formation of the Baptist World Alliance in 1905, and continues to be through publications of the International Baptist Theological Seminary (IBTS established in 1949 in Rüschlikon, Switzerland).[28]

The Global Context: Identity

Baptist studies moved on to seeking to define Baptist identity. This exploration of Baptist identity initially intersected with rehabilitated Anabaptist research around the topic of the restoration of the New Testament church.[29] The ecumenically minded Ernest Payne championed this approach under the 'Free Church' banner.[30] Jack Hoad opined that this Baptist approach to ecumenism would end in an 'apostate conglomerate' religion of all nations if 'baptists' were not faithful to their heritage.[31] Hoad went on to compare the lists of baptist distinctives complied by British Baptist G. R. Beasley-Murray, at that time a professor at Rüschlikon, and Joseph M. Stockwell from the American General Association of Regular Baptist Churches. Hoad

[28] For a representative collection of the views of those who continued to argue for Anabaptist influence see *Exploring Baptist Origins*, ed. by Anthony R. Cross and Nicholas J. Wood, Centre for Baptist History and Heritage Studies, 1 (Regent's Park College, 2010). Significant authors writing on European Baptist history and related issues include J. H. Rushbrooke, *The Baptist Movement in the Continent of Europe* (Carey Press, 1915); Irwin Barnes, *Truth is Immortal: The Story of Baptists in Europe* (Carey Kingsgate Press, 1955); Ernest A. Payne, *Out of Great Tribulation: Baptist in the U.S.S.R* (London: Baptist Union, 1974); Ian. M. Randall, *Communities of Conviction: Baptist Beginnings in Europe* (Neufeld Verlag, 2009); Toivo Pilli, 'The Reformation in Central and Eastern Europe', in *The Central and Eastern European Bible Commentary,* ed. by Corneliu Constantineanu and Peter Penner (Langham Global Library, 2023), pp. 360–361; Martin Rothkegel, 'Mähren als Gelobtes Land: Migrationserfahrung und Heilsgeschichte bei den Hutterischen Brüdern', in *Reformation als Kommunikationsprozess*, *Norm und Struktur: Studien zum sozialen Wandel in Mittelalter und Fruher Neüzeit*, ed. by Petr Hrachovec, Gerd Schwerhoff, Winfried Müller, and Martina Schattkowsky (Brill, 2021), pp. 361–380.

[29] *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, ed. by Guy F. Hershberger (Herald Press, 1957); Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, trans. by Olive Wyon, 2 vols (Harper & Row, 1960); Franklin Hamil Littell, *The Origins of Sectarian Protestantism: A Study of the Anabaptist View of the Church* (Macmillan Company, 1964); George Hunston Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Westminster Press, 1962).

[30] Ernest A. Payne, *Free Churchmen, Unrepentant and Repentant and other Papers* (Carey Kingsgate Press, 1965).

[31] Jack Hoad, *The Baptist: An Historical and Theological Study of the Baptist Identity* (London: Grace Publication Trust, 1986), p. 1.

considered Beasley-Murray's list deficient as it did not include the 'Sole Authority and Sufficiency of the Holy Scripture', which along with 'The Biblical Doctrine of the Church' were for Hoad the two primary baptist distinctives from which all other baptist distinctives flowed. Hoad happily identified Anabaptists as being part of the 'baptist' family, as in his view they adhered to these two fundamental distinctives.[32]

It might be argued that James McClendon Jr's 'Re-Envisioning Baptist Identity: A Manifesto for Baptist Communities in North America' (1997)[33] provided the culmination of this debate when he used a more extended definition of 'baptists' rather than the institutionally organised Baptists. However, it is clear the *Manifesto* did not conclude this debate, rather it provided a focus for the ongoing debate about Baptist identity. Walter Shurden (1998) provided a masterful overview of approaches used to define Baptist identity as well as a nuanced critique of the *Manifesto*. He concluded that the *Manifesto* 'reinterprets the Baptist identity too much in terms of the Anabaptist identity'.[34]

Bebbington (2010) devoted a chapter to the issue of Baptist identity, providing a useful summary of the global context of this debate.[35] He argues that prior to the 1908 publication of E. Y. Mullins's *Axioms of Religion*, Baptists in both Britain and the USA were comfortable with their identity being derived from a core distinctive, the doctrine of the church as defined by Scripture. Mullins produced a persuasive new paradigm encapsulated in the phrase 'soul competency' that moved authority from the 'written text […] to personal experience' from which everything else flowed. Bebbington asserted that Rushbrooke followed Mullins's lead in identifying 'soul competency' as the 'unifying principle' that made Baptist theology distinct, thus providing global reach for this new view of Baptist identity.[36]

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[32] Hoad, *The Baptist*, pp. 11–17, 47.

[33] James Wm McClendon Jr, 'Re-Envisioning Baptist Identity: A Manifesto for Baptist Communities in North America', *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 24:3 (1997), pp. 303–310.

[34] Walter Shurden, 'The Baptist Identity and the Baptist Manifesto', Center for Baptist Studies <http://www.centerforbaptiststudies.org/shurden/Baptist%20Manifesto.htm> [accessed 20 February 2025].

[35] Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries*, pp. 255–274.

[36] Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries*, pp. 259–260.

Inerrancy became an issue among Baptists in the USA and UK initially related to Bible commentaries on Genesis. The issue was popularised by Harold Lindsell in *The Battle for the Bible* (1976) and stated academically in the Chicago Statement on Inerrancy (1978). Among Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) churches the dispute over inerrancy led to a conservative versus moderates 'war', which saw the conservatives take total control of the SBC's presidency, and its major committees and entities, by 1990. Bebbington cites Walter Shurden as representative of the moderates' view that identified 'freedom' as the core of Baptist identity. While 'freedom' was Shurden's overall motif for Baptist identity, he did prioritise 'Bible freedom' as the first necessary step for individual believers to interpret Scripture.[37] Stanley Norman argued for 'Reformation Baptist distinctives' which 'asserts the primacy of biblical authority' as the true core of Baptist identity as opposed to 'Enlightenment Baptist distinctives' as advocated by Shurden.[38]

The outcome of these debates about identity led to fragmentation of both 'moderates' and 'conservatives', which must have dismayed Norman who predicted division and demise only of the 'moderates'.[39] Where it could reasonably be expected that Anabaptist views on freedom, the authority of Scripture, and the church would be mentioned in this SBC identity debate, Bebbington makes no comment. Rather he identifies Baptists such as Ernest Payne, William Estep, and Paige Patterson as those who had an 'affinity for the Anabaptists' who influenced the discussion of Baptist identity.[40] This group will be explored separately under the heading 'Anabaptist Influence'.

Bill Leonard (1990) provided an alternative interpretation to Shurden on the fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention. Whereas Shurden identified what held the SBC together as 'missionary, not doctrinal' emphasis, Leonard suggested it was both. Referring to the principles enunciated by James P. Boyce in 1874, Leonard suggested the

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37 Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries*, p. 263. See Walter Shurden, *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms* (Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 1993).

38 Stan Norman, 'Fight the Good Fight: The Struggle for a Baptist Identity', Baptist2Baptist <http://www.baptist2baptist.net/b2barticle.asp?ID=236> [accessed 14 December 2024].

39 Norman, 'Fight the Good Fight'.

40 Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries*, p. 270.

following principles: 'A clear expression of the "fundamental doctrines of grace" broadly identified as evangelical doctrines; the promotion of what was "universally prevalent" among Southern Baptist Churches; and that "upon no point, upon which the denomination is divided, should the Convention, and through it the Seminary, take a position".'[41] Leonard claimed that Southern Baptists generally accepted these principles as 'doctrines [that] were articulated in such a way as to make room for congregations that represented a variety of diverse theological traditions'. Leonard argued that Southern Baptist identity coalesced around this 'Grand Compromise' until 1979 when it proved to be something of a Trojan horse for the SBC.[42]

The historiography of Baptist theology fed into the SBC 'denominational quarrel' resulting in the production of a volume — *Baptist Theologians* edited by Timothy George and David Dockery — that invited Baptist scholars 'from diverse perspectives' to 'experience, perhaps, the miracle of dialogue'.[43] Beyond the fragmentation of the SBC another study in Baptist theology supported an alternative 'baptist' identity, specifically identifying the contribution of Continental Anabaptism to the roots of Baptist identity.[44] Interestingly, only in the concluding chapter of *Baptist Theologians* does Dockery make one passing mention of Mennonites.[45]

Slayden Yarbrough challenged the moderates' objection to 'creedalism' in 1983[46] and in 2000 identified confessions as playing a significant role in developing Southern Baptist identity.[47] He cited with approval William L. Lumpkin's conclusion that Baptists had no centralised structure to impose 'doctrinal uniformity' on Baptists

41 Bill J. Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Eerdmans, 1990), p. 38.
42 Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope*, p. 39.
43 *Baptist Theologians*, ed. by Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Broadman & Holman, 1999), p. ix.
44 James Leo Garrett Jr, *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study* (Mercer University Press, 2009), pp. 8–16.
45 *Baptist Theologians*, ed. by George and Dockery, p. 685.
46 Slayden Yarbrough, 'Is Creedalism a Threat to Southern Baptists?', *Baptist History and Heritage*, 18 (April 1983), pp. 21–33 (pp. 25–28).
47 Slayden Yarbrough, *Southern Baptists: A Historical, Ecclesiological, and Theological Heritage of a Confessional People* (Southern Baptist Historical Society, 2000), pp. 88–96.

through 'authoritative creeds'. However, he notes that following amendments to the SBC's *Baptist Faith and Message* in 1998 and 2000, 'Southern Baptists were at a crossroads concerning their historic tradition relating to the nature and purpose of confessional statements and concerns over doctrinal integrity.'[48] While Timothy and Denise George declared Baptists as a non-creedal people, they put a signpost at the crossroads pointing to the validity of a 'voluntary, conscientious adherence to an explicit doctrinal standard' as part of Baptist heritage.[49]

Historic investigations of Confessions were not new to Baptists, as Yarbrough's citation of Lumpkin attests. Glen Stassen's article in 1998 argued for some Mennonite influence on the Particular Baptists' 1644 'First London Confession'.[50] Earlier, Lumpkin included discussion on six Anabaptist confessions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Timothy and Denise George only included what is generally known as the 'Schleitheim Confession'. [51] The Georges included this confession to demonstrate 'certain affinities' with early Baptists but rejected the 'ingenuity' of those Baptist historians who argued for a 'genetic connection' between Anabaptist and Baptist.[52]

The Global Context: Anabaptist Influence

Overlapping the period of the debate about Baptist identity, Baptists began to show the influence of a new generation of Anabaptist authors, and of other authors who engaged with Anabaptist convictions, on

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48 Yarbrough, *Southern Baptists*, pp. 89, 96.

49 *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms*, ed. by Timothy George and Denise George (Broadman & Holman, 1996), p. 3.

50 Glen Harold Stassen, 'Opening Menno Simon's Foundation-Book and Finding the Father of Baptist Origins Along-side the Mother-Calvinist Congregationalism', *Baptist History and Heritage*, 33 (Spring 1998), pp. 34–44.

51 William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. edn (Judson Press, 1969), pp. 18–78; *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms*, ed. by George and George.

52 *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms*, ed. by George and George, pp. 5–6. The 'genetic connection' probably refers to ideas being developed by Bill Brackney and published in 2004. William H. Brackney, *A Genetic History of Baptist Thought* (Mercer University Press, 2004).

specific areas of Baptist life and practice. The most notable areas were church, mission, radical discipleship, justice, and peace.[53]

In his discussion about Baptist identity, Bebbington identified a strand of Baptists who had an 'affinity for the Anabaptists'.[54] This affinity was noted under the themes of historical investigation of Baptist origins, pacificism, post-Christendom emphasis, mission, witness under suffering, and as an alternative to Calvinism.[55] In addition to Bebbington's list, Malcom Yarnell focused on Anabaptist theological method and hermeneutics as needing to significantly inform contemporary Baptists.[56]

Bebbington also noted the personal influence of Alan and Ellie Kreider at the London Mennonite Centre as especially important to the promotion of Anabaptist ideals in the United Kingdom through their relationship with Nigel Wright. He also noted that IBTS included the 'study of their [Anabaptist] legacy alongside that of the Baptists'.[57] Among those involved in the international promotion of Anabaptist ideals the significant contribution of Wayne Pipkin should also be appreciated.[58]

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[53] Some of the significant works were as follows: John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Eerdmans, 1972); David W. Shenk and Ervin R. Stutzman, *Creating Communities of the Kingdom* (Herald Press, 1988); Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (InterVarsity Press, 1982); Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom? How the Church is to Behave if Freedom, Justice, and Christian Nation is a Bad Idea* (Abingdon Press, 1991); Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things To Come* (Hendrickson, 2003); Stuart Murry, *Post-Christendom: Church and Ministry in a Strange New World* (Paternoster, 2004).

[54] Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries*, p. 270.

[55] Paige Patterson concluded 'the future is bright only if Baptists identify with and imitate the Anabaptists. The current trend in Southern Baptist life to identify with the Reformed faith is a major step backward and must be resisted.' Paige Patterson 'What Contemporary Baptists Can Learn from the Anabaptists', in *The Anabaptists and Contemporary Baptists: Restoring New Testament Christianity: Essays in Honor of Paige Patterson*, ed. by Malcolm Yarnell (B&H Academic, 2013), pp. 11–26 (p. 25).

[56] Malcolm Yarnell, 'The Anabaptist Theological Method: "For What They Were Concerned with Was not Luther's, but Rather God's Word"', in *The Anabaptists and Contemporary Baptists*, ed. by Malcolm Yarnell, pp. 27–48 (pp. 46–48).

[57] Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries*, p. 270.

[58] H. Wayne Walker Pipkin, *Scholar, Pastor, Martyr: The Life and Ministry of Balthasar Hubmaier (ca. 1480–1528)* (International Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008). On the publication details page is this note, 'formerly Professor of Church History and founder of the Institute of Baptist and

Bebbington's comments provided an excellent starting point for a discussion of influence of Anabaptist thought among Baptists, though some broad categories such as mission should be expanded to include radical discipleship, social justice, and relief aid, and other areas could be added, such as 'communalism', worship, and the atonement.

Baptists accessed these Anabaptist ideals through written sources, personal conversations, and oral presentations. The works of Ernest Payne and William Estep introduced Baptists to the writings of Anabaptists they may not otherwise have read and of non-Anabaptist writers who were writing about Anabaptists. Between December 2023 and May 2024, Chatfield organised interviews with some members of the BWA Heritage and Identity Commission and other Baptists known to have an interest in Anabaptist studies,[59] and it is notable that Estep's *The Anabaptist Story* was commented on as the book that introduced them to Anabaptist studies, with the bibliography of the 1975 revised edition providing an excellent resource for further detailed reading.

Mennonites began their own publishing campaigns to promote their changing vision of themselves. The *Mennonite Quarterly Review* commenced in 1927, and the Institute of Mennonite Studies initiated two projects aimed at engaging the broader Christian world. The Classics of the Radical Reformation series commenced in 1973 and made accessible in English translation primary source material of sixteenth-century Anabaptists. The second project, the Christian Mission and Modern Culture (1995–) included Mennonite and non-Mennonite authors. The editorial committee described the series as 'a forum where conventional assumptions can be challenged and alternative formulations explored'.[60] It also supported Mennonite

Anabaptist Studies at the International Baptist Theological Seminary'. Pipkin was also on the Editorial Board of *Christian Mission and Culture*.

[59] A link to the interviews can be found on the Heritage and Identity website <https://bwabaptistheritage.org/500-years-free-to-follow-jesus-christ-as-lord/> [accessed 10 March 2025].

[60] 'Preface to the Series', in *Another City: An Ecclesiological Primer for a Post-Christian World*, ed. by Barry A. Harvey, Christian Mission and Modern Culture (Trinity Press International, 1999), pp. vii–viii.

writers exploring the nexus between 'ecclesiology and eschatology' and the ethics of Jesus.[61]

Herald Press became a publisher familiar to Baptists, especially those interested in mission and church planting. Representative of the Mennonite authors published by Herald Press are David W. Shenk and Ervin R. Stutzman and their 1988 work *Creating Communities of the Kingdom: New Testament Models of Church Planting*.

The number of publishers open to Baptist authors reflected the theological divisions among Baptists in the USA. Bebbington noted that Baylor (1990) and Mercer (2005) Universities separated from the SBC and began promoting non-Southern Baptist authors.[62] In the UK, Paternoster promoted Baptist authors through its series Studies in Baptist History and Thought, as did Regent's Park College, Centre for Baptist History and Heritage. Significant British Baptist authors promoted via Paternoster included David Bebbington, Paul Fiddes, Anthony Cross, Brian Haymes, Ruth Gouldbourne, Nigel Wright, and Ian Randall. Non-British Baptist authors included Michael Haykin (Canada/USA), Ken Manley (Australia), Toivo Pilli (Estonia), and Martin Sutherland (New Zealand).

Baptist and non-Baptist authors were influenced by the new Anabaptists. A brief sample would include USA Baptists Stanley Grenz and James Leo Garret Jr. Both acknowledged their engagement with Anabaptist ideas. Among UK Baptists Paul Fiddes, Ian Randall, and Keith Jones all incorporated Anabaptist ideas, often with some modification.

A sample of non-Baptist authors influenced by Anabaptist ideals should include Stanley Hauerwas, a United Methodist, who presented a new view of Christendom that developed Anabaptist ideas embedded in the debate over Christendom.[63] Stuart Murray from a Quaker background had also enjoyed stimulating conversations at the London Mennonite Centre with the Kreiders and Nigel Wright. He remains

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[61] John Howard Yoder, 'Preface to the First Edition', *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd edn (Eerdmans and Paternoster, 1994), pp. x–xi.
[62] Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries*, p. 264.
[63] Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom?*

associated with Nigel Wright in the Anabaptist Network and was instrumental in developing the Centre for Anabaptist Studies at Bristol Baptist College after the closure of the London Mennonite Centre.[64]

Institutions also showed the influence of Anabaptist studies. The article has already referred to the Anabaptist research focus at IBTS and the Centre for Anabaptist Studies at Bristol Baptist College. Acadia University established the Acadia Centre for Baptist and Anabaptist Studies in 1991; its first Director was Jarold K. Zeman.[65] While Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary did not create a formal Centre for Anabaptist studies, as Bebbington rightly points out, Paige Patterson strongly encouraged his students to undertake research in Anabaptist ideas and personalities. A sample of doctoral candidates at Southwestern also indicates the international reach of this influence.[66]

Baptist institutions frequently held conferences on specific themes, often reflecting the passion of a particular faculty member. Contributors to these conferences could be Baptist or from other Christian traditions, including Anabaptist traditions. It was through such conferences that Anabaptist ideals were discussed, and networks of interested academics emerged to continue the discussions and publish their findings. Paul Fiddes provided an English example of this process in his acknowledgements to *Tracks and Traces* where he gave a detailed list of how the chapters developed in this way.[67] A North American example is provided by a 2013 publication that compiled essays

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64 Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Ministry in a Strange New World* (Paternoster, 2004), and *The Naked Anabaptist: The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith* (Herald Press, 2010).

65 Acadia Centre for Baptist and Anabaptist Studies <https://acadiadiv.ca/acbas/about/> [accessed 26 September 2024].

66 Samuel Beyung-Doo Nam, 'A Comparative Study of the Baptismal Understanding of Augustine, Luther, Zwingli and Hubmaier' (doctoral dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002); Jason J. Graffagninon, 'The Shaping of the Two Earliest Anabaptist Confessions' (doctoral dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008); Simon Victor Goncharenko, 'The Importance of Church Discipline within Balthasar Hubmaier's Theology' (doctoral dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011); Marc Brunnson, 'The Influence of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism as Exemplified by Balthasar Hubmaier on Baptist Beliefs and Practices' (doctoral dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021).

67 Paul Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought, 13 (Paternoster, 2003), pp. xiii–xv.

presented at a 2012 conference at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.[68]

As one who has attended many conferences, I agree that conversations over coffee or around a meal after a presentation stimulate further reflection often leading to publications, both academic and popular. Such a process has been fundamental to the dissemination of Anabaptist ideas in Australia. So, how did Australian Baptists get to know about the debates about Anabaptism and how have they responded? What follows is an exploration of the Australian experience of these debates.

Baptists in Australia

First a general note about Baptists in Australia. The British established a penal colony at Sydney in 1788. When the first Baptists arrived in Sydney is unknown. The first self-identifying Baptist appeared in an 1828 census and the first Baptist minister caused something of a sensation in Sydney in 1831 when he baptised two women at Woolloomooloo Bay in Sydney. 1834 saw Baptist ministers arrive in Sydney and Hobart (Van Diemen's Land, now Tasmania). From this date Baptists have established themselves in all the states and territories that make up Australia. The story of Baptists in Australia and Australian Baptists' involvement in mission has thankfully been written.[69]

The Australian Experience: Origins

Were Baptists in Australia aware of the origin debate and how did they respond? Baptists in Australia were aware of books that contained both sides of this debate. As early as 1872, Baptists in South Australia were aware of J. M. Cramp's *Baptist History*. In the South Australian Baptist Newspaper *Truth and Progress*, an author quotes from Cramp who is

[68] *The Anabaptists and Contemporary Baptists*, ed. by Malcolm Yarnell, p. ix.

[69] For a comprehensive coverage of Baptists in Australia, see Ken R. Manley, *From Woolloomooloo to 'Eternity': A History of Australian Baptists*, 2 vols, Studies in Baptist History and Thought, 16.1 and 16.2 (Paternoster, 2006); for the story of Australian Baptist involvement in mission, see *From Five Barley Loaves: Australian Baptists in Global Mission 1864–2010*, ed. by Tony Cupit, Ros Gooden, and Ken Manley (Mosaic Press, 2013).

citing resolutions of a 1689 General Assembly in London regarding disciplining those who will not contribute financially to the churches and for the sin of pride in their apparel, noting that nothing much has changed over two hundred years.[70]

In 1894, W. T. Whitley, then Principal of the Victorian Baptist Theological College, critiqued the Church of England minister Revd A. E. Green's dismissive comments about Baptists and their objection to infant baptism by closely following Thomas Armitage's work of 1887. In that work, Armitage traced 'Baptist principles continuously' from the time of the apostles. Green dismissed references to Novatians, Donatists, and Paulicians, Peter and Henry of Lausanne, and the Waldenses. Whitley acknowledged them as 'honoured predecessors' of the Baptists.[71] While there may be predecessors to Baptists on the Continent, Whitley clearly states that Baptists began in England in 1616 'as the result of a schism from the Independents, and in 1640, a second congregation of Particular Baptists was established in London'.[72] Revd A. Bird in 1895 suggested that in Victoria there was an 'absence among Baptists' of a "sense of historic continuity"'.[73] He proposed Armitage's work as an antidote to this problem. However, in neither article are Anabaptists mentioned, despite their appearance in Armitage.

In a follow up to his 1894 article, in August 1895 Whitley proposed two foundational principles from which he derived seven corollaries that in his view encapsulated what it meant to be a Baptist. He declared, 'Continuity in doctrine is the only continuity of value to Baptists.'[74] Nevertheless, he was willing to 'hail those who link us to the Apostolic doctrine' and provided an extensive list of these groups, starting with the Montanists and finishing with the Anabaptists and Mennonites. He further identified some Baptists who brought honour

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70 H. H. 'Baptist Views in 1689', *Truth and Progress*, August 1872, pp. 87–88, citing Cramp, *Baptist History: From the Foundation of the Christian Church*, pp. 485–486.

71 Rev. A. Bird, 'Notes of an Address on the Baptists by Rev A. E. Green', *Truth and Progress*, 18 January 1894, pp. 25–26.

72 This evidence challenges McBeth's claim that Whitley changed his view about the origins of English Baptists in 1923. McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage,* p. 50.

73 Rev. A. Bird, 'Some of the Lessons of a Nine-Year Ministry in Victoria', *Southern Baptist*, 28 November 1895, p. 268.

74 W. T. Whitley, 'Why I am a Baptist', *Southern Baptist*, 15 August 1895, p. 183.

to the name Baptist. He began with the Anabaptist 'Hubmeyer, in Switzerland'.[75]

The debate about Baptist origins and the role of Anabaptism was explicitly addressed in March 1896. The editor of *The Southern Baptist* summarised two articles from US sources in an article 'The Anabaptists'.[76] Citing with approval the work of Scheffer and Cornelius, the author depicts Dutch Anabaptism as the 'stock' from which sprang 'the Mennonites, the Congregationalists, the Baptists and the Quakers'. While Baptists are alleged to have come from the same stock as these others, the author states that it was only the Baptists who 'stood for its great principles in their entirety as regulative of the true Christian Church'. In his presidential address to the Tasmanian Baptist Union, Pastor E. Walton included a reference to the March 1896 article 'The Anabaptists'.[77] He noted what Anabaptists stood for:

> The liberation of religion from sectarian, priestly, and political control; the elimination of the mob of middle-men in religion, and the swarm of mediators between God and man; the practical abolition of monopoly and privilege in religion; the separation of Church and State; freedom of conscience; the priesthood of believers; the rights of the independent congregation; honest translation of the Bible; the liberty of prophesying; prison reform; abolition of slavery; the salvation of infants and of seekers after God in non-Christian lands; the equalisation of the sexes in religion and privilege, and in a world, social, political, as well as spiritual reforms.[78]

He concluded, 'We have no need to be ashamed of our spiritual forefathers, and also that we, like them, still need to stand for certain great principles of the true Church.' At least for this Tasmanian Baptist, the Anabaptists provided something more than Baptist precursor doctrinal principles drawn from the New Testament or examples of

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[75] Whitley, 'Why I am a Baptist', p. 184.

[76] The Watchman, 'The Anabaptists', *Southern Baptist*, 12 March 1896, p. 52. The editor refers to the two articles by Richard Heath, 'Early Anabaptism', in the *Contemporary Review* for April, and Revd W. E. Griffis, D.D., 'The Anabaptists', in the *New World* for December. The editor does not provide full names for Scheffer and Cornelius and simply notes these Dutch authors have shown that 'it was the Anabaptists who profoundly moved the [Dutch] people'. I suspect the editor is referring to J. G. de Hoop Scheffer and C. A. Cornelius.

[77] E. Walton, 'Conditions of Effective Church Life', *The Southern Baptist*, 4 June 1896, pp. 110–111.

[78] Walton, 'Conditions of Effective Church Life', p. 111.

suffering persecution for the truth of the Gospel. Those who opposed Baptists frequently sought to discredit Baptists by linking them to the 'wild revolutionary deeds of the Anabaptists of Munster' but this identification was utterly rejected.[79]

In August 1896, readers of *The Southern Baptist* were made aware of the debate about English Baptist origins shifting focus to when immersion baptism commenced. Whitsitt, noted by McBeth as a proponent of the English Separatist origins thesis, was reported to have asserted the English Baptists 'did not immerse until about 1640'. This was taken to implying that English Baptist origins were in the Puritan stream of Independents and Separatists. The Canadian Baptist E. O. White countered by providing evidence that the church in England continued the old English tradition of immersion baptism providing examples from 1595, 1605, 1625, and 1630. He also claimed that in the early sixteenth century Baptists on the Continent, wrongly named Anabaptists, had also practised immersion baptism. Taking immersion baptism as the test for defining Baptists, White concluded that Baptists began on the Continent among Swiss and German groups wrongly labelled Anabaptists.[80]

Baptists in Australia were now aware of a shift in the debate about Baptist origins. Did Baptists originate separately from any sixteenth-century Anabaptist contact or did Baptists owe their origin in some way to sixteenth-century continental Anabaptists? That debate would not be concluded until after World War Two.

Baptist and Anabaptist connections were also reflected in the promotion of reading material. The readership of *The Southern Standard* which covered South Australia, Tasmania, and Victoria had seen references to Cramp in 1872, and Armitage (cited by Whitley, then Principal of the Victorian Baptist Theological College) in 1894 and 1895. In 1896 Armitage, Cramp, and North are grouped together as 'excellent books to give the facts' on Baptist origins, while Whitsitt is engaged in

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[79] F. J. Wilkin, 'The Home Mission: Support the Test of Patriotism', *The Southern Baptist*, 18 June 1896, p. 127.

[80] E. O. White, 'Early English Baptists', *The Southern Baptist*, 13 August 1896, pp. 170–171 (p. 170).

debate in 1895–1896 over the issue of 'immersion baptism'. When identifying books to send to a mission library in Mymensingh in 1897, Cramp is nominated. While a Western Australian Baptist layman cited Cramp in 1898, the Victorian Bookroom began to promote Vedder's *A Short History of the Baptists* as something 'every young Baptist should read', and in 1899 Vedder's work is listed alongside Principal Whitley's *Witness of History to Baptist Principles* and R. Heath's *Anabaptism*. In 1901, The Baptist Book Depot, New South Wales, had a special a series of books and tracts for only 15 shillings! Second on the list was Vedder's *Short History of the Baptists*. However, in 1922 the Acting Principal of the New South Wales (NSW) Baptist Theological College, G. H. Morling, was teaching church history and Baptist principles using Cramp's *Baptist History*.[81] Anyone reading the whole of Cramp or Vedder could not avoid being aware that these authors advocated a connection between English Baptists and Anabaptists. Cramp provided readers with six chapters (89 pages) on Anabaptists, while Vedder provided four chapters (90 pages). What understanding of the connection between Anabaptists and Baptists they took from their reading was reflected in their articles, letters, and sermons published in their newspapers and year books.

Australian Baptists had a deep and sustained interest in the success of European Baptists. This was especially so in South Australia with its large German population.[82] The hero of European Baptist mission was J. G. Oncken who became a Baptist in 1834. He was presented as the exemplar of a modern missionary and his mantra 'every believer a missionary' was used to challenge Baptists to engage more vigorously in mission both overseas and at home.[83] Oncken's personal journey to becoming a Baptist was not only inspirational but also vindicated those people who asserted that a person could become a Baptist directly from the New Testament without needing contact with those already acknowledged as Baptists.[84] Mention of Anabaptists and

[81] As a personal note, I have the copy of Cramp that my wife's grandfather used as one of his extra mural textbooks during his ministerial training 1923–1930.
[82] 'Persecution and Progress in Europe', *Truth and Progress*, August 1868, pp. 166–167.
[83] J. B. Sneyd, 'Revivals Considered in Connection with Personal Effort', in Annual Meetings of the South Australian Baptist Association, *Truth and Progress*, October 1877, pp. 115–130 (p. 127).
[84] 'Early Days of the Baptist church in Berlin', *Truth and Progress*, April 1873, pp. 38–40.

Mennonites were often made by Oncken for the role they played in preparing the way for the success of Baptist work in Romania and Russia and for their example of suffering persecution for their faith.[85]

The formation of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) in 1905 provided a focus for Baptist missionary work in Europe, especially through the personal visits and reports of J. H. Rushbrooke.[86] Rushbrooke became the Commissioner for European Baptist Missions at the 1920 BWA Congress in London. Primarily through the work of Rushbrooke, relief aid and advocacy for religious freedom became major aspects of the work of the BWA. In his discussions with government representatives, Rushbrooke urged not only the cessation of persecution of Baptists but religious freedom for all, including the Baptists' kin, the Mennonites.[87] Through the pages of *The Australian Baptist* newspaper, the work of Rushbrooke was kept before Australian Baptists, often with an emphasis on the cooperative nature of mission work in Europe, especially Bible distribution alongside Mennonites.[88] Rushbrooke visited Australia in 1932 and in August presented a series of papers to the Australian Triennial Baptist Assembly in Adelaide, where Baptist representatives from each state were gathered. While his address 'The Historic Witness of the Baptists' clearly rejected a Landmarkist understanding of Baptist history, he nonetheless evoked a strong family connection to the Anabaptists of the Reformation period,

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[85] 'The London May Meetings', *Truth and Progress*, August 1872, pp. 90–93 (p. 91); 'The Mission Field', *Truth and Progress*, August 1873, p. 91. Oncken's influence extended as far as India when Mennonite Brethren Church missionaries who had appropriated some of Oncken's Baptist ideas commenced work among the Telugu of India in the 1880s. See 'Mennonite Brethren Church', Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia' <https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Mennonite_Brethren_Church#India> [accessed 28 February 2025]. A church contact described how his great grandfather, a local Baptist minister trained in the American Baptist Telugu Seminary in the 1930s, was seconded to the Mennonite Brethren Church and cooperated in planting Mennonite Brethren Churches in the Hyderabad area (personal communication, 27 February 2025).

[86] Lord, *Baptist World Alliance: A Short History*, pp. 15–21.

[87] Lord, *Baptist World Alliance: A Short History*, pp. 39–42.

[88] J. H. Rushbrooke, 'Facts from Russia', *The Australian Baptist*, 21 November 1922, p. 4; Rushbrooke, 'Astounding Baptist Progress: A Century's Increase', *The Australian Baptist*, 18 June 1929, p. 1; Anon., 'We Glory in Those Who Went Before: Baptists and World Conquest', *The Australian Baptist*, 27 August 1929, p. 1; Rushbrooke, 'Fifth Baptist World Congress', *The Australian Baptist*, 27 October 1931, p. 5.

declaring Hubmaier 'bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh'.[89] Rushbrooke's sentiments about the Anabaptists were positively echoed in the 1932 NSW presidential address of Robert Goodman, who had been in Adelaide. Goodman proudly declared he was Australian born and trained for ministry only in Australia, implying that his views on Anabaptism were sourced in Australia rather than in English or American Baptist institutions.[90] If Australian Baptists considered Anabaptists and Mennonites at all, it was most likely in familial terms with some appreciation that Baptists and Anabaptists both relied on the New Testament as the source for their ecclesiology.

Australian Baptists were keenly aware of these debates. The editor of *The Australian Baptist* included several series of articles on Baptist history and distinctives written by different Australian Baptists.[91] These debates were not only followed by readers of *The Australian Baptist*, but two Australian Baptists made significant global contributions. Both Noel Vose and Ken Manley completed their initial theological training under G. H. Morling at the New South Wales Baptist Theological College. Vose, from Western Australia, went on to complete postgraduate studies in the USA, first at Northern Seminary in Chicago (1959) where Dr Mosteller introduced him to new understandings of Anabaptism. Vose completed his doctorate at the University of Iowa (1960–1963) on the Puritan divine John Owen. However, it was Vose's engagement with Mennonites in the USA that set him on the path to establish the Western Australian Baptist Theological College as a centre for Baptist and Anabaptist studies.[92] Manley travelled to the UK, starting at Bristol Baptist College (1964), then, under the supervision of Barry White, completed his doctorate on

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89 'Happy Days in Adelaide. Triennial Baptist Assembly: Dr Rushbrooke's Memorable Messages', *The Australian Baptist*, 30 August 1932, pp. 1–3 (p. 1).

90 Robert Goodman, 'Baptists at their Best', *The Australian Baptist*, 27 September 1932, pp. 1–12 (p. 7). This edition of *The Australian Baptist* has extensive enthusiastic coverage of Rushbrooke's visits to Sydney, Canberra, and Hobart.

91 Australian Baptist authors included Ken Manley who, under new editor of *The Australian Baptist* Tom Cardwell, commenced a weekly column 'Despatch' in 1974, with a special series on Baptist Distinctives; Basil Brown, 'Baptist Principles', 6 parts, *The Australian Baptist*, 1979; Noel Vose, 'Our Anabaptist Heritage,' 10 parts, *The Australian Baptist*, 1979.

92 Richard K. Moore, *Noel Vose: Pastor, Principal, President: A Biography of Godfrey Noel Vose* (The Baptist Historical Society of Western Australia, 2010), pp. 108–131.

John Rippon at Regent's Park College Oxford (1965–1967). Manley became a staunch advocate of the Separatist origins of English Baptists.[93]

Vose became President of the BWA in 1985 and played a significant role in initiating the Baptist-Mennonite dialogue (1989–1992).[94] Manley became a significant member of the BWA Study and Research Division to which he contributed numerous papers on Baptist identity. While both acknowledged sixteenth-century Anabaptists shared similar ideas about the church as drawn from Scripture, Vose went further than Manley in quietly supporting the view that the ideas of sixteenth-century Anabaptists permeated late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England and probably had some influence on the development of English Puritans, Independents, and Separatists. In an interview published in *The Festival*, Vose is quoted as saying his 'heart is with Estep, but he believes White is more accurate, historically'.[95]

The question of Baptist origins reached something of a consensus among historians by the late 1980s. The focus of Baptist writers moved on to the question of Baptist identity.

The Australian Experience: Identity

As previously seen, Baptists in Australia were very aware of the origins debate and the contested role of Anabaptists in Baptist origins, especially in the writings of Vose and Manley.

Both Vose and Manley were commissioned in the 1980s by the editor of The Clifford Press to write on Baptist identity.[96] Both being

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93 Ken R. Manley, *For All That Has Been – Thanks!* (Ashburton, Victoria: Mono Unlimited, 2018), pp. 148–165. For advocacy of Puritan-Separatist origins see Ken R. Manley, 'Origins of the Baptists: The Case for Development from Puritanism-Separatism', *Baptist History and Heritage*, 22.4 (1987), pp. 34–46.

94 Baptist World Alliance, *Baptists and Mennonites in Dialogue: Report on Conversations Between the Baptist World Alliance and the Mennonite World Conference 1989–1992* (Baptist World Alliance, 2013).

95 Eugene Kraybill, 'Noel Vose: An Anabaptist Sympathizer Heads World Baptists', *Festival Quarterly* (Winter 1987), pp. 19–20, 29–31 (p. 29).

96 G. Noel Vose, *Focus on Faith: A Glimpse of Baptist Roots* (The Clifford Press, n.d.). Richard Moore estimates the work was written and published towards the end of 1985. Moore, *Noel Vose: Pastor, Principal, President*, p. 289. Ken Manley, *Who are the Baptists?* (The Clifford Press, 1988). Manley was by then Principal of Whitley College, the Baptist Theological College of Victoria. Clifford Press was the federal Australian Baptist publication arm based in Sydney.

historians, it is not surprising they provided an historic overview of the origins of Baptists followed by a series of theological emphases that defined Baptist identity. Vose and Manley continued to present their understanding of the influence of Anabaptists on Baptist origins as outlined in the above section on Baptist Origins. They presented summaries of Baptist identity that were acceptable to the various State Baptist Unions of that time. There is no hint in either of these publications of the identity tsunami being experienced among Southern Baptists.

However, Manley was very aware of issues that challenged Baptist identity, and after 1974, through his column 'Despatch' in *The Australian Baptist*, very consciously engaged his fellow Australian Baptists in the debates going on in the Southern Baptist Convention. He notes that the 'inerrancy' debate in Australia preceded the Southern Baptist Debate, as it occupied Australian Baptists in the 1960s, and re-emerged at the NSW Baptist Assembly in 1974, leading to changes in the NSW Baptist Union doctrinal statement in 1979 that endorsed verbal inspiration as the 'official Baptist position'.[97] In 'Despatches' he opened discussion on evangelicals and social action as well as ordination of women, both contentious issues among Southern Baptists but also more broadly in the Baptist world. In 1975, he distinguished 'fundamentalists' from 'evangelicals' by suggesting evangelicals should be involved in social justice activism. While his stated motive was to convince 'Australian Baptists to remain true to all the fundamental evangelical beliefs but not to adopt the sectarian and extreme militancy of the fundamentalist', the consequence was to encourage the sectarian and militant attitudes of those who opposed him.

Another issue Manley identified that fed into the inerrancy debate was 'creation science'. In 1959–1960 the *Australian Baptist* published a series of eight articles based on the 'anti-evolution sermons of Southern Baptist W. Criswell', which gave fundamentalists another issue on which to challenge the moderates. This issue found space in the national and state Baptist newspapers as late as 1995.[98] Manley rightly

[97] Manley, *From Woolloomooloo to 'Eternity'*, pp. 690–695.
[98] Manley, *From Woolloomooloo to 'Eternity'*, pp. 699–701.

commented that for the inerrantists 'the whole authority of the Bible is lost if the Genesis accounts are not taken literally'.[99]

Manley noted the emergence of revived Reformed doctrine and the considerable importance of Sydney Anglicanism and Moore Theological College (Anglican) in the propagation of this theological system. However, he does not consider this group to have significantly modified Baptist identity, at least up to 2006 when he published his *magnus opus* on Australian Baptist history.[100] In 2018, a coalition of fundamentalists and Reformed Baptists utilised the definition of the family to introduce the topic of gender and homosexuality, which lead eventually to a fragmentation of the NSW Association of Baptist Churches and the formation of Open Baptists in 2024. Issues involved in this debate were not only related to gender and homosexuality but also included ordination of women and the autonomy of the local church vis-à-vis the authority of the Association. The contribution of Baptist pastors trained by Moore Theological College and college lecturers should not be underestimated in this development.

A final issue Manley identified as influencing Australian Baptist identity was ecumenism. This was not a major issue among Baptists in the USA. The seed bed of this tension between conservatives and moderates was the debate around Australian Baptists joining the World Council of Churches that dominated Australian Baptist Union assembly agendas from 1948 to 1962.[101]

Manley presented an abridged version of his 1997 paper 'Shapers of our Australian Baptist Identity' to the Melbourne BWA Congress in 2000. For Manley, Baptist identity generally, and Australian Baptist identity specifically, should be 'evidenced by engagement in mission […], affirm diversity, engage in the life of society, and ecumenical endeavours'. Using the idea of a biological taxonomy, Manley suggested Australian Baptists belong to the 'family' 'evangelicals', the 'genus' Baptist, and the 'species' 'those types of Baptists where the family genes find expressions in response to different

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[99] Manley, *From Woolloomooloo to 'Eternity'*, p. 700.
[100] Manley, *From Woolloomooloo to 'Eternity'*, p. 707.
[101] Manley, *From Woolloomooloo to 'Eternity'*, pp. 579–588.

geographical, cultural and political contexts'.[102] His 'species' or 'types' of Australian Baptists were initially embodied in influential leaders, but he argued that by the 1960s the types became 'themes filtered through denominational structures and those who held positions of power'. He nominated five themes: Americanisation, fundamentalism, ecumenism, evangelicalism with social engagement, and charismatic renewal.

In 2002, Manley analysed the BWA dialogues with other denominations and identified five theological themes where Baptists differed from other denominations, asserting that these five themes could provide cohesion for a Baptist identity. Under the authority of God and the Lordship of Christ, Scripture as illuminated by the Holy Spirit is the determinative guide for understanding the gospel which shapes our understanding of the church as a community of believers. Response to the gospel and initiation into the church is expressed in baptism and leads to a life of mission in the world. All Christians are called into ministry, although there are some called into a ministry of leadership.[103] For Manley, the BWA priorities of 'reconciliation and unity through ecumenical dialogue' needed to be prioritised by Baptists in the twenty-first century.[104]

Manley was not the only Baptist contributing to the discussion about Baptist identity at a global level. Frank Rees, Manley's successor as principal of Whitley College (Victoria) presented a paper to the Baptist Heritage and Identity Commission in 2003, and David Parker from Queensland presented three papers in 2013.[105]

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102 Graeme Chatfield, 'Ken R. Manley – An Australian Baptist Identity', an unpublished paper read to the BHS (Baptist Historical Society) Summer School and CBHH (Canadian Baptist Historical Society) Conference, Selly Oak, Birmingham, 16–19 July 2019, pp. 6–8.

103 'A Survey of Baptist World Alliance Conversations with Other Churches and Some Implications for Baptist Identity', BWA Joint meeting of Baptist Heritage and Identity Commission and the Doctrine and Interchurch Cooperation Commission, Seville, 11 July 2002.

104 Ken Manley, 'Forward into the New Century, 1995–2005', in *Baptists Together in Christ 1905–2005: A Hundred-Year History of the Baptist World Alliance*, ed. by Richard V. Pierard (Samford University Press, 2005), pp. 275–299.

105 Frank Rees, 'Baptist Identity: Immersed Through Worship', presentation to the BWA Heritage and Identity Commission, 10 July 2003, Rio de Janeiro. David Parker, 'Identifying the Baptist DNA – Global Baptist Identity', and 'Mapping a 21st Century Global Baptist Identity, Part 2: Identifying the Baptist DNA', BWA Heritage and Identity Commission, 5 July 2012, Santiago, Chile.

While Australian Baptists were aware of the issues around Baptist identity before, during, and after the Southern Baptist fragmentation, any mention of Anabaptism is at best linked to the sixteenth and seventeenth century origins debate, otherwise it is incidental.

The Australian Experience: Anabaptist Influence

How did Australian Baptists experience the influence of Anabaptist ideas and how did they respond?

Until its closure at the end of 1991, *The Australian Baptist* newspaper provides ample opportunity to see what topics were generating discussion among Australian Baptists. Topics that included references to Anabaptists, Mennonites or Hutterites are numerous. Some discussions were generated by reviews of books authored by Mennonites, others from the context of current issues among Australian Baptists where Anabaptists were referenced in some way. These references from *The Australian Baptist* are grouped under the following headings: discipline, religious liberty, liberty of conscience/soul competency, social justice, ecumenism and cooperation, worship, communalism, suffering, ecclesiology, discipleship, baptism, church and state relations, peace and nonviolence, and women in ministry.

Ken Manley's review of *Disciplining the Brother* (1974) by Mennonite author M. Jeschke initiated a healthy discussion about the demise of discipline among Australian Baptist churches and the need to reconsider how discipline and forgiveness might be pursued without falling into the excesses of the Mennonite 'ban'.[106]

Readers of *The Australian Baptist* had the issue of religious liberty brought to their attention from several different contexts. Robert Somerville, a US Baptist missionary in Paris at the time of paralysing strikes, challenged Baptists to be true to their origins and to speak out strongly for religious liberty, especially as it related to issues of peace,

[106] See Ken Manley, 'Despatch: Church Discipline Today', *The Australian Baptist*, 4 December 1972, p. 7 for the start of the discussion. Discussion concluded with Ken Manley, 'Despatch: Discipline and Forgiveness', *The Australian Baptist*, 15 January 1976, p. 5.

racism, and societal evils.[107] Heather Vose's BWA report 'Our Baptist Heritage — Christian Citizenship and Church-State Relations' received coverage, as did William Stephen's 'Baptist Distinctives: Liberty of Conscience'. The final editor of *The Australian Baptist*, Peter Green, presented the readership with his interpretation of Walter Shurden's *Four Fragile Freedoms*.[108]

When social justice was discussed, Australian Baptist David Nicholas was 'not impressed' with Mennonite Myron Augsburger's *Faith for a Secular World* (1968).[109] Social justice slipped out of view until Ronald Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* stirred up heated debate, and his invitation to speak in both Victoria and New South Wales raised the intensity of exchanges.[110]

In 1990 there was an interesting exchange between two younger Baptists. One represented the Australian Student Christian Movement (ASCM). He noted with approval that the ASCM lacked a doctrinal statement which stressed the freedom of the individual to interpret Scripture, echoing Shurden's focus on freedom. He asserted that Bible study led the group to act on the biblical imperative for justice. As a Baptist he cited his Anabaptist forefathers in support of his views. The other young Baptist was a Moore Theological College graduate. He rejected the ASCM claim to champion 'liberty of conscience' and 'Social justice' just because they waved these 'banners'. He also objected to the appeal that Anabaptists are the Baptists forebears, stating, 'Of the mythology built up around Anabaptists there is much that is spurious, and in the history of the movement there is more that is abhorrent.' This statement echoed the continuation in the twentieth century of the

[107] Robert Somerville, *The Australian Baptist*, June 1968, p. 3.
[108] Heather Vose, 'Our Baptist Heritage – Christian Citizenship and Church-State Relations', delivered at the Study Commission of the BWA, reported in *The Australian Baptist*, 17 August 1988, pp. 9–12 (p. 9); William Stephens, 'Baptist Distinctives. Liberty of Conscience', *The Australian Baptist*, 28 June 1989, p. 8; Peter Green, 'Distinctly Baptist', *The Australian Baptist*, August 1990, pp. 3–4.
[109] David Nicholas, 'Titles that Demand Attention', *The Australian Baptist*, 11 March 1970, p. 10.
[110] On the Sider debates see *The Australian Baptist*, 29 June, 1983; 5 October, 1983; 8 February, 1984; 19 March, 1986, p. 12.

sixteenth-century Reformed condemnation of Anabaptism.[111] The Anabaptist–Calvinist struggles identified by Bebbington and Patterson among Baptists in the USA were present in Australia and underpinned one of the conservative Baptist groupings in Australia.

Ecumenism expressed through cooperative projects featured positively in *The Australian Baptist*. This was especially the case when reporting BWA and Mennonite Central Committee cooperation in producing Bibles and the Russian translation and distribution of the full set of Barclay's commentaries.[112] The BWA Baptist–Mennonite Dialogue received positive coverage, anticipating ongoing cooperation between Baptists and Mennonites,[113]as did a Bible translation workshop held at Rüschlikon where the keynote speaker was Mennonite Walter Sawatsky.[114] An older, negative reaction to organic union ecumenism was referred to in an article by J. K. Zeman, a Canadian Baptist. He claimed Canadian Baptists were losing their identity with their 'middle class outlook' that reflected the attitudes of among others the United Church. What they needed to do was be more like the Disciples (Churches of Christ) and Mennonites.[115] This warning was presented in the context of Vatican II and the Roman Catholic courting of denominations to accept Roman primacy.

Much ink was used and angst expressed in discussions about ecclesiology and its sub-set themes discipleship, baptism, church and state relations, women in ministry, suffering, and worship. The most immediate influence of Anabaptist ideals regarded discipleship. Representing both a European view and an Australian Baptist understanding of discipleship was Thorwald Lorenzen, graduate of the

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111 Tim Conner, 'The Student Christian Movement', *The Australian Baptist*, October 1990, p. 16; David Starling, 'SCM: Champagne Socialists?', *The Australian Baptist*, November 1990, p. 10.

112 'Russian Baptists Confer', *The Australian Baptist*, January 23, 1980, pp. 1–2 (p. 1).

113 BWA–Mennonite World Conference Dialogue is mentioned in 'Decisions taken by the BWA Executive Last Month', *The Australian Baptist*, 8 June 1988, p. 7; Baptists and Mennonites in Historic Meet', *The Australian Baptist*, November 1991, p. 23. However, a change in BWA leadership saw a change of focus on BWA priorities and no organised follow-up from this Baptist–Mennonite Dialogue eventuated. This claim was confirmed in personal correspondence with the author by both Tony Cupit and J. D. Roth.

114 'Workshop at Rüschlikon', *The Australian* Baptist, 22 June 1988, p. 20.

115 J. K. Zeman, 'Canadian Baptists Losing Identity in Ecumenism', *The Australian Baptist*, 30 August 1967, p. 3.

NSW Baptist Theological College and lecturer in theology at IBTS, Rüshlikon. Lorenzen returned to his alma mater in 1978 as a visiting lecturer, presenting a paper on 'Anabaptists and Discipleship'. That same year, the principal of the Queensland Baptist College in his presidential address to the Queensland Baptist Union used the Anabaptist understanding of discipleship (*Nachfolge*) to encourage Queensland Baptists to engage in witness and in life transforming obedience to Jesus.[116] In 1995, Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Church* began to impact Australian Baptists' understanding of discipleship. What they probably did not realise was the extent to which the principles being promoted were based on sixteenth-century Anabaptist principles.[117]

The theme of separation of church and state was included in Hugh Osborne's series 'I will build my Church', where he supported the Anabaptist interpretation of the fall of the church brought about when Constantine married church and state. He went so far as to claim 'that nearly every one of the constructive principles of the Anabaptist got written into the Constitution of the United States'.[118] One principle of the Anabaptists, the essential nature of the church as a 'suffering' church did not resonate strongly with Australian Baptists.[119]

Peace and non-resistance as major identifying themes of Anabaptist life did find a place among contributors to *The Australian Baptist*. Ken Manley returned to this theme in several of his 'Despatch' columns.[120] Letters to the editor demonstrated that the debate about just

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116 Thorwald Lorenzen, 'Discipleship – the Central Affirmation of Anabaptist Theology as a Challenger for Christian Life Today', *The Australian Baptist*, 28 June 1978, p. 16 and 1 November 1978, p. 5. E. G. Gibson, 'Our Vision of God', *The Australian Baptist*, 19 September 1979, pp. 7–12 (p. 10); Albert Dube, 'Disciplined Discipleship', *The Australian Baptist*, 19 September 1979, pp. 5–10.

117 Rick Warren, 'The Anabaptists and the Great Commission: The Effect of the Radical Reformation on Church Planting', in *The Anabaptists and Contemporary Baptists*, ed. by Malcolm Yarnell, pp. 83–97.

118 Hugh Osborne, 'I Will Build My Church (6), Reformers Re-Build (2)', *The Australian Baptist*, 12 October 1988, 10–11, 13 (p. 13).

119 Noel Vose, 'Our Anabaptist Heritage – No. 10', *The Australian Baptist,* 28 November 1979, p. 10.

120 Ken Manley, 'Despatch – Non-Violence of Jesus', *The Australian Baptist*, 16 November 1977, p. 11; Ken Manley, 'Despatch – Baptists and Peace', *The Australian Baptist*, 19 March 1986, p. 10.

war theories resonated among non-academic Baptists.[121] Arnold Sider reappeared in debates with Baptists citing his *A Call for Evangelical Nonviolence*.[122] Further study is required to test whether the number of Australian Baptists supporting a non-violence theology grew from the 1960s and 70s to the 1990s and beyond.

Communalism, or the search for community, appeared in a column by Miss D. M. Clack where she expressed that she was 'horrified' that there were Christians wanting to withdraw from society and abrogate their obligations as citizens. The Hutterites and Amish were portrayed as the horrific consequence of such an attitude.[123] Albert McClellan added that stagnation for evangelism resulted from retreating from the world.[124] Contrasting these views were those of Vose, who viewed positively the Anabaptist ideal of community. He included community in his list of things Baptists can learn from Anabaptists.[125] Peter Green reviewed *Australian Christian Communities*, noting the significant Baptist leadership in this movement and the Anabaptist heritage it reflected.[126] Ken Manley noted there were about 180 of these Radical Discipleship communities in Australia in 1987, but numerically as a total of the Australian population, they were very small.[127]

Australian authors were exploring several of these themes. Possibly the most influential was Michael Frost and his promotion of the 'missional church' model. While there is evidence of Frost and Alan Hirsch reading Anabaptist and Radical Discipleship literature, their model drew on an extensive range of authors and ideas.[128]

As in the UK, an Anabaptist Network was established in Australia: The Association of Anabaptists of Australia and New Zealand

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121 Gillian R. Hazleton, 'Nuclear War', *The Australian Baptist*, 8 January 1986, p. 4.
122 Belinda Groves, 'Australia the Arms Dealer', *The Australian Baptist,* July 1991, p. 19.
123 D. M. Clack, 'View Points', *The Australian Baptist*, 3 March 1971, p. 7.
124 Albert McClellan, 'The People of God: Always a Movement', *The Australian Baptist,* 15 November 1978, p. 7.
125 Noel Vose, 'Our Anabaptist Heritage – No. 10', p. 10.
126 Peter Green, 'Book Review: *Australian Christian Communities*', *The Australian Baptist*, April 1991, p. 18.
127 Ken Manley, *Woolloomooloo to 'Eternity'*, p. 684.
128 Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things To Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century Church* (Hendrickson, 2003).

(AAANZ). Never large in numbers, it continues to seek to promote the new Anabaptist vision. It maintains links to the Anabaptist Network in the UK through its relationship with Stuart Murray, and with the World Mennonite Centre through the Mennonite missionaries to Australia Mark and Mary Hurst. One member of the AAANZ sponsored a well-attended conference held at Morling College which focused on Darrin Belousek's *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*. The conference papers were presented in a special edition of the *Pacific Journal of Baptist Research* May 2015.[129]

While Baptists in Australia were becoming more aware of radical discipleship in the later decades of the twentieth century, it would be fair to say that the influence on the majority of Australian Baptists was minimal. Victorian Baptists, through their association with IBTS, proved more open to incorporating a broader range of Anabaptist ideals than Sydney or Brisbane Baptists, who remained focused on mission and evangelism, though it could be argued that Baptist World Aid Australia with its association to BWA incorporated more of the Anabaptist approach to social justice and relief aid than other Australian Baptist organisations.

A change of leadership and emphases within an ecclesial institution often sees the demise of the preceding leadership's agenda. Such has been the case of Anabaptist advocacy among Baptists in Australia. For example, the influence and advocacy of Anabaptist ideals by Noel Vose in Western Australia greatly diminished following his retirement and with a restructuring and change of leadership style of the Baptist Union of Western Australia that has flowed on into the Australian Baptist Ministries.

Conclusion

Were Australian Baptists aware of the debates about Anabaptist contributions to Baptist origins? Absolutely. Did it impact their Baptist

[129] Darrin W. Snyder Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace: The Message of the Cross and the Mission of the Church* (Eerdmans, 2012). Papers relating to The Morling Conference on Atonement Theology, May 2014, *Pacific Journal of Baptist Research*, 10.1 (May 2015).

identity? Not to any great degree. Australian Baptists were happy enough to refer to various Anabaptists as exemplars of perseverance under persecution, often thinking of these Anabaptists as another branch of the Baptist family tree. Anabaptists may have been considered a bit strange in the way they lived out being church, but there were some family characteristics Australian Baptists shared with them, and we need not be ashamed of the association. At times a minority of Australian Baptists would become passionate about a particular Anabaptist ideal and incorporate that ideal into their identity. However, the institutional structures of State and Australian Baptist Unions did not incorporate Anabaptist ideals into the formal statements that defined their identity. Rather, pursuing the ideal of 'unity in diversity', those Baptists who were influenced by Anabaptist ideals were allowed to form their own sub-groups within the broader Baptist family, just like charismatics, renewal groups, fundamentalist groups, and Calvinistic reformed groups.

The majority of Australian Baptists overall remain a pragmatic people, maintaining a broad 'evangelical' unity so that 'together we can achieve more than we could achieve separately'.

Believers' Baptism as an Ongoing Practice of Constellating Identities: Historical and Theological Insights after the Radical Reformation's 500th Year

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Abstract
As Anabaptism celebrates its 500th year, authoritarianism and partisan violence loom menacingly on the horizon of possible futures. This article revisits early Anabaptists and English Baptists, who insisted upon believers' baptism amidst a broader struggle to distinguish between the loyalties generated by the orders of church and state. Before this insistence, however, these reformers worked within their local, mainstream reform movements. They became increasingly radical, advocating for soul liberty and the separation of church from state, only as their reforms were rejected and they were alienated from state-church spaces. Well-adjusted to the prevailing social order, their neighbours could not begin to fathom the radicals' worldview, and believers' baptism came to symbolise the radicals' break with reality itself. Ultimately, this article offers a constructive theology of baptism to prepare 'small b' baptists to discern intentionally the tensions among modernity's many loyalties and to navigate faithfully the twenty-first century's environmental pressures.

Keywords
Swiss Anabaptism; English Baptists; Radical Reformation; believers' baptism; church-state separation; religious liberty

Introduction

The first quarter of the twenty-first century has been marked by the rising popularity and, in some circles, ascendence to power of 'authoritarian reactionary Christianity'.[1] This virulent form of politics, ethicist David P. Gushee explains, is everywhere an attempt 'to bend the arc of history backward toward a premodern world of Christian political

[1] David P. Gushee, *Defending Democracy from Its Christian Enemies* (Eerdmans, 2021), ch. 3.

and cultural hegemony'.[2] Examples include Russia under Vladimir Putin, Hungary under Viktor Orbán, Brazil under Jair Bolsonaro, and the United States under Donald Trump. Each political leader has channelled populist, religious energy into cultural-reactionary politics with authoritarian stratagems.

This is not to say Trump's base, as an example, is driven by a singular, comprehensive worldview; rather, a variety of conservative Christians and other right-wing actors are animated by his promises to advance their goals with his power.[3] The idea of a 'Christian nation', invoked by a political leader who gestures toward 'conservative' policies, is a sufficiently empty signifier for culture warriors of many different stripes to pledge their allegiance.[4] This number includes modern-day millenarians like evangelical 'dominionists' and the charismatic New Apostolic Reformation movement. It includes Southern Baptists (e.g. Tom Ascol and Voddie Baucham) and Roman Catholics (e.g. Christopher Rufo) campaigning against 'critical race theory' (CRT), 'diversity, equity, and inclusion' (DEI) initiatives, and what they refer to as 'wokeness'.[5] But it also includes some untold number of Anabaptists and members of other historic peace churches.[6] The appeal to reactionary Christians of some kind of Christian nation and/or far-right nationalism is rising in many corners of the Western world.

These nations have their own histories with the imperial church-state, reformation movements, the violent struggles to establish and defend the integrity of state-church structures, and the promise and perils of modernity's pluralist, democratic nation-states. As authoritarianism and partisan violence loom menacingly on the horizon of possible futures, and as Anabaptism celebrates its 500th year, we

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2 Gushee, *Defending Democracy*, p. 51.

3 Gushee, *Defending Democracy*, pp. 138–140.

4 Claude Lévi-Strauss coined the term 'floating signifier' to denote 'a concept that is both specific enough to engender loyal activism and empty enough for individuals to bring their own complex sense of meaning to it' (Jacob Alan Cook, *Worldview Theory, Whiteness, and the Future of Evangelical Faith* [Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2021], p. 294; see also p. 227).

5 Jacob Alan Cook, 'A New Fundamentalism Rising: The Southern Baptist Battle against the CRT "Worldview"', *Journal of American Culture*, 47.1 (2024), pp. 41–49.

6 Melissa Florer-Bixler, 'Anabaptist Trumpism', *Anabaptist World*, 4 February 2025 <https://anabaptistworld.org/anabaptist-trumpism> [accessed 12 April 2025].

might do well to revisit early radical reformers whose lives witnessed to the separability of church and state, who advocated for religious liberty in a time when few could even imagine such a thing, and who suffered at the hands of the nominally 'Christian' civil authorities. To this end, the following article examines early Anabaptists and English Baptists, comparing their trajectories out of mainstream reformations and established churches into ways of being that their neighbours found implausible. Then, it will briefly propose a constructive theology of the practice that came to symbolise these radical reformers: believers' baptism. In the end, this article argues that recovering a vibrant theology and practice of baptism can reinvigorate 'small b' baptists (à la Jim McClendon) to discern intentionally the tensions among modernity's many loyalties and to navigate faithfully the environmental pressures of this century.

Aspiring reformers have often shared an earnest desire for the renewal of the whole church, pictured as a universal, catholic body, and as such, church history is filled with moments that could have gone differently. What if the reforms of John Wyclif or Jan Hus had been accepted or even simply accommodated in some creative way?[7] The stories of early Anabaptists and English Baptists share these traits, with reformers earnestly pursuing a revitalised church and key moments when several possible futures branched beyond the visible horizon. Operating roughly a century apart, leaders at the head of these traditions 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 civil powers. Before their practice of believers' baptism came to symbolise their radical differentiation, these reformers worked within their local, mainstream reform movements on matters like the celebration of the Lord's Supper.[8] In fact, as we will see below, the trajectory and locus of decisions about this other defining practice contributed significantly to when and why early Anabaptists and

[7] Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, 2 vols (HarperCollins, 1985), 1, p. 349; and 2, p. 122.
[8] Theological questions had often been debated, as with Wyclif's 14th-century argument for consubstantiation (González, *Story*, 1, p. 347), and practical questions regularly featured in proposed reforms, as with Hus's early-15th-century opinion that laypersons should receive not merely the bread but also the wine (p. 352).

English Baptists alike found themselves exiting the mainstream reformation. The shared experience of disaffection while retaining strong commitments to a fully reformed church highlighted and even intensified several key points of tension in the identities and worldviews of the radical reformers. They harnessed this tension's potential energy to fuel their innovative attempts to negotiate loyalties to God and one's people, to imagine and articulate the value of soul liberty and a human right to religious freedom, and to organise new voluntary communities under shared local leadership and accountability. Before moves like these were theorised by modern political philosophers, they were workshopped by radical reformers whose very ways of being challenged the plausibility structures of their mainstream counterparts.

The Implausibility of Early Anabaptists

The first to become Anabaptists originally gathered around the Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli, who embraced Erasmus as his teacher, taking seriously the humanist call *ad fontes* — back to the textual sources in their original languages. This orientation is partly what drew hungry young students like Conrad Grebel and Felix Manz into his orbit in the early 1520s. These two had travelled abroad and studied in universities, taking in other cultures and taking up numerous languages, living and ancient.[9] In his study circle, Zwingli would lead his students to examine a biblical text in multiple languages and by several methods and to debate points of faith and practice, including where the text varied with church teaching and practice (e.g. dietary restrictions and clerical celibacy).[10] By the first disputation in January 1523, Zwingli could number Grebel and Manz among his co-reformers.

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[9] See William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story: An Introduction to Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism*, 3rd edn (Eerdmans, 1995), ch. 2. Grebel and Manz numbered among those 'particularly among the rising middle class who had a freedom for reflection and travel their ancestors had not had, and particularly in the cities, where commerce flourished and ideas fermented, new kinds of Christianity began to appear. (Church authorities of the time called this ferment not Christianity but heresy, and persecuted it vociferously and violently)' (*Baptist Roots: A Reader in the Theology of a Christian People*, ed. by Curtis W. Freeman, James Wm. McClendon, and C. Rosalee Velloso Ewell [Judson Press, 1999], p. 13).

[10] Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, pp. 34–35, 42.

Disputationes as form of academic debate were commonplace in the universities of key medieval intellectual hubs, and matters of faith were routinely examined in these spaces — sometimes to put scholars through their paces, but other times to lodge genuine criticisms, promote reforms, or defend innovations.[11] Luther was announcing this method of public debate with his ninety-five theses in 1517, and such a thing is clearly what Zürich's city council envisioned when they called a *disputatio* in January 1523. Zwingli had been preaching in Zürich for several years, and the city council was ready to give him a stage from which to defend his reformed positions, which he distilled into sixty-seven articles for the occasion. The bishop's representative, however, refused on principle to respond to Zwingli's articles at the disputation. He claimed that matters of faith were subject to the authority of church councils and universities not civil bodies and assured them that a forthcoming council would settle their issues.[12] Hearing no refutation from the bishop's office, the council assumed the right to act, deciding Zwingli should keep preaching and teaching as he had been. This marked Zürich's formal break with Rome.

In the ensuing months, some of Zwingli's students were increasingly animated by a rather direct, practicable reading of the New Testament that began reforming their theology and ethics from the roots. The young radicals continued their informal studies and debates with Zwingli, but the leader repeatedly wavered on what he would advocate as *necessary* reforms before the city council. During the second disputation in October 1523, the use of images and the liturgy of the mass were among the few key issues considered. Zwingli repeatedly equivocated, differentiating 'the diverse functions of the disputation': (1) to determine the biblical truth of a matter and (2) to secure the implementation of relevant reforms.[13] While he agreed with his students via the first function (e.g. on the point of 'changing the mass into an observance of the Lord's Supper'), he deferred to the city council for the second.[14] Given this dynamic, there is little surprise that debates

[11] Justo L. González, *The History of Theological Education* (Abingdon, 2015), pp. 44–47.
[12] González, *Story*, 2, p. 49.
[13] Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, p. 17.
[14] Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, p. 16.

within the study circle began to spill into the public *disputationes*, where Grebel, Manz, and Simon Stumpf, among others, proposed more radical reforms before the crowds and the civil authorities. During that second disputation, Stumpf openly criticised Zwingli's deference to the city council on matters that, he argued, the Holy Spirit decides, and within months, he found himself banished from Zürich.

But it was the January 1525 disputation, called at the radical reformers' request, that focused on the practice of baptism. Here again, Zwingli largely agreed with Grebel, Manz, and company on the biblical norm (viz. that only after reaching the age of accountability and upon professed belief should one be baptised), but he would neither preach accordingly nor advocate reform to this end.[15] Instead, Zwingli professed this matter to be ambiguous in the biblical record, and the council sided with him, declaring the radicals' insistence on believers' baptism an error and mandating those who withheld their infants from the rite to change course or face banishment. Within days, Grebel baptised George Blaurock at Manz's mother's home, and by February these three and others were on the circuit, bearing witness, baptising the repentant, and observing the Lord's Supper in the simplest manner.[16]

Although this moment marked their formal break with the state church, and their baptismal practice implicitly (and its timing explicitly) criticised that arrangement, beginning with its submission of faith and practice to civil authorities, the radical reformers had not led with these emphases. Up until then, they essentially pursued their reforms through authorised channels, appearing at and even calling many *disputationes*, seeing public forums as important opportunities to win broader support. The question of church order — particularly whether congregations should discern their own beliefs and practices without the oversight of civil authorities — is in the subtext of all their points of dispute (sometimes becoming the text, as with Stumpf's criticism). But had the council decided for the radicals on some occasions, church history and tradition might have unfolded differently in Switzerland. Only in the

[15] Estep, *The Anabaptist Story* (following Leonard Verduin) reads this as a political move — avoiding offence and potential division of the fledgling reformation movement (p. 42).

[16] Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, pp. 38, 45. Blaurock is widely known as one of the central figures in the emergence of Swiss Anabaptism along with Manz and Grebel.

weeks after Zürich's city council put Felix Manz to death — the first radical reformer condemned under their new anti-Anabaptist decree — did Michael Sattler draft and lead the ratification of the Schleitheim Confession. State coercion and violence necessitated rejection in the strongest terms and lived forms:

> Everything which is not united with our God and Christ cannot be other than an abomination which we should shun and flee from. By this is meant all popish and antipopish works and church services, meetings and church attendance, drinking houses, civic affairs, the commitments [made in] unbelief and other things of that kind, which are highly regarded by the world and yet are carried on in flat contradiction to the command of God.[17]

The Anabaptists' commitments to witnessing to the peaceable kingdom of God, gathering as free churches, and practising believers' baptism intensified through the persecution that came to characterise the nominal Christians in power.

With the benefit of 500 years' perspective, the Schleitheim Confession is quite understandable as a response to these early Anabaptists' immediate, real-world context, but at the time, this statement and other such acts only worsened relations with neighbours whose 'plausibility structure' simply could not make good sense of the Anabaptists' actions. Sociologist Peter Berger developed the concept of a plausibility structure to highlight prevailing, socially available ideas that form and constrain the beliefs of individuals within a society, such that certain ideas, explanations, and possibilities seem more reasonable or credible than others. 'Each world requires a social "base" [or "plausibility structure"] for its continuing existence as a world that is real to actual human beings.'[18] One level of plausibility is what people in various communities hold to be a shared, cultural 'worldview' and articulate as 'common sense'.[19] In the radical reformers' lived theology, human agency was ascendant in both personal-individual and collective-communal forms, set over against traditional state-church or church-

[17] 'The Schleitheim Confession of Faith', trans. by J. C. Wenger, *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 19.4 (October 1945), pp. 247–253.

[18] Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (DoubleDay, 1969), p. 45.

[19] The concepts of worldview and common sense are, in themselves, deceptively simple and vulnerable to co-optation by ideology and authoritarian power.

state sociopolitical machinery that conceived of individual persons as so many instances of the same essential human form fulfilling predetermined roles. Manz, Sattler, and company were turning over the fields of traditional worldviews and planting the seeds of individualism and pluralism out ahead of the modern philosophers who would reap a great harvest.

Reform was in the air, so many European peoples increasingly recognised that some change was possible within their own churches' practices, but local civil authorities were continually working to ensure a singular social order — pushing all tensions to their borders rather than working creatively with those tensions within them. Church historian Justo González notes how most Europeans in this period shared the Constantinian assumption 'that the existence and survival of a state demanded religious agreement among its subjects. […] All who lived in a Christian state must be Christians, and faithful children of the church.'[20] This assumption was part of their plausibility structure. González continues, 'This view of national unity as linked with religious uniformity was at the root of the many wars of religion that shook both the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries.'[21] In this period, when there was a settlement acknowledging diverse Christian practice, *cuius regio, eius religio* became the standard, affording rulers the right to determine the religious commitments within their territories.[22]

The radical reformers' moves beyond and separate from the state churches — the very notion of individuals gathering in voluntary communities around preaching and churchly practices based in their own convictions and interpretations of Scripture — were flatly *implausible*. Who on the Zürich city council could fathom Schleitheim's sixth article, on the sword, wherein civil and ecclesial spaces are strictly separated? And while this confession professes that God ordains state structures and their use of the sword to curb wickedness among non-Christian populations, sequestering faithful Christian living from

[20] González, *Story*, 2, p. 122. See also Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, p. 257.
[21] González, *Story*, 2, p. 123.
[22] From time to time and place to place, exceptions were carved out — for Jews or Muslims or even certain alternative Christian church structures — but there were few reliable guarantees against civil disenfranchisement or outright persecution.

obedient civil service like this was, again, implausible to those for whom the (mainstream reformation) state-church order was indisputably Christian. And the practice of believers' baptism — framed as Holy Spirit-driven, personal repentance from sin and error as well as voluntary identification with Christ in a church community composed of true believers — came to symbolise this implausibility for those who had only ever known themselves to be incontestably Christian.

Diverse Approaches to Loyalties in Tension among Early Anabaptists

As the Anabaptist movement spread or arose in other locations, the church-state relation was expressed and lived in several ways. One of the most told stories may be about the commitment of many Anabaptists to live out the Christian faith, fully and with integrity, by withdrawing or otherwise divesting from the social structures governed by civil authorities (even nominally Christian ones) and tending to one another's needs as 'the quiet in the land'. In this narrative, the tension between church and state loyalties is resolved in favour of the former, with the believers' church forming an alternative community *next to*, or in some ways *over against*, secular society. It bears repeating that this form of life together follows earlier attempts to participate in the public processes of reformation as well as real rejection and persecution. Perhaps the other most told story is about the popular chiliastic-revolutionary strand that emerged alongside, and occasionally in conversation with, other streams of Anabaptism. Figures like Thomas Müntzer and Jan van Leyden became known for their active attempts to start the revolution that would inaugurate God's kingdom come. The former organised an armed militia during 'the commoners' movement', and the latter waged an ill-fated takeover of the city of Münster. Other figures, like Melchior Hofmann and Hans Hut (an erstwhile follower of Müntzer), were more active as preachers than sword-bearing revolutionaries — though Hofmann's prophecy-driven, self-instigated imprisonment created the aperture through which the Münster debacle

appeared.[23] These stories made it either (a) difficult for mainstream leaders to discern the differences among those who practised believers' baptism or (b) easy for them to ride roughshod over these differences, framing and punishing all nonconformists as seditious heretics.[24]

Other early Anabaptist figures reveal more tension between the loyalties that exert themselves upon the Christian and, accordingly, strengthen the emerging sense that something like 'Anabaptism' did not fall from the heavens as a singular, coherent whole. For example, Balthasar Hubmaier, the leading reformer in Waldshut, also first conferred with Zwingli and initially modelled his reformation programme after Zürich. He later aligned himself with the Anabaptists (e.g. the Lord's Supper, on church order, and believers' baptism), but Hubmaier 'appears never to have accepted the Schleitheim dictum on the sword'.[25] In his treatise entitled *On the Sword*, Hubmaier maintains, as William Estep helpfully summarises, 'Since governments are necessary for the sake of peace and justice, Christians have not only a moral responsibility to support and pray for rulers but to serve as judges, mayors, and the like when chosen for those offices.'[26] In fact, Hubmaier imagines the Christian making a better ruler than a non-Christian and a future in which 'governments would limit themselves to the secular ends for which they were ordained of God'.[27] To the Christian who finds themselves living under an unjust government, he offers options ranging from nonviolent resistance to flight to faithfully suffering in place. Here the tension between the competing loyalties of church and civil society can still be imagined, even if Hubmaier tends toward resolving that

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[23] Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, p. 98.

[24] The flows of influence (e.g. whether from Thomas Müntzer or the city of Münster to all leading Anabaptists) are few and far between, except inasmuch as key Anabaptist leaders attempted to reign in the wildcards. For example, as Estep explains, referring to an undelivered 1524 letter from Grebel to Müntzer, 'His would-be Swiss disciples knew little of Müntzer's actual teachings. They had read a few tracts from his pen and thought his position on infant baptism and his anti-Luther stance were analogous to theirs in Zürich' (*The Anabaptist Story*, p. 41). Among other things, Grebel admonished Müntzer against violence. For another example, Menno Simons was actively engaged as an opponent of the Münsterites' activities (1532–1535), though not against all their theological points (Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, pp. 163–164).

[25] Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, p. 100.

[26] Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, p. 100.

[27] Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, p. 101.

tension in a static, two-kingdoms model. Yet even this view was *implausible* to those who could only think within a traditional church-state model. Hubmaier was twice imprisoned in Zürich based on his baptismal views. When he called for a disputation, Hubmaier 'quote[d] Zwingli, place and time, when he asserted children should not be baptised until they could be instructed in the faith', but Zwingli claimed to have been misunderstood.[28] Nonetheless, it was the church and state authorities of Catholic Vienna that executed Hubmaier in March 1528.

Parallels with Early English Baptists

Emerging in another time but sometimes in overlapping places, the early English Baptists' narrative arc bears a striking resemblance to that of the Anabaptists. England's national reformation kicked off in the 1530s, and by that century's end, many publications and actions were challenging the crown's authority over religious life. Puritans agitated for further reforms within the Church of England (i.e. in a more disciplined, Reformed, often Presbyterian direction). And as the doors closed to mainstream reforms, they began to embrace the potential of independent congregations for pure worship.[29] Church historian David Bebbington explains, 'Those who believed, by the early seventeenth century, that the national Reformation had failed were at the heart of the circles in which Baptist convictions first appeared.'[30] First-order problems arose in an ecclesial atmosphere made volatile by its subjection to the contradictory whims of a rotating cast of monarchs as well as ever-shifting degrees of religious tolerance and persecution.[31] For example, during the reign of Charles I and his Catholic queen, the Archbishop of Canterbury

> called for communion tables to be removed from the body of the church, where they had normally been sited since the Elizabethan settlement, and put against the east wall of the chancel, where they could be aligned on the pattern of Catholic altars. In 1640 new regulations required the communion

[28] Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, p. 92.
[29] David W. Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries: A History of a Global People* (Baylor University Press, 2018), pp. 19–20.
[30] Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries*, p. 21.
[31] Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries*, p. 23.

> tables to be railed off from the people; they also encouraged bowing toward the altar as a devotional practice. Such policies made many feel that the government wanted to roll back the Reformation entirely.[32]

This lurching back and forth on central elements of worship frustrated both reformers who longed to see the *ecclesia semper reformanda* moving in a consistent direction and those who eschewed a hierarchical church order in favour of autonomous local churches.

Before John Smyth would become a Baptist trailblazer, he was first ordained in the Church of England. While he already shared Puritan sentiments by the time of his appointment to Lincoln, Smyth grew increasingly frustrated with the national reformation and left for a Separatist congregation in 1606.[33] Only two years later, facing religious persecution under the rule of James I, Smyth and his friend Thomas Helwys led a faction from this church to Amsterdam. That church-communities could uproot and leave their homeland suggests a lived theology in which church order and civil authority had already moved considerably from the traditional church-state and more recent but still singular state-church worldviews. Soon after arriving in Holland, Smyth's views on the practice of baptism were in flux, and around 1609, believers' baptism rose in his view to eclipse covenant relationship as the basis of church membership.[34] Eventually Smyth sought (but never received) membership with the Waterlander Mennonites, aligning himself with many of their more distinctive beliefs.

Helwys spurned his friend's overtures toward the Mennonites, and their fellow congregants were divided between them. While some successfully joined the Waterlanders — including Richard Overton, who would go on to become an important Leveller activist and an early human rights theorist — Helwys and others excommunicated Smyth in 1610 and returned to London about two years later to establish the first

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[32] Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries*, p. 21.
[33] Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Judson, 2004), p. 23.
[34] Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, pp. 289–290; Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History*, pp. 24–25; and Freeman, McClendon, and Ewell, *Baptist Roots*, pp. 72–73.

Baptist church on English soil.[35] Whatever else transpired in this early Baptist community, the Helwys faction did not share many of the Waterlander Mennonites' distinctives. For example, Helwys aligned with Hubmaier's notion that a magistrate could also be a member of the church, even calling civil service a holy ordinance.[36] Moreover, church historian Bill Leonard explains, these early Baptists 'permitted the taking of oaths and rejected other "strange opinions" held by the Anabaptists, with whom they were often equated'.[37] From this time, Baptists were often found distancing themselves from Anabaptists, both because they truly were not Anabaptist in conviction and because the Münsterites had turned 'Anabaptist' into a byword for decadent revolutionaries. Putting aside any genuine concerns about identification with Anabaptists, Helwys and many Baptists who came after him were keen to advocate for religious liberty in an environment of intolerance and persecution. Already in 1612, Helwys penned one of the first defences of religious liberty written in English and addressed it to King James I.[38] By 1615, the monarch received the message and threw Helwys in prison, where he died.

In the 1630s and 40s, another generation of Baptists emerged virtually *de novo*, following their own path out of the so-called Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey church, founded in 1616 and referred to by the names of three successive pastors operating within a Separatist-Congregationalist structure. Starting in 1633, several groups splintered from this church with strong convictions around believers' baptism and church order, and even Henry Jessey received believers' baptism in 1645, 'though he remained pastor of a partly paedobaptist congregation down to his death'.[39] By this time, as Bebbington tells the story, 'There were seven churches in London that observed the immersion of none but those who could profess their faith. A network of Particular Baptist

[35] On Richard Overton's legacy, see Glen H. Stassen, *A Thicker Jesus: Incarnational Discipleship in a Secular Age* (WJK Press, 2012), ch. 5. On the Smyth-Helwys split, see Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History*, pp. 25–26.
[36] Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, pp. 292–295.
[37] Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History*, p. 26.
[38] Thomas Helwys, *A Short Declaration of the Ministry of Iniquity* (1612; repr. Mercer University Press, 1998).
[39] Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries*, p. 47.

churches had come into being.'[40] These churches were theologically Calvinist but held to a congregational polity and Baptist proclivities around the ordinances. 'Despite their mainstream convictions,' Curtis Freeman, Jim McClendon, and Rosalee Ewell writing together note, 'Baptists in England and the colonies were held in suspicion by the established churches. The confusion was due in part to the proliferation of disestablished religious groups, many of which were subversive' — and, one might add, due in part to some Baptists moving among these groups.[41] In any case, the Particular Baptists had several reasons to disavow 'Anabaptists' in the opening lines of their first confession of faith, ranging from political posturing to genuinely weak flows of influence. Some see some such influence mediated through Helwys and the General Baptists.[42] Key differences between the two Baptist groups have always been clear (e.g. on soteriology), but their similarities (e.g. around church order and religious liberty) have also become more pronounced over time.

The fact that Baptists in the mid-seventeenth century represented a growing population within larger masses of those committed to disestablished reform movements, with many leaders sticking rather closely to the mainstream, indicates that the plausibility structure was indeed in flux. As González explains, 'Eventually, in some areas sooner than in others, the conclusion was reached that religious agreement was not necessary for the security of the state, or that, although desirable, its price was too high.'[43] He names France and the Low Countries as testing grounds for religious tolerance policies, which slowly crawled throughout the European states in various forms. Early English Baptist reformers were neither generally attempting to withdraw from civil society nor rejecting the divine mandate of civil government, but they were often found attempting to disentangle their loyalties to God and country. By the time they arrived at their Baptist convictions, their common efforts at social reform tended more toward the end of

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[40] Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries*, p. 47.
[41] Freeman, McClendon, and Ewell, *Baptist Roots*, p. 74.
[42] See Glen H. Stassen, 'Anabaptist Influence in the Origin of the Particular Baptists', *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 36.4 (October 1962), pp. 322–348; and Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, pp. 301–303.
[43] González, *Story*, 2, p. 123.

religious liberty than a state church reflecting their distinctives. However, it is no foregone conclusion that early Baptists would have reached a consensus on social reforms. Some Baptists, for instance, were to be found among the Levellers (e.g. Richard Overton), the Ranters (e.g. Lawrence Clarkson), and other more overtly subversive groups, including the Fifth Monarchy Men — a millenarian group that attempted armed uprisings in 1657 and 1661.[44] Juxtaposing this illustration with the tragedy at Münster, we might do well to observe how varieties of millenarism made the rounds in popular theology in those days (in preaching, in books and pamphlets), much as they do now. In the end, Baptists also responded to and resolved church-state tension in several different ways.

Concluding Segues into a Constructive Account of Believers' Baptism

Early Anabaptists and English Baptists emerged under different conditions, responding and adapting to differing pressures, and arrived at different emphases, but, as this section has revealed, their emergences share some common features. First, neither Anabaptists nor Baptists, in the main, started with what would become their most radical positions or by plotting revolutionary actions. As we have seen, these reformers attempted to shape mainstream reforms and otherwise remain in the conversation, including participation in public disputations. Their radical energy was both an evolving response to the *unrelenting external pressures* of church-state and emerging state-church authorities and an unfolding of earlier commitments as the passage of time permitted further reflection.

Second, the practice of believers' baptism as a symbolic break with the prevailing social order arose amidst a wider struggle to separate the orders of church and state — and to *distinguish between the loyalties* each generates. As their attempts to influence mainstream reformation efforts fell short and as state-church authorities prosecuted their

[44] See Bernard Stuart Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth-Century English Millenarianism* (Faber & Faber, 1972).

ongoing dissent and organising as seditious, the radical reformers felt the need to become and advocate for free churches and religious liberty. Fidelity to divine authority required them to operate apart from and even defy civil authorities, but separatism was neither indispensable nor even preferable on theological grounds for these reformers in their early years, including among the Anabaptists. It was contextually pragmatic (even genuine) but not the logical starting point of their reform efforts. Separating the loyalties was key, not separating from the civic community, but all such moves composed a way of being quite foreign in their parochial context.

Third, while it was not the original breaking point for any of these reformers who found themselves taking their church communities back to their roots, *the practice of believers' baptism came to symbolise the specific way these groups made themselves implausible*, even threatening, to the world around them. To embrace personal agency and live as these radicals did, with a view to joining a voluntary, alternative community that called itself 'church' apart from the approved spaces for this kind of identification, was to participate in the cracking up of a premodern, monocultural worldview. The deeper story is one of (a) a decisive identification with Christ, in his death and the promise of new life, and (b) a commitment to the church community as that disciplining community that will keep believers free and responsible, and for many Anabaptists, as one's only true people.

Given the force of authoritarian reactionary Christianity, we would do well to ask whether and how we might renew our commitments to religious freedom (disestablishment and free exercise) and to minding the tension between loyalties to church and state — and other social groups we might now add. So, next we begin to make a creative turn with sections structured around the three features highlighted above, taking them as indicators of key points of departure for a constructive theology of believers' baptism in the radical reformation's 501st year.

Current Conformist Pressures on Baptising Communities[45]

In this section, I will register some prevailing environmental pressures, specifically some reasons Christians may be tempted to release important tensions, collapsing their many loyalties into a singular guiding narrative. And we begin with developmental psychologist Dan McAdams, who has proposed a 'narrative identity theory' that charts the healthy development of an integrated 'personal myth' over the course of a person's life. He intentionally uses the term 'myth' to signal how the *stories we live by* (to borrow one of his book's titles) need not be entirely accurate to be the true guide for an adult maturing through life. One of an adolescent's primary feats is consolidating an 'ideological setting' that provides 'a backdrop of belief and value upon which the plot of [one's] particular life story can unfold'.[46] McAdams invokes Erik Erikson's famous exploration of Martin Luther's 'identity crisis' to define the ideological setting:

> We will call what young people in their teens and early twenties look for in religion and other dogmatic systems *ideology*. At the most it is a militant system with uniformed members and uniform goals; at the least, it is a 'way of life,' or what the Germans call *Weltanschauung*, a world-view which is consonant with existing theory, available knowledge, and common sense, and yet is significantly more: a utopian outlook, a cosmic mood, or a doctrinal logic, all shared as self-evident beyond any need for demonstration.[47]

Then, through the middle-adult years, the individual's key task is to live with integrity within this way of life, 'integrating and making peace among conflicting imagoes in one's personal myth'.[48] To do so is to thrive, to mature. Already the notion of 'consolidating' a setting for one's identity-making work might give a thinker in the line of the radical reformation pause. What variety of beliefs and loyalties could be received or fused together as unquestionably singular under this rubric?

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[45] For further engagement with the current psychological theories summarised only briefly in the next two sections, see Cook, *Worldview Theory*, ch. 2.

[46] Dan P. McAdams, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* (The Guilford Press, 1997), p. 67.

[47] Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (W. W. Norton, 1993; originally published 1958), p. 41.

[48] McAdams, *Stories*, p. 37.

Moreover, when McAdams specifically analyses the personal myths of US Americans who most nearly resemble the cultural ideal of a 'highly generative' self, understood as those who vigorously 'strive, consciously and unconsciously, to pass on to posterity some aspect of our selves',[49] he finds *low degrees of self-reflection* upon the enduring coherence or truth of their ideological setting. Highly generative US Americans 'believe that their values are clear, consistent, and coherent and have pretty much always been so'.[50] In short, there is a strong correspondence between the way US Americans picture maturity — namely, as a person living with integrity within their ideological setting and striving to pass on something of oneself — and the tendency to neither reflect on nor question the substance of their own worldview all that much.

When a person is committed to a certain way of seeing themselves, they will strive for 'completeness' and tension will build within them while they perceive themselves to be 'incomplete'. What they do with such tension depends heavily on their character, which includes coping and defence mechanisms. To this end, 'symbolic self-completion theory' describes the tendency of those who experience this tension to seek symbolic routes to validating their self-definition, including doubling down on describing themselves as complete, attempting to enlist others to affirm that one is, in fact, who they say they are, being unwilling or unable to admit to transgressions of the ideal self, and relying on external signs and symbols to bolster this self-image.[51] Add into this mix the strength of one's commitment to certain ideal selves — for instance, the lofty ideal self of one's real or imagined faith community, or otherwise the tidy, heroic self of one's personal myth — and we have a recipe for both self-deception and, over time, the disfigurement of genuine community. So, what if a person or group of people overidentify themselves with a singular self like 'conservative

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[49] Dan P. McAdams, *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By*, rev. edn (Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 31.

[50] McAdams, *Redemptive*, p. 136.

[51] Hazel Rose Markus and Elissa Wurf, 'The Dynamic Self-Concept: A Social Psychological Perspective', *Annual Review of Psychology*, 38.1 (February 1987), pp. 299–337 (p. 322), contextualise this theory within their plural self-concept, citing Robert A. Wicklund and Peter M. Gollwitzer, *Symbolic Self-Completion* (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1982).

US American Christian'? Or even merely 'Christian'? Undoubtedly, these overly simple identities are tied to beliefs and feelings gathered over a vast social terrain, consolidated and integrated into their ideological setting. The singularity of a person's self-conception, however, leaves them vulnerable to self-deception related to all critical feedback, a sense of antagonism toward those who might persist in their criticism, and seeking symbolic routes to relieve any tension that may appear.

It is relatively easy to imagine how believer-baptising traditions might become less radical in practice over time following the institutionalisation of reforms that once required deep personal and communal agency to discern and practice. In all too many ecclesial spaces, believers' baptism has become the rite by which an individual expresses their faith in the gospel as this or that church preaches it. Christians are guilty of turning believers' baptism into a process of taking up a singular worldview — whether coming of age within the church or exchanging one singular worldview for another in conversion. Here the practice of baptism is domesticated to play a simple gatekeeping role at the boundary of the community of the faithful. Moreover, more than a fair amount of sociocultural content is shared in churches, mostly informally, and when a believer is received in baptism without any instruction or support in disentangling that sociocultural content from the gospel itself, it is often baptised along with the person. The homogeneity of many Western churches lends to the sort of singular thinking and partisan politics that create incredible polarities across, but also within, 'Christian' communities. One might simply understand their identity as 'I am a Christian, and nothing else matters', but to overidentify oneself and likeminded others with Christ risks both self-deception and an evasion of the living One who calls us into deeper repentance and all manner of truth.

Embracing the Tension of Plural Selfhood

While one may consolidate an ideological setting and live into a coherent personal myth, people cognitively process their daily experiences of life through a bundle of selves. Social psychologist Hazel Markus, in many

co-authored works since the late 1970s, theorises 'self-schemas' to illuminate how 'individuals attune themselves to their significant social contexts, and they provide solutions to important existential questions such as *who am I, what should I be doing, and how do I relate to others*'.[52] In her research, Markus and company could measure a person's self-schemas to predict how they would process self-relevant information, including how they help subjects judge incoming information with relative ease, retrieve evidence for those judgements, predict their own future behaviour on that basis, and resist counter-schematic feedback.[53] These self-representations range from traits and characteristics (e.g. self as 'a good student' or 'conscientious') to sociocultural contexts. 'In the United States, these contexts might include specific collectives in addition to the nation of origin, such as the family or workgroup, as well as contexts defined by gender, ethnicity, race, religion, profession, social class, birth cohort, and sexual orientation.'[54] Markus and company use the term 'working self-concept' to refer to that set of self-schemas which is presently active and operating and thus lending 'structure and coherence to the individual's self-relevant experience'.[55] It is also 'working' in the sense that it is 'a continually active, shifting array of available self-knowledge' subject to any number of affective, motivational, and environmental conditions.[56] All the same, we can reasonably expect a consistent showing from a core bundle of selves within 'the self that is very much a part of the public domain'.[57]

While an accurate description of who we are is important to the present conversation, we must also attend to questions of motivation — including loyalty, repentance, and growth over time. The research

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[52] Tiffany N. Brannon, Hazel Rose Markus, and Valerie Jones Taylor, "'Two Souls, Two Thoughts," Two Self-Schemas: Double Consciousness Can Have Positive Academic Consequences for African Americans', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 108.4 (2015), pp. 586–609 (p. 587).

[53] Karen Farchaus Stein and Hazel Rose Markus, 'The Role of the Self in Behavioural Change', *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*, 6.4 (December 1996), pp. 349–394 (p. 351).

[54] Hazel Rose Markus and Shinobu Kitayama, 'Cultures and Selves: A Cycle of Mutual Constitution', *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 5.4 (July 2010), pp. 420–430 (p. 423).

[55] Hazel Rose Markus and Paula Nurius, 'Possible Selves', *American Psychologist*, 41.9 (September 1986), pp. 954–969 (p. 955).

[56] Markus and Nurius, 'Possible Selves', p. 957.

[57] Markus and Nurius, 'Possible Selves', p. 964.

suggests we should distinguish between (a) those self-schemas that are grounded in social reality as past and present selves and (b) those possible selves that we desire (e.g. the successful self, the influential self, or the Christlike self) or dread (e.g. the impotent self, the lonely self, or the damned self).[58] A person's thoughts and behaviour depend on the nature and depth of the feeling they get when noticing a mismatch between who they are and who they (do not) want to be and as they anticipate attaining (or avoiding) a possible self. What a person does with this kind of motivation also depends heavily on their character, which includes coping and defence mechanisms like those mentioned above as symbolic routes to self-completion.[59] In any case, some degree of counter-schematic feedback is crucial for growth within any given self-schema since awareness of a mismatch motivates the process of change and growth more than the mere existence of possible selves, which on their own can function self-deceptively.[60]

Research is showing that persons who understand themselves to be complex (i.e. have a complex self-theory) demonstrate an improved ability to integrate or otherwise weather self-critical information. 'Failure in a single self-domain does not imply failure in all domains. Complexity thus permits maintenance of positive self-esteem despite specific failures.'[61] Criticism is then perceivable not as an attack on the singular, core identity we believe ourselves to be (my *true* self, my *total* worldview) but as addressed to a specific element or tension within our confident, plural self-concept.

A plural self-concept might helpfully figure into a world that is increasingly aware of not only its pluralism but also the social problems that arise in the consolidation of power across social groups in certain uncritical identity constellations. The best context for spotting defects in one's lived expressions of faith is a diverse community committed to

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58 Drew Westen, 'The Cognitive Self and the Psychological Self: Can We Put Our Selves Together?', *Psychological Inquiry*, 3.1 (1992), pp. 1–13 (p. 4).

59 Drew Westen, *Self and Society: Narcissism, Collectivism, and the Development of Morals* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 119, 123–124.

60 Markus and Wurf, 'The Dynamic Self-Concept', p. 303.

61 Westen, 'The Cognitive Self', p. 4. See also Patricia W. Linville, 'Self-Complexity and Affective Extremity: Don't Put All of Your Eggs in One Cognitive Basket', *Social Cognition*, 3.1 (1985), pp. 94–120.

radical obedience, seeing each other often enough or and having conversations important enough to recognise these things in each other. Who could better surface just where my national loyalties might be damaging my reading of the gospel or my sense of justice than someone from another nation or at least another point on the political spectrum? A commitment to religious liberty and the spirit of dissent could facilitate fellowship across a diversity of worldview constellations, which we might now hypothesise would correlate positively to the capacity of the members for seeing complexity not only in themselves but also in their fellows, their neighbours, and even their enemies. I wager we need such diversity to practise real peace, to unhinge the prevailing patterns of polarisation, and to undercut the battles between or among oversimplified, singular worldviews in which the authoritarian reactionary Christian would prefer to engage. Following the pattern of the early radical reformers, this could play out in social ethics as a commitment to engagement and disputation — perhaps with guidance from expert practitioners in the field of conflict transformation, which numerous inheritors of the radical reformation have become.

Baptism as an Ongoing Practice of Constellating Identities

From the outset, my constructive account of believers' baptism carries a sense of the arcane discipline (or 'discipline of the mystery'), referring to an ancient Christian way of indicating that some things are difficult to communicate in didactic forms and are best conveyed through interpersonal engagement. While the term 'baptism' in Christian circles indicates a specific practice by which some mixture of water and Spirit identify a person with Christ and his church, I argue this practice is best understood as an *ongoing* practice — more in the sense that one practises medicine or law. Put succinctly, believers' baptism is *the ongoing practice of analysing and constellating one's various identities and loyalties around the lordship of Jesus*.

What happens on the believing human side of baptism is an informed, public identification with the living, biblical, historical person of Jesus — a solidification of one's loyalty to this person and his way in the world — but this new identity and loyalty set in motion a cascade of

changes, big and small, that take a lifetime to play out. While many will have heard of the baptisms of Spirit and water, not least through the testimony of John the Baptist, Balthasar Hubmaier mentioned a third phase of baptism: blood. As theologian Thomas Finger explains,

> The first was the internal, often painful process that brings one to faith. The second was the public ceremony, valid only if it bore witness to the first. The third was 'daily mortification of the flesh' brought on largely by following Jesus in the world, culminating in martyrdom or deathbed.[62]

Inasmuch as the baptismal act commits one to dying to self and rising to new life in Christ, that new life entails future changes and ongoing repentance, dying to oneself by a thousand cuts, and an active posture of seeking alignment with Jesus. Some may prefer other ways of communicating this underlying reality — for example, that baptism is practised only once but remembered often. The language concerns me less than the impact: the identity constellation of a Christian sets Jesus as the centre and continually realigns as one discovers disorder between the gospel and whatever else there is. Lesser loyalties need not be abolished, but they must be set and kept in orbit around that bright, shining star in the centre of it all.

I anticipate that some will object to something in this description along the lines of a theological commitment, like the efficaciousness of Christ's work on the cross, or with reference to biblical passages that make the pivotal change within a person sound complete, as in Second Corinthians 5:17, 'So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away — look, what is new has come!' But it seems to me that to fall back on these firm, final pronouncements is to mistake one kind of truth for another and, thereby, to miss important aspects of the whole truth. I propose that we apply a theological ethic that admits of multiple aspects or 'moods' of truth, understood along the lines of how an artist might perceive a work's 'mood' as the state of mind or feeling it suggests. In this case, we might understand that something can be formally true, and thus worthy of one's confession of faith (e.g. the statements from Second

[62] Thomas N. Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (IVP Academic, 2004), p. 163.

Corinthians just above) while being experientially in process.[63] I submit there are multiple moods in which we are to understand baptism as a dying to self. In a formal-confessional sense, the believer does this once and for all — the act of baptism need not be repeated. But in a moral-pragmatic sense, the believer must continue to enact this death to self, with a thousand deaths of varying scales and timelines over the course of a lifetime. To misplace the concreteness of death-to-life, old-to-new-person claims is to sell short the normative model that baptism sets up for ongoing repentance and change.

Before closing, I would like to deepen the discipline of the mystery with a suggestive view to some relational components of baptism understood as an ongoing practice of identifying with Jesus across various social terrains over time. As a matter of discipleship, those who would identify (with) Jesus over time must pay attention to how Jesus identifies (with) both *us* and *others*.[64] For example, take Jesus's identification with 'the least of these', as in Matthew 25. Those who feel compelled to identify (with) Jesus must first hear the lament of the other as the voice of Jesus to them — identifying them and their place in the communion of persons. This voice, when recognised in its dignity, creates the occasion for responsibility, repentance, and restorative action. One may be tempted to think first of oneself as 'being the hands and feet of Christ' to another in dire circumstances whereas, to the contrary, Jesus identifies himself in them on his own account. Furthermore, no one should set out thinking they can rightly identify (with) Jesus in all circumstances based on what they think they know of him or themselves. When we think we have grasped for ourselves all the most important truth that is consonant with God's own will, we risk treating others (including God) as objects in our moral universes on that basis. And this problematic posture can bend even the truest and most beautiful theologies out of the spiritual, relational, person-oriented shape of faith.

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[63] This question of truth's many moods is deeply implicated in the theological tension classically located in the relationship between election and sanctification.

[64] For further development of this argument, see Jacob Alan Cook, 'Toward an Incarnational Theology of Identity', in *Justice and the Way of Jesus: Christian Ethics and the Incarnational Discipleship of Glen Stassen*, ed. by David P. Gushee and Reggie L. Williams (Orbis, 2020), pp. 25–38.

While my concepts and language may fail here or seem at present rather implausible given the strong environmental pressures we endure, my aim has been to begin marking some theological footholds that might enable encounters with Jesus, including those mediated by other persons, that genuinely surprise us by somehow upsetting the expectations of our stable worldviews, calling us to still further repentance, restoration, or even reformation.

Discipleship Without Borders: Anabaptist Lessons for Baptists on Rejecting the Idea of a Christian Nation

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Abstract
This article offers an Anabaptist-informed critique of the tendency in contemporary politics to conscript Christian identity into the service of nationalistic agendas. By drawing upon the historical witness of the Anabaptists, I argue that the idea of a 'Christian Nation', despite its seductive appeal, is not a sacred archetype, but a profane illusion and a self-contradiction. Instead, I will argue that Baptists today are called to a transformative engagement with the world that is grounded in radical discipleship and inspired by shared Baptist–Anabaptist convictions, such as freedom, dignity, and the importance of living out our faith as Baptists in a way that transcends political and national boundaries.

Keywords
Anabaptism; nationalism; authoritarianism; freedom; discipleship

Introduction

In an increasingly polarised political landscape, the intertwining of Christian identity with nationalistic rhetoric has become a significant feature of politics today in many countries, including the United Kingdom.[1] Since the Brexit Referendum, there has been a resurgence of claims that Britain is a 'Christian Nation', which reflects a global trend where religious faith is instrumentalised to provide legitimacy to authoritarian political ideologies.[2] This article argues that the

[1] Philip W. Barker, *Religious Nationalism in Modern Europe: If God be for Us* (Taylor & Francis, 2008), pp. 45–74.
[2] Jan Niklas Collet, 'Rechte Normalisierung und kirchlich-theologische Normalität', in *Rechte Normalisierung und politische Theologie: Eine Standortbestimmung*, ed. by Jan Niklas Collet, Julia Lis, and Gregor Taxacher (Pustet, 2021), pp. 158–182.

degeneration of Christian faith into an instrument of political power harms the witness of the church to the world.

The argument proceeds in several key stages. Firstly, I will explore the historical context of Anabaptism, focusing particularly on the conviction regarding the separation of church and state, and the voluntary nature of faith. Next, I will examine the current political climate marked by the rise of Christian Nationalism. In this section, I will illustrate how this ideology distorts the message of the gospel and conflates faith with political power. This discussion leads naturally into an elucidation of the Anabaptist critique of authority and its contemporary significance. This section emphasises the need for Baptists to recover their nonconformist prophetic voice that challenges oppressive structures and advocates for justice, peace, freedom, and dignity. The article concludes with a brief reflection on the significance of the 500th anniversary of the Anabaptist movement. By reinterpreting the Anabaptist vision of radical discipleship in today's context, my aim is to delineate a vision of discipleship without borders: a vision that prioritises the kingdom of God above national identities and allegiances and encourages Baptists and our ecumenical partners to rediscover the radical call to live differently and to witness to the world the saving power of the gospel.

What Baptists Can Learn from Anabaptists about Political Power and Christian Witness

Anabaptism emerged in the sixteenth century as a radical movement within the Reformation.[3] The Anabaptists' experience of persecution made them inherently suspicious of political power and the risks of coercion and violent persecution that result when the church and state are united into the totality of a single institution. Anabaptists were often subjected to oppressive decrees imposed by legislators acting on behalf of the Church–State who equated dissent with blasphemy and nonconformity with treason. The early Anabaptists maintained that the

[3] William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story: An Introduction to Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism* (Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 15–24.

church should avoid seeking dominance over society. Many argued that followers of Christ should avoid involvement in political affairs at any level.[4]

Out of this conviction arose the Anabaptist commitment to the separation between church and state. This belief was derived from the conviction that faith in Christ was a voluntary commitment rather than something that could either be imposed by law or conferred automatically simply by the contingency of one's birthplace or cultural milieu. The Anabaptists believed that civic religion was no substitute for costly gospel witness. The essence of faith consisted in a radical trust in God as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.[5] As Menno Simons insisted, 'It is vain that we are called Christians, that Christ died, that we are born in the day of grace, and baptised with water, if we do not walk according to His law […] and are not obedient to His word.'[6] Such faith in the crucified and risen Christ was a matter of deep, inward conviction of a free conscience responding to the call of Christ, rather than a cultural or national identity that could be endorsed by an outside institution, such as a church or a government.[7] This foundational conviction also underpinned the Anabaptist commitment to nonviolence, because Anabaptists interpreted Christ's teaching as advocating for a community characterised by love and costly obedience, rather than by worldly security enforced by the use of coercive power.

One of the aspects of the Anabaptist vision that I cherish is its emphasis on real and visible transformation of the world, not through force or coercion, but through the embodied witness of a community covenanted together in love and loyalty to Christ and his teachings.

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[4] For an overview of the diverse range of political convictions of the early anabaptists, see James M. Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword* (Wipf and Stock, 2002), pp. 27–29.

[5] Inseo Song, 'Baptism', in *T&T Clark Handbook of Anabaptism*, ed. by Brian C. Brewer (Bloomsbury, 2022), pp. 271–286 (p. 277).

[6] Simons, cited in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, trans. by L. Verduin, ed. by J. C. Wenger (Herald Press, 1956), p. 111.

[7] These convictions are set out with force and clarity in the writings of Hans Denck (1500–1527). See especially Denck's *Nuremburg Confession* (1525). See Geoffrey Dipple, 'The Spiritualist Anabaptists', in *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521–1700*, ed. by John D. Roth and James M. Stayer (Brill, 2007), pp. 257–297 (p. 262).

Harold Bender expressed this transformative emphasis in a famous lecture on the Anabaptist vision:

> The whole life was to be brought literally under the lordship of Christ in a covenant of discipleship, a covenant which the Anabaptist writers delighted to emphasize. The focus of the Christian life was to be not so much the inward experience of the grace of God, as it was for Luther, but the outward application of that grace to all human conduct and the consequent Christianization of all human relationships.[8]

The Anabaptists emphasised the infusion of God's grace into the world by the real transformation of interpersonal relationships, rather than by the acquisition and deployment of political power or institutional authority. This meant that they sought to embody the teachings of Christ in their daily lives by promoting peace, justice, and reconciliation in their communities. Even if a follower of Christ were promoted to serve in high office, the early Anabaptists regarded this calling not as an opportunity to exert power, but to expand one's capacity to serve and do good. As Balthasar Hubmaier (c.1480–1528)[9] maintained, a Christian in a position of authority

> does not rule […] Rather, he is aware that he is a servant of God, and he is diligent in acting according to the order of God, so that the pious are protected and the evil are punished. The Christian magistrate does not elevate himself above anyone; rather, he very truly takes to heart the words of Christ that the most preeminent should be like a servant.[10]

Moreover, their commitment to nonviolence and service was a radical challenge to the prevailing norms of their time. The radical gospel witness of the early Anabaptists was not merely a matter of internal piety, but also a demonstration of how discipleship could lead

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[8] Harold S. Bender, 'The Anabaptist Vision', in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision: A Sixtieth Anniversary Tribute to Harold Bender*, ed. by Guy F. Hershberger (Herald Press, 1957), pp. 29–54 (pp. 42–43).

[9] Hubmaier was a leading figure in the first generation of the Anabaptist movement. He made significant contributions to the development of Anabaptist theology and is best known for his writings on baptism, the church, and the separation of church and state. After being pursued by the authorities on account of his beliefs, he was eventually arrested by the authorities. After he refused to recant his Anabaptist beliefs, he was burned at the stake in Vienna on 10 March 1528.

[10] Hubmaier, cited in *The Radical Reformation*, ed. by Michael G. Baylor (Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 203.

to profound changes in society. This approach ultimately aimed at witnessing to Christ's love and justice by summoning the watching world to a deeper understanding of what it means to live in the saving power of Christ. Their legacy reminds us that true transformation occurs not through political domination, but through the humble and faithful witness of a community that reflects Christ's character in its everyday interactions.

This year, as we celebrate the 500th anniversary of Anabaptist witness, the influence of Anabaptist theology on Baptist identity and practice remains as relevant as at any other time since 1525. Anabaptist convictions are especially significant in helping Baptists today to navigate the complexities of contemporary politics. Historically, Baptists have inherited from Anabaptists a commitment to religious liberty, the voluntary nature of faith, and the separation of church and state.[11] As David Gushee points out, Baptists have historically played a crucial role in the development of modern democracy by advocating for the rejection of state Christianity in favour of religious disestablishment and the free exercise of religion within a democratic framework.[12] However, the temptation to align more closely with political power poses significant challenges for Baptists today. The Anabaptist caution against political entanglement and the importance of maintaining critical engagement with the world while rooted in gospel freedom is a prophetic message that Baptists throughout the world today should heed. In order to appreciate the Anabaptist critique of Christian identity politics, we need to consider some of the wider global trends that have led to a rise in nationalism and authoritarianism.

The End of the Liberal Consensus and the Emergence of New Forms of Authoritarianism

After the Second World War and the decisive victory of liberal democracy over fascism, there was a certain consensus concerning the

[11] For a summary of the historical debate about the extent to which the Anabaptists have shaped Baptist life and thought, see H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (B&H Publishing, 1987), pp. 83–85.
[12] David P. Gushee, *Defending Democracy from its Christian Enemies* (Eerdmans, 2023), p. 155.

universal desirability of liberal democracy — at least in the western world. Having defeated fascism in 1945, liberalism's triumph was consolidated in 1989 with the disintegration of Soviet communism and the seemingly inexorable expansion of liberal democracy throughout the world.[13] The triumphant liberal vision brought with it a set of normative assumptions, such as the inevitability and desirability of progress, the inherent dignity of human life, the subordination of the power of the state to the freedom of individuals, the need for a universal toleration of religious and political opinions, the promotion of the rule of law, the need to respect professional expertise, the desirability of reason and rational thought to resolve political disputes, and a general preference for peaceful relations between the nations through the diplomatic resolution of conflicts.

However, there are clear signs that this liberal democratic consensus is fracturing in today's world. The signs of the times indicate that we may be entering a new age of tribalism and nativist hostility, which feeds off popular resentment towards established social and political structures. Ethno-nationalist populism prioritises identity and allegiance to specific national groups over shared values and universal human rights.[14] The stone tablets upon which were inscribed the liberal codes of universal equality, tolerance, and human rights are being eroded, if not completely smashed by powerful new political forces in today's world. Scepticism toward this liberal consensus is taking root not only in traditionally authoritarian countries such as Russia and China, but also in countries that were once seen as bastions of liberal democracy, such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, as well as many European Union countries. Throughout the democratic West, we are witnessing the criminalisation of dissent, the demonisation of traditional media, and the displacement of rationality in favour of emotions as the means for settling political disputes.[15]

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[13] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

[14] Maureen A. Eger and Sarah Valdez, 'The Rise of Neo-nationalism', in *Europe at the Crossroads: Confronting Populist, Nationalist, and Global Challenges*, ed. by Pieter Bevelander and Ruth Wodak (Nordic Academic Press, 2019), pp. 113–134.

[15] Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (Crown, 2018), pp. 81, 191; Anne Applebaum, *Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism* (Knopf Doubleday, 2020).

The general mood of epistemological scepticism that characterises the postmodern condition has created a dangerous climate of relativism in which authoritarian politicians can lie and even commit crimes with apparent impunity.[16] Political leaders, especially authoritarian 'strongmen', have artfully exploited the postmodern propensity to regard truth not as an objective reality or a social virtue, but as a mere expression of the will to power. This new climate of epistemological scepticism has resulted in a resurgence of diverse political movements advocating for alternative authoritarian models. One such movement that has emerged with renewed vehemence is Christian Nationalism, which has conscripted Christianity into the cause of authoritarian politics.

Christian Nationalism is a belief system that regards the state as an instrument of God's will. Its adherents seek to create a national identity based on supposedly biblical or Christian principles. Christian Nationalist thinking is usually defined by its promotion of 'white culture', 'Christian civilization', and a 'traditional way of life'.[17] Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry observe that Christian Nationalism is not solely a religious belief: 'The "Christianity" of Christian Nationalism represents something more than religion […] it includes assumptions of nativism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity, along with divine sanction for authoritarian control and militarism.'[18] Explaining the link between authoritarianism and Christian Nationalism, David Gushee remarks that 'democracy is sacrificed […] in part because Western liberal democracy is now understood to be a Trojan horse for godless left-liberalism, and in part because a Christian holy war to defeat the enemies of God is far more important'.[19] Christian Nationalism, in its zeal to enact God's

[16] Matthew D'Ancona, *Post-Truth: The New War on Truth and How to Fight Back* (Ebury Press, 2017).
[17] Philip S. Gorski and Samuel L. Perry, *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 11.
[18] Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, cited in Gushee, *Defending Democracy*, p. 55.
[19] Gushee, *Defending Democracy*, p. 102.

righteousness on a godless society through the imposition of legislation, wages an evangelical crusade against minorities who do not conform to its specific religious standards.

Anabaptism serves as one of the most effective antidotes to Christian Nationalism today because it emphasises loyalty to Christ above national identity and advocates for a faith that transcends cultural and ethnic boundaries. By focusing on the teachings of Jesus and the call of the gospel to love and serve all people, Anabaptists challenge the divisive tendencies of Christian Nationalism, which seeks to create a national identity rooted in narratives of exclusion and racial and ethnic superiority. For Anabaptists, Christian faith signifies much more than an ethnic boundary marker, a repository of cultural practices, or a system of doctrines and professed beliefs. Instead, for Anabaptists, being a Christian entails a disciplined life of obedience to the actual teachings of Christ. This commitment involves responding to Christ's call by embodying Christ-like behaviour, which results in life that exhibits the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, this call is universal in scope, rather than confined to any specific group that uses Christian beliefs to bolster ideologies of national or even racial superiority.

Resisting the Theocratic Temptation

Despite this vehement criticism of Christian Nationalism, it is important to recognise the legitimate aspirations of many who sympathise with Christian Nationalist ideologies.[20] Some people sincerely believe that by campaigning for legislation informed by Christian faith they will help to create a more moral and just society. There have also been rapid material changes to people's lives as a result of globalisation and secularisation that have left many Christians feeling isolated and insecure.[21] It is therefore understandable why many people would be attracted to an ideology such as Christian Nationalism that offers a focus for them to

[20] Pamela Cooper-White, *The Psychology of Christian Nationalism Why People Are Drawn in and How to Talk Across the Divide* (Fortress, 2022), pp. 9–38.

[21] Andrew R. Lewis, 'Is Public Support for Religious Freedom Nationalistic?', in *Trump, White Evangelical Christians, and American Politics: Change and Continuity*, ed. by Anand Edward Sokhey and Paul A. Djupe (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024), pp. 227–254.

affirm the alleged superiority of their values and beliefs in cultural concepts that are familiar to them.[22] In order to offer a sustainable critique of Christian Nationalism, it is necessary to acknowledge its subtle appeal and seductive power, especially to people who feel alienated from the political establishment.

Notwithstanding the sincere motivations of many people who sympathise with Christian Nationalism and its obvious appeal to those who profess Christian faith, I maintain that it is a seduction that must be resisted and vehemently opposed by all people who profess allegiance to the gospel of Christ. The underlying theocratic assumptions of Christian Nationalism are not only harmful to political life, but also toxic to the unity of the church and the integrity and credibility of its gospel witness to the world. Moreover, even as we acknowledge the progress made by some faith-informed governments in enacting humane laws, Anabaptists remind us that advancing the kingdom of God can never be achieved by enacting legislation that favours the religious majority and discriminates against minorities. Any attempt to subsume Christian faith into an ideological project must be exposed and rejected as an unjustified encroachment on the dignity and freedom of the gospel.[23]

Anabaptists also remind us that historically, all forms of theocracy have ended in failure — often bloody failure. The conflation of religious authority with political power results not in the establishment of God's kingdom on earth, but in the perpetuation of unjust systems that prioritise earthly power and in the neglect of the radical vision of communal justice and compassion that Jesus

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[22] As Whitehead and Perry put it, Christian Nationalism provides an ideological basis for many self-serving assumptions: 'Christianity is truer than other religions; America is a nation chosen over others; European civilization is more advanced than others; White people are superior to Black and Brown people; and men are naturally dominant over women.' See Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 2020), p. x.

[23] John Howard Yoder, *Anabaptism and Reformation in Switzerland: An Historical and Theological Analysis of the Dialogues Between Anabaptists and Reformers* (Pandora Press, 2004), pp. 277–281. No reference to J. H. Yoder can go without comment in the light of his extensive sexual abuse of women as documented in Rachel Waltner Goossen, 'Defanging the Beast: Mennonite Responses to John Howard Yoder's Sexual Abuse', *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 89 (2015), pp. 7–80. Nevertheless, his works currently remain in the scholarly domain and are cited here in full recognition of the problematic nature of such citations.

proclaimed and embodied.[24] Moreover, Baptists themselves, despite their deep Christian faith, have frequently faced oppression from Christian lawmakers who equated dissent with blasphemy and nonconformity with treason. Efforts by governments and state-endorsed churches to 'Christianise' the populace through top-down legal restrictions have not only undermined individual dignity and freedom but have also proven ineffective and counterproductive, leading to division, persecution, and violence.

Anabaptists also remind us that vehement lobbying on contentious issues like abortion, immigration control, or uncritical support for the State of Israel is no substitute for costly gospel witness. Moreover, such political campaigning often leads to Christianity being subsumed into nefarious political agendas. Ideological forms of Christianity result in oppressive and unjust forms of control. Anabaptists insist that the gospel must be proclaimed and received in a spirit of freedom in a way that respects the dignity of every individual, recognising their inherent worth as created in the image of God. Any gospel message that is devoid of freedom and dignity loses its saving power.

All types of theocracy contradict this core principle of gospel freedom, even when the theocratic authorities claim to act under the guise of upholding 'Christian values'. History has shown that the merging of politics and religion does not bring about spiritual renewal; instead, it deepens societal divisions into opposing factions, such as 'liberal/conservative', 'pro-choice/pro-life', 'pro-Israel/pro-Palestine', and so on. These polarising conditions create confusion and disorientation among Christians, leading many to side with authoritarian political groups in the so-called 'culture wars'. Baptists, learning from their Anabaptists cousins about the dangers of political entanglements, should avoid taking sides in these polarising debates and instead provide a counter-narrative to the binary thinking prevalent in the public discourse.

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[24] A. James Reimer, *Toward an Anabaptist Political Theology Law, Order, and Civil Society* (Cascade, 2014), p. 13.

One of the most important lessons that Baptists can learn from Anabaptists is the conviction that faith cannot be coerced.[25] According to the Anabaptist understanding of faith, people become Christians not through the accidents of geography or by state-imposed edicts, but by the free and conscious response of obedience to the way of Jesus.[26] Anabaptist theology maintains that whenever faith is enforced by a church or government, Christian faith loses its salvific character. This conviction served as the foundation for the early Anabaptist commitment to the separation of church and state, deemed essential for genuine religious freedom.[27] Baptists have strongly asserted the belief that it is impossible to force Christian doctrines into the hearts and minds of individuals through coercion. Since the time of Thomas Helwys, Baptists have contended that the 'rule of man' (*regum hominis*) cannot be transformed by political decrees into the city of God (*civitas Dei*).[28] The principles of freedom and dignity inherent in Christianity fundamentally clash with the principles of coercion and domination present in political systems, even when those in power identify themselves as 'Christian'.

To preserve the freedom of the gospel, it is necessary to maintain a distinct separation between the kingdom of Caesar and the kingdom of God. Christ instructed his disciples to proclaim the gospel in word and deed and to establish the kingdom through radical acts of love and service, rather than through force and oppression. In Christ, God reveals himself to the world not through power and authority but through freedom and sacrificial love. The gospel invites individuals to respond freely to the initiatives of divine grace. Jesus forms disciples not through top-down, state-enforced mandates, but by 'the allure of gentleness', which encourages a voluntary obedience to the way of Jesus. The gospel becomes a saving message not when it is invoked within a political framework to support a dominant ideology, but when it is

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[25] Thomas A. Brady Jr., *German Histories in the Age of Reformations, 1400–1650* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 330.
[26] Walter B. Shurden, *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms* (Smyth & Helwys, 1993), p. 59.
[27] Bender, 'The Anabaptist Vision', pp. 29–30.
[28] W. R. Estep, 'Anabaptists, Baptists, and The Free Church Movement', *Criswell Theological Review*, 6 (1993), pp. 303–307 (p. 306); Helwys, *Mystery of Iniquity*, ed. by Richard Groves (Mercer University Press, 1998).

proclaimed as a revolutionary call to love, repentance, and reconciliation. The gospel message summons people to respond freely to God's love by entering into a transformative relationship with Christ that transcends all cultural, social, and political boundaries.[29]

How Does the Church Witness to the Rule of God without Itself Ruling?

It is sometimes assumed that the Anabaptist emphasis on separation between the church and the world necessarily results in a sectarian posture of complete withdrawal from the world. The Schleitheim Confession (1527) expressed the Anabaptist position in seemingly uncompromising terms: 'It does not befit a Christian to be a magistrate: The rule of the government is according to the flesh, that of the Christians according to the spirit.'[30] There are instances in which Anabaptist communities have sought to withdraw from the world, but such a withdrawal is by no means the only way that the Anabaptist vision finds political expression. Although Anabaptists historically have disavowed the use of force, they have generally recognised the legitimacy of secular authorities that exercise lawful authority in order to maintain order and restrain evil doers. Hubmaier maintained that 'the sword has been given to the authorities so that they can maintain the common peace of the land with it'.[31] Even the Schleitheim Confession acknowledged the legitimacy of the 'sword' (an Anabaptist metaphor for political power) as something 'ordained of God' for the 'punishment of the wicked'. Crucially, Schleitheim asserted that political authority wielded by secular rulers inherently resides 'outside the perfection of

[29] Joshua T. Searle, 'Baptist Perspectives on Freedom and the Kingdom of God', in *Baptists and the Kingdom of God: World Perspectives Through Four Interpretive Lenses*, ed. by T. Laine Scales and João B. Chaves (Baylor University Press, 2023), pp. 271–290.

[30] Cited in Robin W. Lovin, *An Introduction to Christian Ethics: Goals, Duties, and Virtues* (Abingdon, 2011), p. 136. The Schleitheim Confession is one of the earliest and most significant documents of the Anabaptist movement, which emerged during the Protestant Reformation. The confession outlines the core beliefs and practices of Anabaptists and remains influential to the present day.

[31] Hubmaier, cited in Michael I. Bochenski, *Transforming Faith Communities* (Lutterworth Press, 2017), p. 50.

Christ'.[32] This core belief protected Anabaptist communities from the naïve notion that the kingdom of God could be realised through legislation or enforced by military might, while also safeguarding them from the idolisation of secular authorities.[33]

The early Anabaptists were also not afraid of admonishing and criticising secular rulers who they deemed to have transgressed the proper restraints of maintaining peace and order and upholding basic justice. The early Anabaptist leader, Menno Simons, often wrote to secular magistrates, admonishing them to act justly and with regard to the oppressed. 'Your task,' he wrote, 'is to do justice between a man and his neighbour, to deliver the oppressed out of the hand of the oppressor.' He further maintained that the secular magistrates were called by God to 'enlarge, help and protect the kingdom of God' by ruling wisely and justly.[34]

The example of Menno Simons and other Anabaptist leaders who boldly spoke truth to power illustrates a vital way of witnessing to God's reign without exercising dominion. Their prophetic critique of power structures that perpetuate injustice, promote war, and inhibit genuine freedom serves as a model for how to challenge and transform society. One of the most urgent tasks of Baptist theology today, I believe, is to deconstruct religious ideologies that confer legitimacy on authoritarian and oppressive governments. In this regard, the Anabaptists provide a wealth of wisdom and insights that can help Baptists to reclaim the core tenets of their faith: principles of peace, dignity, freedom, justice, and community, rooted in the teachings of Jesus. By returning to Anabaptist convictions on discipleship, nonviolence, and the separation of church and state, Baptists can develop a robust theological framework that resists complicity with

[32] John Howard Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution* (Baker, 2009), p. 178.
[33] Ted Grimsrud, *Embodying the Way of Jesus: Anabaptist Convictions for the Twenty-First Century* (Wipf and Stock, 2007), p. 143.
[34] Simons, cited in Lydia Harder, 'Power and Authority in Mennonite Theological Development', in *Power, Authority and the Anabaptist Tradition*, ed. by Calvin Redekop and Benjamin Redekop (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), pp. 73–94 (pp. 80–81).

power structures and witnesses to the coming reign of God.[35] Moreover, dissent against unjust political structures and dehumanising ideologies is not simply a negative act of rebellion, but a positive expression of the church's identity and vocation in the world.

Baptist churches that are true to their own nonconformist tradition — as well as to the teachings of Christ — should be guided by the gospel of freedom. This means that they should not build a separate relationship with the state or be lured by promises of patronage and preferential treatment in return for their loyalty and collaboration. Jesus calls his church not to establish a theocracy, but to become 'a community of *voluntary* commitment, willing for the sake of its calling to take upon itself the hostility of the given society'.[36] From their earliest origins, Baptists have recognised the danger of trying to apply the label 'Christian' to any state. Baptists have inherited from their early European Anabaptist forbearers a deep suspicion of the concepts of both a 'state church' and 'a Christian nation'.[37] Baptists have tended to regard these concepts *not* as sacred archetypes, but as profane illusions. A fundamental conviction of the early Anabaptists was that when the church and state operated in harmony in ways that violated human dignity, the church ceased to be the church.[38]

The Anabaptists also remind us about the rule of the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Caesar operate on fundamentally different principles. While the kingdom of God embodies freedom, love, and voluntary commitment, the kingdom of Caesar often relies on coercion, domination, and the bureaucratic enforcement of laws. Baptists must remain wary of mingling these two kingdoms. The Anabaptist suspicion of political power could help us to recognise the propensity for state power to distort the essence of the gospel. Anabaptist interpretations of the gospel remind us that to imbibe the gospel message results in a

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[35] Harold S. Bender, 'Anabaptist-Mennonite Attitude Toward the State', in *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* ed. by Harold S. Bender, Cornelius Krahn, and C. Henry Smith (Mennonite Publishing House, 1955), pp. 611–619 (p. 612).
[36] John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (Eerdmans, 1980), p. 45.
[37] Joshua T. Searle, 'British Baptists and Brexit', *The Baptist Ministers' Journal*, 349 (January 2021), pp. 10–20 (pp. 10–12).
[38] William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story* (Eerdmans, 1977), p. 194.

revelation of a new order of reality: namely, God's kingdom, which is set in opposition to the world order and which spells the end of the false harmony of Christian piety and political power. There is great truth in the saying that 'all states and economies are, in essence, unchristian and opposed to the Kingdom of God'.[39]

In Christ, God reveals Himself to us not in power, authority, and sovereignty, but in freedom, love, and sacrifice. Moreover, the temptation for Christians to seek political dominance often mirrors the same idolatry that beset ancient Israel when they desired a king to lead them like the surrounding nations (1 Sam 8). The Christian pursuit of national sovereignty undermines the universal claims of the kingdom of God that transcends national boundaries and operates from a fundamentally different paradigm that prioritises self-sacrificing love and service over authority and control.[40] I believe that the lure of political sovereignty was one of the temptations that Christ rejected in the wilderness (Matt 4:1–11). I would even speculate that among the kingdoms of the world that Satan presented to Christ during the temptation were all those nations and empires of the world which would later call themselves 'Christian'.[41]

In a world in which authoritarian regimes frequently invoke Christian ideas of morality and civilisation for electoral gain, Baptists are called to view all political expressions of Christianity through a hermeneutic of suspicion. This perspective does not imply outright hostility but instead encourages vigilance against the idea that faith or morality can be imposed by military force or legal statutes.[42] For the early Anabaptists like Balthasar Hubmaier it was a matter of fundamental conviction that genuine faith is the result not of state or ecclesiastical decrees, but of a voluntary (and often costly) decision to live in obedience to the way of Christ.[43] They maintained that when faith

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[39] Nikolai Berdyaev, *Smysl Tvorchestva* [The Meaning of Creativity] (Moscow: Astrel, 2011), p. 294.

[40] I developed this point in an earlier article, 'British Baptists and Brexit', see footnote 37 above.

[41] Nikolai Berdyaev, *Tvorchestbo i Obyektivatsiya* [Creativity and Objectification] (Moscow: T8RUGRAM, 2018), p. 242.

[42] Reinder Bruinsma, *The Body of Christ: A Biblical Understanding of the Church* (Review and Herald Press, 2009), p. 136.

[43] Estep, *Anabaptist Story*, pp. 261–263.

is coerced, it loses its saving power and degrades into mere compliance to worldly authorities. As Hubmaier pointedly remarked, 'Faith is a work of God and not of the heretics' tower.'[44] The Anabaptists remind us that true freedom is found in obedience to the teachings of Christ (*Nachfolge*) rather than the pursuit of political dominance. I believe this is an important lesson that is relevant for Baptists and our ecumenical partners today.[45]

Rather than withdrawing from the world, as some sectarian approaches suggest, Baptists are called to prophetic engagement, which has always been an essential element of Anabaptist thought.[46] While sectarian disengagement might have been a necessary strategy for the persecuted communities of the original Anabaptist movement, such a posture is no longer adequate for the challenges of the twenty-first century. Faith should be actively lived out in all spheres of life. Freedom in Christ entails the freedom to witness beyond the church walls.[47] This involves a critical solidarity with the world that allows for meaningful witness without compromising core convictions. The Anabaptist tradition of prophetic witness to the reign of God encourages Baptists to uphold the dignity and freedom of all individuals, in line with the gospel mandate to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour (Luke 4:18–19). When engaging politically, the goal should not be to impose Christian values via legislation but rather to extend God's grace and truth through radical acts of faith, hope, and love that reflect the principles of the kingdom of God. This approach aligns with the Anabaptist vision of the church as a counter-cultural community that witnesses to the resurrection of Christ, rather than a mere functionary of the state that exerts its dominance through military might or the imposition of legislation.[48]

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[44] Hubmaier, cited in Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword*, p. 263.

[45] Searle, 'Baptist Perspectives on Freedom and the Kingdom of God', pp. 271–290.

[46] Michael Ian Bochenski, *Transforming Faith Communities: A Comparative Study of Radical Christianity in Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism and Late Twentieth-Century Latin America* (Lutterworth, 2017), p. 77.

[47] Joshua T. Searle and Mykhailo N. Cherenkov, *A Future and a Hope: Mission, Theological Education and the Transformation of Post-Soviet Society* (Wipf & Stock, 2014), pp. 118–119.

[48] Stefan Paas, 'The Counter-Cultural Church: An Analysis of the Neo-Anabaptist Contribution to Missional Ecclesiology in the Post-Christendom West', *Ecclesiology*, 15.3 (2019), pp. 283–301.

Baptists should embrace the Anabaptist idea that the mission of the church does not commit the church to support any particular political ideology or regime. It is a common misunderstanding that the Anabaptist tradition is opposed to all forms of political power and secular authority. Anabaptists have long argued that political authorities, in so far as they act within the bounds of lawful authority and in accordance with the dignity and freedom of the people, should be obeyed and respected as necessary for maintaining order.[49] Yet these authorities should never claim unquestioning allegiance or dictate to the church how the church should witness to the reign of God. The Anabaptist tradition echoes the essential mandate of the early church that true authority lies with God and not with any human leader or institution (Acts 5:29).

Conclusion: A Call to Radical Discipleship without Borders

Embracing a more nuanced approach to discipleship, rooted in Anabaptist values, allows for a transformative engagement in the world. An Anabaptist vision of radical discipleship without borders calls believers to recognise the inherent dignity of each individual, regardless of their nationality, race, or religious affiliation. Furthermore, the call to radical discipleship requires an active engagement in society that goes beyond merely opposing secular policies or ideologies. It invites Christians to embody the gospel's message in ways that promote peace, justice, and reconciliation without relying on political power as a vehicle for change. For Baptists today, this means both advocating for the marginalised and voicing dissent against injustice while recognising that our primary allegiance lies with the kingdom of God.

As we commemorate the 500th anniversary of the origins of the Anabaptist movement, this historical moment offers an opportunity to reflect on the enduring significance of Anabaptist principles in contemporary faith communities and to reimagine what it means to live out our convictions in today's changing world. Radical discipleship, as

[49] For example, Hubmaier maintained that 'the sword has been given to the authorities so that they can maintain the common peace of the land with it' — cited in Bochenski, *Transforming Faith Communities*, p. 50.

exemplified by the Anabaptists, rejects the notion of a 'Christian nation' and instead advocates for a vision of community that transcends cultural and political boundaries. This perspective compels us to actively engage with societal issues, not merely in opposition to secular policies or ideologies, but by embodying the gospel's saving message through words and deeds of love, peace, justice, and reconciliation. For Baptists today, this means recognising that our primary allegiance lies with the kingdom of God, which transcends any earthly political system.

This call to discipleship invites us to be a prophetic voice in our communities. We fulfil this prophetic mandate not through the imposition of laws or mandates that reflect allegedly 'Christian' ideologies, but by witnessing to the saving power of the gospel. As we reflect on the legacy of the Anabaptists, I hope that Baptists will renew their commitment to the gospel values of community, peace, and the transformative power of the gospel in a world that desperately needs hope and healing. The challenge posed by our historic Anabaptist forbearers today is to honour their heroic legacy while reinterpreting their vision of radical discipleship in the context of today's complex realities. Therefore, my hope is that this 500th anniversary will not only remind us of our rich heritage but also inspire us to engage in a radical gospel witness that remains receptive to the movement of the Spirit both within and beyond our borders.

Robert Robinson (1735–1790), Baptist Minister in Cambridge, on Anabaptistic Convictions

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Abstract
Robert Robinson (1753–1790) was an influential Baptist minister and thinker, whose ministry spanned three decades in St Andrew's Street Baptist Church, Cambridge. There has been no recent scholarly treatment of Robinson's life and work as a whole. What has been done tends to see him through the eyes of others. Robinson's ability as a speaker and writer led to his being asked to write a history of the Baptist movement. In the completed *History of Baptism*, a work ultimately of 566 pages, Robinson was wide-ranging. The focus of this article is on what Robinson wrote about Anabaptism. Sections of his book covered many other aspects of baptismal practice. The article examines what Robinson said about the different types of Anabaptists that existed. It then goes on to consider the contested convictions which Robinson found in Anabaptism. Finally, Robinson's work on Anabaptism in relation to baptism and the church is covered.

Keywords
Robert Robinson; *History of Baptism*; Anabaptism; contested convictions

Introduction

Robert Robinson, an influential Baptist minister and thinker, was born in Swaffham, Norfolk, in the East of England (East Anglia). His father, Michael Robinson, was a customs officer and his mother, Mary (Wilkin), was from a better-off family, with whom she had a strained relationship. Michael died when Robert was aged five and an uncle helped to support Robert in his education. His mother had to work hard to keep the family together. At fourteen, Robert was apprenticed to a hair-dresser in London, and later to a butcher, but his real desire was to study. He experienced evangelical conversion through the preaching of a leader in the Evangelical Revival, George Whitefield. When Robinson heard Whitefield, he initially pitied 'the poor deluded Methodists' but came away 'envying their happiness'. He then began to attend the Tabernacle,

in London, where Whitefield preached, and his conversion took place three years later.[1] A move back to East Anglia followed, and Robinson began to preach, first among Calvinistic Methodists, including at a Tabernacle in Norwich established by Whitefield.[2] For a time he preached to an independent group, then among Baptists, and he was baptised by immersion in 1759. His exceptional ability was recognised. A Baptist congregation meeting in the Stone Yard, St Andrew's Street, Cambridge, heard that Robinson, then aged 23, 'might perhaps be persuaded to undertake the pastorate'.[3] A move took place, resulting in the whole of his ministry being in Cambridge. As well as his preaching and pastoral work, his voracious reading led to his producing a significant range of books.

There has been no recent scholarly treatment of Robinson's life and work as a whole. Two articles, in 2019 and 2023, have examined Robinson through six letters by Andrew Fuller, a leading Baptist exponent of evangelical Calvinism.[4] Jeongmo Yoo looked at Fuller's critique of Robinson's desire to avoid allegorical interpretations of Scripture.[5] A case in point was the Song of Songs, but Yoo's article extended beyond the issue of the Song to look at interpretations of 'ceremonies' in the Old Testament. Fuller saw spiritual meaning in ritual cleansing, whereas Robinson offered some alternatives to do with physical cleanliness. While Yoo referred to Robinson's work (which was a sermon) *The Doctrine of Ceremonies* (1780), he did not utilise it. When *The Doctrine of Ceremonies* is read, questions can be raised about Fuller's narrow focus. Robinson wrote that 'the Mediator of the New Testament' is Jesus Christ, and in him is found 'a priest not stained with

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1 Luke Tyerman, *The Life of the Rev. George Whitefield*, 2 vols, 2nd edn (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1890), 2, p. 408.

2 George Dyer, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Robert Robinson* (London: G. and J. Robinson, 1796), pp. 25–26. Dyer's is the most substantial biography of Robinson, but he is not reliable as an interpreter of Robinson's theology since he wished to portray Robinson as having abandoned evangelical views.

3 Graham W. Hughes, *With Freedom Fired* (Carey Kingsgate Press,1955), p. 16.

4 For Fuller, see Peter J. Morden, *The Life and Thought of Andrew Fuller (1754–1815)* (Paternoster, 2015).

5 Jeongmo Yoo, 'Allegory or Literal Historical Interpretation?: Andrew Fuller's Critique of Robert Robinson's View of the Canonicity of the Song of Songs', *Evangelical Quarterly*, 90.3 (2019), pp. 264–288. See p. 279.

the blood of bulls and goats', but 'one who by his own blood obtained redemption for us, and ever liveth to make intercession for all'. Robinson continued with an exhortation to be involved in 'disseminating the gospel of Christ', and in words that show Anabaptist sympathies he encouraged believers to 'go forth without the camp bearing his reproach: animated with the Joy that is set before us, let us endure the cross and despise the shame'.[6]

The article in 2023 by Ryan Rindels also looked at the six letters by Fuller, but as with Yoo the use of Robinson's own work is scant.[7] On the basis of Fuller's letters, Rindels described Robinson as a 'rationalist and reductionist'. The Song again featured, with Rindels seeing Fuller's interpretation as submitted to Scripture and engaged with the Christian tradition. But Robinson also followed Christian thinking as espoused, for example, by Sebastian Castellio, who queried allegory and was also known for opposing Calvin over the sentence of death passed on Michael Servetus. Robinson, like Castellio, argued strongly for freedom of conscience.[8] In Fuller's 'On the Influence of Satan on the Human Mind', Rindels sees Fuller as opposing Robinson's alleged view that 'the human mind operates in an autonomous manner that precludes penetration by demonic beings'.[9] Once more, engagement with Robinson himself would have helped. Robinson wrote, 'The design of the devil is to keep men in ignorance, and as he could not keep the gospel out of the world, he maketh it his great business to keep it out of the hearts of men.'[10] It is unfortunate that in such doctrinal areas some authors associate Robinson with the views of Joseph Priestley, a leading Unitarian. Priestley referred to Robinson as a Unitarian, but admitted that he did not know Robinson well.[11] This article is not about Robinson's supposed unorthodoxy, but does examine an aspect — a

[6] Robert Robinson, *The Christian Doctrine of Ceremonies* (London: C. Etherington, 1781), pp. 25–26. A sermon.
[7] Ryan Rindels, 'Rationalist and Reductionist: Andrew Fuller's Response to Robert Robinson in Six Letters', *Perichoresis*, 21.2 (2023), pp. 84–96.
[8] Nicholas Thompson, 'Does the Cause Make the Martyr? Sebastian Castellio and John Calvin debate the Execution of Michael Servatus', in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Christian Martyrdom*, ed. by Paul Middleton (Wiley, 2020), pp. 271–286.
[9] Rindels, 'Rationalist', p. 92.
[10] Robinson, *Ceremonies*, p. 27
[11] Joseph Priestley, *Reflections on Death* (Birmingham: J. Belcher, 1790), pp. iii, 21.

neglected one — of his theological enterprise: Robinson's major work on baptism and specifically 'anabaptistical' (as he put it) views.

Ministry and Community

Robinson can be understood properly only by taking full account of his primary calling as a pastor. For two years, 1759–1761, he preached at the Stone Yard in Cambridge, and his ministry was fruitful, but he was hesitant to respond to the many requests he received from members of the church and others to be their pastor. He was aware of his lack of training: in 1761, however, he accepted a call and was ordained. The members at that point numbered thirty-four. Not much could be given to Robinson by way of financial support, and he took up farming to supplement what he received; yet he and his wife Ellen (Payne), as well as caring for their growing family, welcomed needy people into their home.[12] The congregation expanded. A month after his ordination, Robert Robinson wrote to a relative, John Robinson: 'Touching the work of God amongst us, — I bless his holy name. We are not left without witness, — we have many here, upon whom we hope there is a good work begun, who seem to be giving all diligence, to make their calling, and election sure, and these are chiefly young persons.'[13] The way Robert Robinson attracted younger people, especially students, was to be increasingly significant.

Alongside his concern for those outside the church, Robinson sought to build up a strong sense of community within the congregation. He wrote in the St Andrew's Street *Church Book* that church members were marked by 'faithfulness, forbearance, and tenderness to each other', and his own experience was that members 'tenderly loved him'. He and Ellen had 'fathers, brothers, sisters'.[14] In 1762, Robert Robinson again wrote to John Robinson on the subject of friendship, recalling

[12] Dyer, *Memoirs*, 136–138. Dyer became a tutor of some of the Robinson children for a time. See Timothy Whelan, 'George Dyer and Dissenting Culture, 1777–1796', *The Charles Lamb Bulletin*, 155 (Spring 2012), pp. 9–30.

[13] Robert Robinson to John Robinson, 11 July 1761, in Timothy Whelan, 'Six Letters of Robert Robinson from Dr Williams's Library', *Baptist Quarterly*, 39.7 (2002), pp. 347–359.

[14] *Church Book: St Andrew's Street Baptist Church, Cambridge 1720–1832*, ed. by L. G. Champion and K. A. C. Parsons (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1991), pp. 20-21, 25-26, citing Robinson.

hearing Whitefield say that 'parting with friends was worse to him than death itself'. For Robert Robinson, as expressed in this letter, Jesus was 'a friend' as well as head of the church. Next to fellowship with Christ, 'communion with the members', was something to be desired and he added that 'I can truly say, to me no blessing equals it'. In human friendship imperfections were present, whereas in Christ there was 'no fear of discovering any imperfection'. In a simple testimony, Robert Robinson said, 'I love him too little.'[15] His experience was more publicly expressed in the congregational hymns he wrote, such as 'Come thou fount of every blessing', which includes the line, 'Oh to grace how great a debtor'.[16]

The membership at St Andrew's Street grew consistently, largely through conversions. In a letter in 1766, Robinson wrote of 'many avenues to the human heart'. He included fear, hope, grief, and joy. Through all of these, God could work as 'his blessed word' was read and preached.[17] By 1774 the church membership was 120.[18] With many more attending, a chapel was built seating 600. Financial help came from some wealthy supporters; the building was filled and over-filled on Sundays.[19] 1774 saw Robinson's first published work, *Arcana* (Latin, mysteries), with topics including the right of private judgement, the civil magistrate, and persecution. He commended Quakers like William Penn; extolled innovation as intrinsic to science and the arts; repudiated the falsity of religion supported by the state; and urged Methodists to go back to the spirit of John Wesley and Whitefield.[20] Themes such as his repugnance for religious persecution would feature in his work on

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15 Robert Robinson to John Robinson, 11 October 1762, in Whelan, 'Six Letters'.

16 *A Dictionary of Hymnology*, ed. by John Julian, 2 vols (John Murray, 1970), 2, p. 969. This was originally published in 1892 and has undergone numerous reprints since then. See Michael A. G. Haykin, '"Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing": Robert Robinson's Hymnic Celebration of Sovereign Grace', in *Ministry of Grace: Essays in Honor of John G. Reisinger*, ed. by Steve West (New Covenant Media, 2007), pp. 31–43.

17 Robert Robinson to John Robinson, 30 November 1766, in Whelan, 'Six Letters', pp. 354–355.

18 *Church Book*, ed. by Champion and Parsons, p. 51, citing Robinson. For more see L. G. Champion, 'Robert Robinson: A Pastor in Cambridge', *Baptist Quarterly*, 31.5 (January 1986), pp. 241–246.

19 Len Addicott, 'Introduction', *Church Book*, p. xiii.

20 Robinson, *Arcana* (Cambridge: Fletcher & Hodson, 1774).

Anabaptism. *Arcana* created interest within Cambridge University and among those attending St Andrew's Street by the 1770s were university students and some tutors. Dissenters were barred from graduating from Cambridge, and most students would have known only Church of England worship. Some were attentive. Others interrupted the services. Robinson was deeply committed to defending freedom, including freedom not to believe.[21] Alongside this conviction, he preached, and published in 1776, a satirical sermon about poor behaviour in worship. Improvement ensued.[22]

As well as preaching in Cambridge itself, Robinson engaged in wider ministry around Cambridgeshire villages. He was assisted by John Berridge, a Church of England clergyman and fellow of Clare Hall in the University. Robinson sent the biblical texts on which he preached in advance. One of his published books contained sixteen 'discourses' that were 'addressed to Christian assemblies in villages near Cambridge'. His varied themes included God as the 'Lovely Father'; Christ as a teacher; care for the poor, especially widows; the divine inspiration of Scripture; forgiveness through Christ's death; holiness of life by the Spirit; and love of enemies.[23] His intent was always pastoral, and in 1776 he published 'A Pastoral Letter', with the title *A Plea for the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ*, which was indebted to James Abbadie, a French Protestant minister and scholar, in his *Vindication of the Truth of the Christian Religion* (English translation, 1694). This was well received by Dissenters and some Church of England readers too. Robinson argued that either 'Jesus Christ is truly and properly God' or his worshippers are 'guilty of idolatry'. At the same time, he felt the 'tenderest compassion' for those 'mistaken' on this subject.[24] French Protestantism continued to interest

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[21] Karen Smith, 'The Liberty Not to Be a Christian: Robert Robinson (1735–1790) of Cambridge and Freedom of Conscience', in *Distinctively Baptist: Essays on Baptist History: A Festschrift in Honor of Walter B. Shurden*, ed. by Marc A. Jolley with John D. Pierce (Mercer University, 2005), pp. 151–170.

[22] Hughes, *With Freedom Fired*, pp. 20–22. The sermon, as later published, was *A Lecture on a Becoming Behaviour in Religious Assemblies* (Cambridge, 1776).

[23] Robert Robinson, *Sixteen Discourses on Several Texts of Scripture: Addressed to Christian Assemblies in Villages near Cambridge* (London: Charles Dilly, 1786). Much of what he said was not written until afterwards, when he dictated his addresses to a friend.

[24] Robert Robinson, 'A Plea for the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ', in *Miscellaneous Works*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: J. Deighton, 1807), pp. 5–137 (pp. 5, 107). There are four volumes of *Works*.

Robinson, and starting in 1775 he translated and edited sermons by James Saurin (1677–1730), a pastor in The Hague.[25]

In 1781, when writing on 'toleration' and arguing for 'free' or 'open' communion, Robinson included comment on Anabaptism. He deplored how those reckoned as 'orthodox' thinkers 'put Anabaptists into the list of the most pestilent heretics'. He praised Anabaptists for clear statements of faith, by contrast with 'impenetrable jargon' which had done Christianity no favours. Baptists and Anabaptists, he continued, were misrepresented as 'fomenters of anarchy' because they denied the authority of the civil magistrate in matters of religion. 'Even [Thomas] Cranmer,' he stated, 'thought it no crime to burn an anabaptist woman,' and others followed his 'bloody example'.[26] Robinson had read about Joan Bocher, or Joan of Kent, who was burned at Smithfield, London, in 1550. Cranmer, then Archbishop of Canterbury, tried to persuade her to abandon her views, but when she refused, he was a party to her execution. Kirk MacGregor explored Joan's theology and concluded that due to her maintenance of her convictions under persecution, Bocher should be regarded as 'the exemplar of sixteenth-century English Anabaptists'.[27] It was a view Robinson had anticipated.

A History of Baptism

Robinson's ability as a speaker and writer led to his being asked to write a history of the Baptist movement. It was felt that the work done by Thomas Crosby (?1665–1752), the first historian of English Baptist life, was inadequate. Crosby, introducing his work, which came out in four volumes between 1738 and 1740, emphasised that English Baptists should be distinguished, as he put it, from Anabaptism's 'mad and heretical people' in Münster. However, he noted that George Cassander, a sixteenth-century Flemish Reformed theologian who had debates with

[25] Robert Robinson, *Sermons Translated from the Original French of the late Rev. James Saurin*, vols 1–5 (London: Longman & Rees, 1775–1780).

[26] See Robert Robinson, 'The General Doctrine of Toleration Applied to the Particular Case of Free Communion', in *Miscellaneous Works*, 3, pp. 185–186.

[27] Kirk, MacGregor, 'The Theology of English Anabaptist Martyr, Joan Bocher', *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 91.4 (October 2017), pp. 453–470 (p. 470).

Anabaptists and visited some of them in prison, described them as having 'an honest and a pious mind'. They 'condemned the outrageous conduct of their brethren of Münster', and they taught that 'the kingdom of Jesus Christ was to be established only by the cross'.[28] Crosby was well-aware of seventeenth-century English Baptist developments, since his father-in-law was Benjamin Keach, an influential early Baptist leader, and Crosby was a church member in Horsleydown, Southwark, where Keach had been minister.[29]

Keith Jones notes that Crosby, and those who followed him in the early period of the writing of Baptist history, 'were concerned with the development of the movement against infant baptism'.[30] That was true of Robinson. Among those encouraging Robinson to take up work on the history of baptism was Andrew Gifford, a Baptist minister at Eagle Street, London, and from 1757 until his death in 1784, assistant librarian at the British Museum. He also became a member of the Society of Antiquaries.[31] Additional approaches to Robinson came from other London Baptists, and the initial thought was that Robinson might spend time in London where he would have access to materials.[32] However, Robinson bemoaned the fact, as he put it in a letter in 1784 to Joshua Thomas in Herefordshire, that papers he collected in London were unsatisfactory for his purpose. Thomas was himself producing historical output which Eric Hayden described as 'monumental'.[33] When Robinson began his research, as he explained to Thomas, he was discouraged by 'the greatness of the work'. To understand movements in other countries he studied Italian, Spanish, German, and Dutch. With

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[28] Thomas Crosby, *The History of the English Baptists*, vol. 1 (London: privately printed, 1738), p. xxviii.

[29] B. R. White, *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1983), pp. 12–14. For detailed studies of Crosby see B. R. White, 'Thomas Crosby, Baptist Historian', *Baptist Quarterly*, 21.4 and 5 (October 1965 and January 1966), pp. 154–168 and 219–234 respectively.

[30] Keith G. Jones, *A Believing Church: Learning from Some Contemporary Anabaptist and Baptist Perspectives* (Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1998), p. 11.

[31] *Challenge and Change: English Baptist Life in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Stephen Copson and Peter J. Morden (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 2017), p. 206.

[32] Robinson, 'Memoirs', in *Miscellaneous Works*,1, pp. 11–156 (p. 100).

[33] Eric W. Hayden, 'Joshua Thomas: Welsh Baptist Historian 1719–1797', *Baptist Quarterly*, 23.3 (January 1969), pp. 126–137 (p. 127).

such a daunting task, he felt his 'incompetence'. He persevered because through friends in Cambridge who were in the university he was able to borrow and use books from the university library.[34]

Robinson set out in letters to Daniel Turner, Baptist minister in Abingdon, what the demands of writing the history involved.[35] With the responsibilities during the day of pastoral ministry, Robinson's research and writing meant he sometimes wrote in the early hours of the morning: he described to Turner how 'the clock struck three, when I dipped the first pen', while the kettle boiled. Later he breakfasted, and had the help of his 'beloved pipe'. Turner had recommended that Robinson read Adrianus Regenvolscius, who wrote on Slavic history, and Robinson had made 'great use of him' in looking at Catholics, Calvinists, Moravian Brethren, and Anabaptists. It had been exciting for him to read about Polish Anabaptists (the non-Trinitarian Polish Brethren) in a volume written by Stanislaw Lubieniecki.[36] Robinson had initially 'despaired', thinking this crucial volume was unavailable in England, but a friend of his, a fellow of Trinity College in Cambridge University, found it in a corner of the College library. Robinson confessed that when the volume was lent to him, he shortened his mid-week talk at St Andrew's Street to go home and read it. Other writers he used were Ferdinando Ughelli, a seventeenth-century Italian Cistercian monk and church historian, and the eighteenth-century Maria Paciaudi, an Italian antiquarian. In this complex field, Robinson asked Turner for ongoing advice.[37]

The experience of working with others, in ministry in the church setting and through his research, was something Robinson enjoyed. He wrote to one 'old friend', Henry (Harry) Keene, in Walworth, London, who was urging him to write, that his time was being taken up in ministry

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[34] Robert Robinson to Joshua Thomas, undated, in *Miscellaneous Works*, 4, pp. 243–244.

[35] Robinson and Turner had an affinity as they cooperated in commending an 'open table' at Communion. See R. W. Oliver, 'John Collett Ryland, Daniel Turner and Robert Robinson and the Communion Controversy, 1772–1781', *Baptist Quarterly*, 29.2 (April 1981), pp. 77–79.

[36] Robinson probably used the history by Stanislaw Lubieniecki in Latin. Publication was in 1685. See *History of the Polish Reformation: And Nine Related Documents*, trans. and ed. by G. H. Williams (Fortress Press, 1995).

[37] Robert Robinson to Daniel Turner, 28 September 1786, in *Miscellaneous Works*, 4, pp. 239–240.

and in the farm.[38] Keene helped Robinson when the latter had small-pox and in return Robinson gave Keene a cow from the farm, accompanied by a poem, 'The Rocket Cow', which exhorted the cow, 'the milk-white messenger', to be 'the generous Harry's own *milch* cow'.[39] Robinson was happy to report to Daniel Turner that he had been visited by American politicians who appreciated his views on liberty of conscience, heard him preach, and offered him inducements to go to America.[40] With Joshua Thomas, he expressed gratitude for the 'valuable papers' Thomas had lent him. Regarding books, he wrote, 'I have had loads, and loads more I must have, if I finish the plan I have laid out.' He was investigating Anabaptist theology in Transylvania, and although he did not defend all their views he was convinced that those in these movements 'were zealous defenders of the perfection of scripture'.[41]

In a further letter to Thomas, by which time Robinson had an overall plan for the book, he described how he had ranged across church history to explore baptismal convictions.[42] He had read much of which he 'had no notion', until he 'went heartily into the business'. He was not simply telling the story of Baptists, but of how baptism was practised. This was the plan: 'The whole is intended to contain an account of the rise, progress, connections, corruptions, appendages, and reformation of baptism.' The historical part, he continued, 'begins with apostolical churches, goes through the several countries of Asia, Africa, and Europe, and ends with America'. A first draft was ready, but he was cautious until he had 'taken the opinion of a few wise and good men'. In order to do so, he had sent twenty copies of part of his work as a specimen to readers such as Thomas, who could say whether it was 'likely to serve the cause' — the Baptist community. It is not clear which section Robinson was sending, but it was from the body of the text and it is likely that he drew attention to the beginning of what he saw as Anabaptism. He went back to the New Testament, and asserted boldly

[38] Robert Robinson to Henry Keene, 26 May 1784, in *Miscellaneous Works*, 4, p. 231.
[39] Robert Robinson, *The Rocket Cow* (Biggleswade: T. W. Spong, 1784).
[40] Robert Robinson to Daniel Turner, 22 June 1784, in *Miscellaneous Works*, 4, pp. 234–235.
[41] Robert Robinson to Joshua Thomas, undated, in *Miscellaneous Works*, 4, pp. 243–244.
[42] Robinson enjoyed plans. In 1778 he produced for Baptists a much used 'Plan of Lectures on the Principles of Non conformity'. Edmund Burke, an MP, attacked it in Parliament. See 'Memoirs', in *Miscellaneous Works*, 1, p. lxix.

that since Paul re-baptised disciples in Ephesus (Acts 19:1–7), 'he reflects perfectly what is an Anabaptist'.[43]

Different Kinds of Anabaptists

In the completed *History of Baptism*, a work ultimately of 566 pages, Robinson was wide-ranging. The focus here is on Anabaptism, but sections of his book covered, for example, the baptism of John; Jewish washings; baptism as instituted by Jesus; baptism in the early church; baptismal practices in the Patristic period; washing in Muslim tradition; the St Sophia Church in Constantinople; the Lateran baptistry in Rome; artists depicting baptism; baptismal fonts; the influence of Tertullian, the role of Cyprian, and the arguments of Augustine; the Eastern Church, which he had evidently found fascinating; the causes of the acceptance of infant baptism across Europe; church and state; specific practices in Britain; and modes of baptism. One review saw a *History of Baptism* as a book that would not only clarify the subject of baptism, but, because it was connected with so many other subjects, would open up 'a wide field' and make a contribution to literature that 'casts much light upon the state of Christianity in different ages of the church, and in different parts of the world'.[44]

In addressing beliefs and practices under the heading 'Anabaptism', Robinson argued that there were six approaches. On the first conviction, which was the necessity for 'virtue' in the person baptised, Robinson noted that 'about the close of the second, or the beginning of the third century', in North Africa, 'Tertullian began to complain of the corruption of baptism, and he wrote a book in the Greek language, against the administering of it to immoral persons'.[45] After Tertullian, Robinson highlighted Agrippinus, Bishop of Carthage, and neighbouring bishops, who 'agreed to reject the vague baptisms administered, they knew not how or by whom'. In this way, Robinson

[43] Robert Robinson, *History of Baptism* [*HB*] (London: Thomas Knott, 1790), p. 459. For *History of Baptism* I am indebted to Helen Weller, the archivist at Westminster College, Cambridge.
[44] 'Review', *The American Baptist Magazine and Missionary Intelligencer*, 1 (1818), pp. 254–262.
[45] *HB*, p. 462. Here Robinson footnotes Tertullianus, *De Baptismo*, chapter 15.

argued, the need for re-baptism was accepted.[46] A few years later, Robinson continued, Cyprian and seventy-one neighbouring bishops renewed this agreement, and Firmilian, Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, and bishops in Galatia, Cilicia, Phrygia, and other parts of Asia, agreed for the same reason to re-baptise.[47] Robinson then ranged over Dionysius and his followers in Egypt, Novatus of Rome, Novatian of Carthage, and Donatus and his followers, all of whom rejected baptisms administered in 'churches they called habitations of impurity'. Those who came from such churches were re-baptised.[48] The comment from Robinson was that there were churches holding to 'one baptism' — their own.[49]

Two further approaches Robinson analysed placed the essence of true baptism in the form of words used or in the character of the administrator. In 325 CE at the Council of Nicaea, the Trinitarian Christians decreed that those who came from the congregations of the Trinitarian Novatians into what was now seen as the Catholic Church should be admitted to communion by the laying on of hands, but those from the Paulicians, who denied the Trinity, should be re-baptised.[50] Robinson then outlined the third conviction, which focused on 'the virtue or competency of the administrator'. He wrote, 'To see a bad man perform the most solemn rites of religion, to see him perform them with carelessness, or it may be with contempt, is to behold a spectacle shocking to the most vulgar eye, the cause, naturally, of prejudice and infidelity in the people.' Robinson affirmed the Bohemian and Moravian Brethren of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, who re-baptised for this reason and were categorised as Anabaptists. In one instance, the Brethren, according to sources, complained that a parish priest

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[46] For background, see András Handl and Anthony Dupont, 'Who was Agrippinus? Identifying the First Known Bishop of Carthage', *Church History and Religious Culture*, 98.3-4 (2018), pp. 344–366.

[47] For background see Charlotte Methuen, '"The very deceitfulness of devils": Firmilian and the Doubtful Baptisms of a Woman Possessed by Demons', in *Doubting Christianity: The Church in Doubt*, ed. by Francis Andrews, Charlotte Methuen, and Andrew Spicer (Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 49–64.

[48] For background, Stanislaw Adamiak, 'Who Was Rebaptized by the Donatists, and Why?', *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 12.1 (Spring 2019), pp. 46–64.

[49] For this paragraph see *HB*, pp. 460–461.

[50] *HB*, p. 462, citing Philip Labbe, S.J., who collected the Acts of Nicaea.

'administered baptism laughing' and that baptism 'had more the air of a ludicrous comedy than of a religious institute'. Bishop Bossuet (in the seventeenth century), Robinson noted, 'properly enough observes' that for the Brethren, 'the Catholic Church had lost baptism'.[51]

In Robinson's final three categories, he looked at those with Anabaptist convictions in which a personal profession of acceptance of the Christian faith was seen as essential to baptism. He cited Faustus Socinius as holding this position.[52] On the question of consent to being baptised, Robinson wrote with some vehemence: 'The forcing of a Jew or Pagan to be baptised without his consent is now-a-days considered as an unwarrantable and unprofitable act of violence: but the baptism of a babe […] doth not shock anybody. So wonderful is the tyranny of custom!'[53] He highlighted the Mennonites, using for this a history by Hermann Schyn, a Dutch Mennonite leader.[54] For some who held to baptism after profession of faith, he noted, dipping or immersion in water was regarded as an essential element, and sprinkling was considered inadequate.[55] Robinson's last category overlapped with the previous two. He referred to Baptist churches in Britain, other parts of Europe, and America 'which, however diversified in speculation [about doctrines] and the practice of positive rites, all hold that dipping in water and a personal profession of faith and repentance are essential to baptism'.[56]

Moving to a summary of Anabaptism, Robinson argued that it was 'a singular phenomenon' that Anabaptists should be described by many celebrated writers as a 'dangerous set of men', forbidden in one state, banished from another, burnt or drowned in others, 'and allowed

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[51] *HB*, pp. 462–463, citing Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, *Histoire Des Variations Des Églises Protestantes* (Chez la veuve de Sébastien Marbre-Cramoisy, à Paris, 1688). For the Waldensians, Robinson used Lydius Balthas, *History of the Waldenses* (Dortrecht, 1624).

[52] *HB*, p. 463, citing Joshua Toulmin, *Memoirs of the Life, Character, Sentiments and Writings of Faustus Socinus* (London: J. Brown, 1777), p. 253.

[53] *HB*, p. 463.

[54] *HB*, p. 464, citing Hermann Schyn, *Historia Christianorum, qui in Belgio Foederato inter Protestantes Mennonitae appellantur* (Amsterdam: Waesberg, 1723). This was the first history of the Mennonites.

[55] *HB*, p. 464. In passing, Robinson commented that the Greek Orthodox Church did not hold sprinkling to be authentic baptism.

[56] *HB*, p. 464. Here Robinson drew attention to Thomas Crosby's, *History of the Baptists*.

to live in any country only as a favour'.[57] He spoke about 'confused writers' on Anabaptism, who had 'misled many other writers, much wiser and better than themselves'. A few commentators were 'men of learning and merit', but were 'strangers to the general history' of the Anabaptists. Here Robinson adduced William Wall, a Church of England clergyman, who through his writings was a 'champion of infant baptism'. Wall referred to the Anabaptists as 'Antipaedobaptists', but Robinson found this misleading as it could include Quakers.[58] Other writers believed the violent Anabaptism of Münster was typical, and Robinson was most scathing about Ephraim Pagitt — a clergyman during the reign of Charles I — and found it 'diverting to see historians on the continent' quote this 'obscure scribbler in England'. Pagitt's parishioners had 'tired of him and went to hear the sectaries, as he called them'. In response Pagitt 'humbly hoped' that Parliament would 'suppress the blasphemous Anabaptists'; he was glad some 'Christian princes and magistrates had never left burning, drowning, and destroying them'. Robinson concluded this section with the comment that of the opponents of Anabaptism, Pagitt was 'undoubtedly the first in ignorance and falsehood'.[59]

Contested Convictions

In the next part of his study, Robinson addressed some of the contested convictions that characterised those with 'anabaptistical' views of baptism. He was clear that it was not the mode of baptism — 'dipping or sprinkling' — that was the main area of contention. Those who baptised adult believers by sprinkling had been under the same pressure from opponents as had those who practised dipping. The issue was the baptism of adults who had previously been baptised as infants. This, Robinson stated, 'forms the grand objection' by opponents and 'is connected with the errors charged upon Anabaptism'.[60] For Robinson,

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[57] *HB*, p. 465.
[58] *HB*, p. 465. Robinson cited William Wall, *The History of Infant-Baptism* (London: George Whittington, 1646).
[59] *HB*, pp. 466–468, with reference to Ephraim Pagitt, *Heresiography; or a description of the Hereticks and Sectaries of these latter times* (London: Wilson, 1645).
[60] *HB*, p. 469.

what was at stake was not simply academic in nature: he was fully involved in the practice of baptism. Douglas Sparkes, in 1960, drew attention in the *Baptist Quarterly* to the way Robinson, over several years, conducted baptisms at Whittlesford (a village outside Cambridge) in the river adjoining the house of Ebenezer Hollick, a wealthy member of St Andrew's Street. On one occasion forty-eight were baptised. Manuscript accounts of this event were preserved.[61] Hollick worked closely with Robinson in the formation in 1783 of the Cambridge Constitutional Society, which met in the Black Bull tavern, Cambridge, to discuss 'civil and religious liberty' and its underpinning in theology.[62]

The exercise of civil and religious liberty was linked, Robinson argued, to views of baptism. He quoted Peter Heylyn, an Anglican (a description Heylyn used) in the seventeenth century, who condemned Anabaptists for saying 'a Christian ought not to execute the offices of magistrate'.[63] Robinson relished addressing this contested conviction. He saw the baptism of believers as having 'a close connection' with the subject of government. Infants, he wrote, were baptised by state churches — the sixteenth-century background against which Anabaptism developed. Thus, if someone chose to be baptised, they disowned the state 'in this matter of conscience'. Parents who did not baptise their children left the decision with them. There was, Robinson argued, 'an inseparable union between adult baptism and civil liberty'. All Anabaptists and Baptists struggled for liberty when oppressed by 'despotic governments'. Robinson then discussed variations in beliefs about church members being magistrates. Some Anabaptists, he noted, 'execute no offices, take no oaths, bear no arms, shed no human blood, and in civil cases resist not government'.[64] Robinson's own position was

[61] Douglas C. Sparkes, 'Baptisms at Whittlesford', *Baptist Quarterly*, 19.3 (1961), pp. 131–132.
[62] 'The Cambridge Constitutional Society', *The Cambridge Chronicle*, 16 January 1790; Hughes, *With Freedom Fired*, pp. 48–49.
[63] Peter Heylyn, *Ecclesia vindicata; or, the Church of England justified* (1657), p. 469. See Anthony Milton, *Laudian and Royalist Polemic in Seventeenth-Century England: the Career and Writings of Peter Heylyn* (Manchester University Press, 2007).
[64] *HB*, p. 470.

that Christians could hold political office, and one of his friends was Christopher Anstey, who served as High Sheriff of Cambridgeshire.[65]

Another contested area was the place of 'learning' in Anabaptist communities. Robinson referred to those who maintained that it was 'an anabaptistical error to prefer illiteracy before learning'. He turned again to baptism, which was 'necessarily connected with a personal profession of believing the truth of the Christian religion' and thus with a process of thought. An infant, he stated baldly, 'asks no questions'. Robinson was in favour of making the gospel intelligible to 'plain men and women'. He had sympathy with those who found 'that Pagan literature had perverted the gospel' and that learning which was 'unprofitable' had been forced on many. However, there were examples of institutions that had successfully combined Christian thinking and study of the wider world. One of the 'remarkable' instances he cited was the 'university at Raków in Poland', under the auspices of the Polish Brethren. It began in 1602 and was closed in 1638 by the authorities. At its height it had over one thousand students.[66] Robinson saw no reason why philosophers like Plato should be commentators when 'expounding the inspired writers' of the Bible. He was not a philosophical rationalist. But he considered that Anabaptists and Baptists, 'as their history proves, hold all branches of science in a just and proper esteem'.[67]

Clerical authority was a further contested area. Robinson gave a sermon in 1784 at Maze Pond Baptist Chapel, Southwark, which had chosen James Dore as their pastor, and spoke of the freedom of a group of Christians to meet to 'sing, pray, teach and be taught, baptise and be baptised, administer and receive the Lord's supper'. He continued, 'The distinction of Christians into clergy and laity is groundless, and there is no mention of any such thing in the gospel; but, on the contrary, all Christians are put on a level in all matters of religion.' He wanted the

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[65] 'Memoir' in *Miscellaneous Works*, 1, pp. lxxiv–lxxv. Anstey's father was Rector of Brinkley, Cambridgeshire, and had an extensive library which Robinson was able to use.
[66] *HB*, p. 472. For more see Phillip Hewett, *Racovia*: *An Early Liberal Religious Community* (Blackstone, 2004).
[67] *HB*, p. 472.

words 'clergy' and 'laity' to be 'banished from Christian churches'.[68] Robinson was well-aware of complaints regarding the supposed 'anabaptistical error of rejecting all clerical authority'. In his research he had discovered considerable variety of opinion in this area. However, one conviction was widely held: responsibility to judge in matters of belief, looking to 'the holy scripture as the only and sufficient rule of faith and practice'. Therefore a 'priest' became 'a mere tutor'. An approach that could 'effectually subvert all clerical authority' was the one Robinson advocated.[69] He had sympathy with communities in Moravia who had 'no regularly ordained ministers', and anyone, including women, 'gave instruction'.[70]

The relationship of 'anabaptistical' thinking to the work of the Holy Spirit was another area. Robinson was prepared to admit that Anabaptists and Baptists were 'enthusiasts', but he found 'enthusiasm' to be 'a vague term'. If enthusiasm was understood as 'unreasonable and irrational adherence to a doctrinal position or practice', and was 'coupled with fanaticism and superstition', then it had no place among those who required for baptism a profession of faith and thus 'deliberate exercise of thought'.[71] At the same time, the heart was fully engaged. In a letter in 1783 guiding a young minister, Robinson urged 'a *heart-felt sense* of religion'.[72] Similar concern was evident when Robinson preached at the ordination of General Baptist minister George Birley, at St. Ives, Huntingdonshire, near Cambridge, on Proverbs 27:10, 'Thine own friend, and thy father's friend forsake not.' Dan Taylor, the leading figure in the New Connexion of General Baptists, gave what was called the 'charge' to Birley, whom he knew well. In his address, Robinson spoke of churches composed of friends, where there was 'perfect equality of minds'. This might seem to rule out the heart, but Robinson

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[68] Robert Robinson, 'A Discourse addressed to the congregation at Maze-Pond, Southwark, on their public declaration of having chosen Mr. James Dore their Pastor, March 25, 1784', in *Miscellaneous Works*, 4, pp. 25–58 (pp. 29, 33–34).

[69] *HB*, p. 472.

[70] *HB*, p. 473. For Baptists in America, Robinson referred to Isaac Backus, *A History of New England with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists* (Newton, MA: Historical Society, 1871).

[71] *HB*, p. 474.

[72] Robert Robinson to a Young Minister, 1783, in *Miscellaneous Works*, 4, p. 229.

went on to say that being in fellowship 'excites the exclamations of Christians', who use the words of Psalm 26:8 to express their love for God and each other. 'There was', he said, an 'emotion of love', but it depended on 'a perpetual exercise of friendship'.[73]

The Life of the Church

For Robinson, the nature of the church as a church of believers was a crucial issue. This, he stated, 'is the article, from which all their other principles and practices proceed. It is for the sake of this that adult baptism is practised.' Robinson cited the perspective of Johann von Mosheim, Chancellor of the University of Göttingen, that the Waldensians, the followers of John Wickliffe, the Hussites, and others before 'the dawn of the Reformation', together with the Mennonites, all held the same principle, that the church was an assembly of 'true and real saints'. Mosheim referred to this stream of thought as a source of ecclesiastical 'peculiarities', or indeed, of 'pernicious doctrines'.[74] Robinson was roused by this and again addressed the practice of infant baptism, which he argued was of no benefit to children. Catholics defended it by tradition. Among Protestants, it could only be defended by finding in Scripture 'detached sentences, and figures of speech, and allusions' which might point to infants being baptised, but no substantial passages of Scripture were quoted — since these did not exist. At this point Robinson quoted 'that ornament of this country, the late Mr. [John] Locke', who saw a church as 'a free and voluntary society'. Locke was clear that no-one was born a member of any church. Membership did not go automatically from parents to children.[75] Thus infant baptism was not appropriate.

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[73] Robert Robinson, 'Discourse Preached at the Ordination of Mr. George Birley, at St. Ives, Huntingdonshire, 18 October 1786', in *Miscellaneous Works*, 4, pp. 39–59, esp. pp. 45, 46, 48. This was on Proverbs 27:10, 'Thine own friend, and thy father's friend forsake not.'

[74] *HB*, p. 475. Robinson used a Latin version of Johann Lorenz Mosheim's *Ecclesiastical History*. The Anabaptist references can readily be found in a reprint (Cincinnati: Applegate & Co., 1858) pp. 491–494.

[75] This discussion is in *HB*, pp. 476–479. He used John Locke, *Letters Concerning Toleration* (London: A Miller, 1765).

It seems to have been Mosheim to whom Robinson took most exception in this section of what he wrote. Some of the words and phrases Mosheim had used in dismissing Anabaptists Robinson saw as outrageous. They were, Mosheim asserted, 'a seditious and pestilential sect', marked by 'tumultuous and desperate attempts' to overthrow established order. They were 'enthusiasts' — a term Robinson had already dealt with — and in their 'visionary notions' were seeking to erect 'a new spiritual kingdom'. Their practice of adult baptism and the fact that they re-baptised those who had received the sacrament as infants were in Mosheim's opinion 'intolerable heresies'. Among other things, Mosheim's horror of the established order being challenged flew in the face of Robinson's commitment to a church and society that were free. 'There is no hazard', Robinson continued scathingly, 'in saying Mr. Locke understood liberty, and a British Baptist day-labourer understands it better than the learned Dr. Mosheim.'[76] But among English and well as German ecclesiastical figures Robinson found people with Mosheim's spirit. He quoted from a 1589 publication, *A Godly Treatise*, by Robert Some, Master of Peterhouse in the University of Cambridge, which proclaimed that it 'examined and confuted many execrable fancies'. The book described Separatists in England, placing them in the tradition of 'anabaptistical' views. It was 'execrable' on their part to hold that a church ought to be constituted of believers only, that a church could elect its own pastor, and that the magistrate had no civil power in the church.[77]

The tendency to draw from Locke continued among British Baptists. Joseph Angus, who became Principal of Stepney College (later Regent's Park College), quoted Locke on the church as a 'voluntary society', but in a deeper sense a community with 'willing submission of the heart and life to Christ'.[78] Robinson had this same perspective, and in a sermon in Cambridge on 10 February 1788, from the text Luke 4:18 ('The Lord hath sent me to preach deliverance to the captives'), he

[76] *HB*, pp. 480–481.

[77] Robert Some, *A Godly Treatise, wherein are examined and confuted many execrable fancies, given out and held partly by Henry Barrowe and John Greenwood: partly by other of the Anabaptistical order* (London: G.B., 1589).

[78] Ian Randall, *'Conscientious Conviction': Joseph Angus (1816–1902) and Nineteenth-Century Baptist Life* (Oxford: Centre for Baptist History and Heritage, 2010), pp. 11–12.

pictured an early Christian community where many members were slaves, and were not free outwardly, but were still free in Christ. He asked his hearers to 'imagine a primitive assembly of Christian slaveholders and slaves, not now, in this instance, as slaves, but above slaves, brethren beloved in the Lord, all sitting at the same table, eating the same bread, drinking the same cup'. They had all experienced the reality of Jesus bringing 'deliverance to captives'. A further step was that to see that 'the liberating of slaves was a part of Christianity'. Here, however, Robinson, brought the serious indictment that through the African slave trade, enslaving 100 000 people each year, Britain was reducing 'a people, who never injured us, to a servitude unmerited, unjust, and to an enormous degree barbarous as well as disgraceful to our country'. This was a scandal. There had to be liberty for the captives.[79]

This sermon was preached at a time of great sadness for the Robinson family. In a letter to a fellow-Baptist minister, Joshua Toulmin, Robinson spoke of the death of his seventeen-year-old daughter, Julia. She was, he said, 'the loveliest of all girls, the pride and the beauty of my family', marked by 'a fund of wit, an innocence of manners, and a piety and virtue regulated by wise and just sentiments'. She 'fell asleep, saying, as she reclined her head, Lord, into thy hands I commend my spirit'.[80] Perhaps in part with the character of Julia in mind, in a sermon in Cambridge on 30 October 1788, on Matthew 10: 25, 26 — about God's kingdom as a place of servanthood — Robinson addressed in typical fashion the danger of hierarchical power, insisting that 'Jesus is guiltless of all the oppression that hath been exercised, and all the blood that hath been shed by his ill-informed followers in his name'.[81] In June 1789, he had the opportunity to preach on early

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[79] Robert Robinson, 'Slavery Inconsistent with the Spirit of Christianity', in *Miscellaneous Works*, 4, pp. 60–84, esp. pp. 70–71. Preached at Cambridge, 10 February 1788, on Luke 4:18: 'The Lord hath sent me to preach deliverance to the captives.'

[80] Robert Robinson to Joshua Toulman, 1787, in *Miscellaneous Works*, 4, p. 251.

[81] Robert Robinson, 'On Sacramental Tests', in *Miscellaneous Works*, 4, pp. 104–150, esp. pp. 113–114. Delivered at Cambridge, 30 October 1788 on Matthew 20:25, 26: 'Jesus said; ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they, that are great, exercise authority upon them: but it shall not be so among you.'

religious nurture. He described himself as 'a sincere and modest follower of Jesus Christ' and gave testimony to how in early life he 'hated God' and had a 'hard and callous heart'. Eventually he came to cry, 'Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner', and after a long struggle discovered 'the love of God in Jesus Christ to wretched sinners like me'. After having been a pastor for many years, and 'having tasted the pleasures of holiness', he wanted to continue to serve and he looked forward to the Last Day. Let the church now and on that Day, he pleaded, 'give Jesus Christ what we ought to give him — honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen!'[82]

The way in which Robinson brought the Last Day into focus could be seen to have had a prophetic dimension, since he died a year later, at the early age of fifty-four. His death was sudden, although he had suffered difficulty in breathing. One of his last surviving letters, which shows his thinking near the end of his life, was to a friend, Samuel Lucas, minister of Swan Hill Independent Chapel, Shrewsbury. Robinson outlined to Lucas all that he had been doing on his *History of Baptism*. He had by that time completed the work. In looking back on all the movements he had covered in the book, Robinson said to Lucas, 'Believe me, I am neither a Socinian, nor an Arian,' and he went on to describe his faith in terms that were 'anabaptistical'. He expressed adoration to God for loving the world and sending his Son; he embraced Christ as an unspeakable gift; and he said unequivocally, 'I believe his doctrines, trust his promises, copy his life, imbibe his disposition, and live in hope of the glory he has promised all his disciples.'[83] One of Robinson's oldest friends, Coxe Feary, pastor of the Baptist church in Bluntisham, Huntingdonshire, twenty-one miles from Cambridge, recorded a conversation a month before Robinson's death. In this conversation, Robinson again made clear that he was neither a Unitarian nor an Arian, and told Feary, 'My soul rests its whole hope of salvation

[82] Robert Robinson, 'The Advantages of an Early Religious Education'. Preached at Mr. Dan Taylor's Meeting-House, London, 7 June 1789. Psalm 116:12: 'What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?', in *Miscellaneous Works*, vol. 4, pp. 142–153, esp. 147–149.
[83] Robert Robinson to Samuel Lucas, 10 September 1789, in *Miscellaneous Works*, 4, pp. 287–291.

on the atonement of Jesus Christ, my Lord and my God.'[84] Robinson stood in a determinedly Christ-centred tradition.

Conclusion

Much more could be said about Robert Robinson. This article has not considered his pastoral ministry in detail, nor the range and creativity of his thought in areas of theology and spirituality. In 2019, Bruce Hindmarsh took up the words 'Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it', from Robinson's hymn, and asked if the author wandered theologically. Hindmarsh, like others, noted that when Robinson died, he was spending time with Joseph Priestley. But being with someone does not imply a shared viewpoint. It is important to note that over three decades in the same church in Cambridge, Robinson was clearly an effective preacher and pastor, and one appreciated by his people for his teaching and care. Alongside that was Robinson's writing; his *History of Baptism*, his most substantial work.[85] It has, however, been neglected in favour of arguments about Robinson's orthodoxy. Although in the *History* he ranged far beyond Anabaptism, questions of re-baptism and of the nature of the church were a continuous theme. In his conclusion, in one of many examples of his breadth of reading, he quoted Voltaire, acknowledging him as a 'lover of liberty', while finding it disappointing that he included Anabaptists in his work but did not engage deeply with their history.[86] It is a mistake either to see Robinson through those whom he quoted, as if he agreed with them all, or through those who debated with him, since they might not all be doing justice to his Christ-centred thinking. Robert Hall, Robinson's successor at St Andrew's Street wrote that he was following in his ministry someone who was 'brilliant and penetrating', spoke with eloquence, was fascinating in

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[84] A note in *Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, vol. 2, ed. by Joseph Belcher (American Baptist Publication Society, 1831), pp. 223–224. See also Addicott, 'Introduction', in *Church Book*, pp. xvii–xviii, who shows the fallacies underlying the view that Robinson became a Unitarian.

[85] A further volume of Robinson's work was published posthumously: *Ecclesiastical Researches* (Cambridge: Lunn, 1792).

[86] *HB*, pp. 483–484. Voltaire portrayed an Anabaptist positively in *Candide*. Robinson referred to Voltaire's *Works* published in London in 1770.

conversation, had scholarly erudition, and displayed the discrimination of the historian and the boldness of a reformer.[87] In 1789, writing to Dan Taylor, Robinson wanted in much more modest terms to speak of the church fellowship, not of his individual role. He told Taylor how he saw affirmed the love of liberty that characterised congregations of 'us poor anabaptists'.[88]

[87] *Select Works of the Rev. Robert Robinson*, ed. by William Robinson (London: J. Heaton & Son, 1851), pp. lxxxvi–lxxxvii.

[88] Robert Robinson to Dan Taylor, 23 March 1789, in *Posthumous Works of Robert Robinson*, ed. by Benjamin Flower (Harlow: B. Flower, 1812), p. 306.

'A Believing Church' Reconsidered

Keith G Jones

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Abstract
The first part of the article describes the author's journey towards discovering the meaning and relevance of Anabaptist tradition for the present day. From a formal theological education in a state university which concentrated on the Magisterial Reformation, the author was challenged during a period of sabbatical study leave in 1984 to consider the Radical Reformation and, especially, the Swiss Anabaptists and those who followed Balthasar Hubmaier to Moravia. Post sabbatical, the author engaged with the work of Mennonite scholars, Alan and Ellie Kreider, leading to his involvement with various Anabaptist initiatives in England. This caused the author to write a book for English Baptists on insights gained from this exploration of the Anabaptist heritage. The second part of the article explores some of the issues in the book *A Believing Church*, which was published in 1998, and re-evaluates those insights for baptistic Christians in 2025.

Keywords
Baptist; baptistic; Anabaptist; radical; marginalised; inclusivity; meals (eucharistic)

Introduction

This volume of the *Journal of European Baptist Studies* is intended to offer reflections as to how the Anabaptist form of radical Christianity has influenced the baptistic traditions, perhaps especially within Europe. My own contribution to this reflection engages with a booklet I wrote whilst with the Baptist Union of Great Britain, later revised and reprinted and, at the last count, translated into Armenian, Lithuanian, and Spanish.[1] The book itself arose out of my own experiences and, therefore, I first offer a review of a series of life events, before venturing into an iteration of some of the key themes of *A Believing Church*.

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

In this article I set out my journey of discovery into the world of the Radical Reformation from having been schooled in classic Reformation studies. I then return to re-examine the modest book I produced for British Baptists, which gained an international audience. Hopefully, this two-part article will map out a journey of discovery, rather than a masterplan of insights. Issues explored include ecclesiology, inclusivity, the place of meals, and whether classic ministry as envisaged by the Reformers has a place in the new order. The article concludes with a brief reminder of the forward-looking statement of faith produced by a group of international scholars for the 2005 Centenary Gathering of the Baptist World Alliance.

Part One: A Journey to a Radical New Place

My formation as a British Baptist minister took place within the Northern Baptist College[2] and in terms of gaining a theological degree, the University of Manchester,[3] which, at that time, possessed a Faculty of Theology.[4] In the 1970s the faculty boasted amongst its senior staff outstanding scholars in the likes of F. F. Bruce, Basil Hall,[5] David Pailin, S. G. F. Brandon, and Ronald Preston. In terms of Christian history, the emphasis of the Department of Ecclesiastical History, within the faculty, was on the Church Fathers and, in terms of the Reformation era, on John Calvin. Perhaps this was not surprising as the professor of ecclesiastical history was none other than the eminent Calvin scholar, Basil Hall,[6] who, with his colleague Ben Drewery, himself a Lutheran

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2 Peter Shepherd, *The Making of a Northern Baptist College* (Manchester: The Northern Baptist College, 2004).

3 Brian Pullan with Michele Abendstern, *A History of the University of Manchester 1951–1973* (The University of Manchester Press, 2000).

4 The Faculty of Theology has long since disappeared and the current Religions and Theology Department is a sub-set of a larger Faculty of Humanities, despite the fact that the Free Church Colleges in Manchester developed and supported an excellent Faculty of Theology throughout the twentieth century.

5 See, for instance, Basil Hall, *Humanists and Protestants 1500–1900* (T &T Clark, 1990).

6 Basil Hall's obituary in the *Independent* newspaper, Monday 2 January 1995, describes him as 'one of the finest Church historians in Britain'. He was ordained into the then Presbyterian Church in England, which was a founding denomination of the later United Reformed Church in Great Britain.

expert,[7] presented the Reformation era through the spectacles almost exclusively of Luther and Calvin, paying but little attention to Huldrych Zwingli[8] and spending absolutely no time at all on the radical reformers, including the Anabaptists.[9] This deficiency in my formation presented a critical challenge in my vocation and one I have spent the rest of my ministry trying to overcome and help others to see that there is a significantly wider perspective to be understood and engaged with in our journey to be authentic disciples of Jesus. I was later to advocate an ecclesial vision of a 'gathering',[10] intentional, convictional community of disciples.[11]

The first significant move to a wider understanding came during a period of sabbatical study leave my then employer, the Yorkshire Baptist Association,[12] granted me in 1984. Opportunity to undertake this study period in Switzerland at the Baptist Theological Seminary in Rüschlikon was a moment to both open my eyes to the fascinating world of European Baptist life and to attend seminars with H. Wayne Pipkin[13] on the life and work of Huldrych Zwingli. This occurred in the 500th anniversary year of Zwingli's birth. As Ed Furcha and Wayne Pipkin say in their introduction to the two-volume translation of Zwingli's works they edited and published in 1984, the anniversary led to these volumes

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7 E. G. Rupp and Benjamin Drewery, *Martin Luther* (Edward Arnold, 1970).

8 G. R. Potter, *Zwingli* (Cambridge University Press, 1976); W. P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Clarendon Press Oxford, 1986).

9 George Hunston Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1992).

10 I use the word 'gathering', rather than the more traditional and accepted English word 'gathered'. I have argued elsewhere that gathered implies a complete and settled community at peace. Gathering reminds us that the Holy Spirit is still at work, and we must be missional in reaching out to others and accepting of others and the change they might well bring when they join our ecclesial communities. There is nothing static in baptistic churches.

11 Keith G. Jones, 'Towards a Model of Mission for Gathering, Intentional, Convictional *Koinonia*', *Journal of European Baptist Studies,* 4.2 (2004), pp. 5–13.

12 *Our Heritage: The Baptists of Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cheshire 1647–1987*, ed. by Ian Sellers (The Yorkshire Baptist Association and the Lancashire and Cheshire Baptist Association, 1987).

13 H. Wayne Walker Pipkin was an eminent American historian who served on the staff at Rüschlikon and who later delivered the Hughey Lectures in Prague. Amongst his relevant works see H. Wayne Walker Pipkin, *Scholar, Pastor, Martyr: The Life and Ministry of Balthasar Hubmaier (ca 1480–1528)* (International Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006) and his 500th Anniversary two volume translations of the writings of Huldrych Zwingli, *The Defence of the Reformed Faith* and *In Search of True Religion: Reformation, Pastoral and Eucharistic Writings* (Pickwick Publications, 1984).

as an attempt to 'overcome a lamentable gap in English language Reformation studies by making available for the first time several important Reformation, pastoral and eucharistic writings of Huldrych Zwingli on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of his birth'.[14]

Of course, during this time of sabbatical and talking with Wayne Pipkin, I began to understand much more about the Radical Reformation and the works of Zwingli's erstwhile friend and leading Anabaptist theologian Balthasar Hubmaier,[15] who I would come to appreciate in a deeper way when I paid regular visits to Mikulov[16] in Moravia and the surrounding villages on the Moravian/Slovakian border. This was an area where Anabaptist communities flourished and where you can still find remains of their village design, pottery, and housing.

From my 1984 experience, I began to re-form my inadequate understanding of the reformations.[17] Returning to the United Kingdom, my journey and development was stimulated by that amazing Mennonite couple, Alan and Ellie Krieder. Sent as 'missionaries' to England, they entered into a partnership with Northern Baptist College and, with many individuals initially in the North and Midlands of England, to reflect on their own Mennonite heritage and our shared Anabaptist radical heritage.[18] The development of an Anabaptist network in the

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14 H. Wayne Pipkin *Zwingli: The Positive Religious Values of His Eucharistic Writing* (The Yorkshire Baptist Association, 1985).

15 *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, ed. and trans by H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder (Herald Press, 1989).

16 Mikulov is the town where Hubmaier ministered from 1526 to 1527. It was then known by its Germanic name Nikolsberg and was home to the Liechtenstein family.

17 I use the word 'reformations' rather than the still common 'reformation', recognising that alongside what might be described as the magisterial Reformation of Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin there were other dynamic streams of Christian thought which grew and developed during the 1500s onwards.

18 There are those who argue English Baptists owe nothing to the continental Anabaptist movement, despite Smyth and Helwys being counted as 'the English brethren' in the Anabaptist church in Amsterdam and others noting the correspondence of the first English Particular Baptist Church, the so-called Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey church, who entered into dialogue with the Anabaptists in Amsterdam as they searched for what the 'True Church' might look like. I follow that illustrious Baptist, the late Ernest A. Payne, in his view that 'ideas have wings' and early English Baptists were influenced by the Anabaptists (E. A. Payne *The Baptist Movement in the Reformation and Onwards*, [The Kingsgate Press, 194], introduction).

isles,[19] which included local meetings of people from across the denominations,[20] a publication, *Anabaptism Today*,[21] a theological study network that met almost annually at Offa House, the Anglican Diocese of Coventry Retreat House, and, thanks to the initiative of the Revd Dr Ian M. Randall and Dr Stuart Murray Williams at Spurgeon's College, a master's degree in Baptist and Anabaptist studies, which was later also offered at IBTS in Prague.

Much more could be said about the blossoming of contemporary reflection of Anabaptist insights for those of a baptistic[22] inclination in the isles, and I will return later to reflect on my own, very modest, contribution from that period — *A Believing Church*. At this juncture, I will address the historical moment of radicalism in January 1525 that we are marking five hundred years on.

The Twenty-first of January, 1525: A Moment of Radicalism

The Hutterite *Chronicle*[23] provides George Blaurock's reminiscences of the first radical reformation baptism of believers on the twenty-first of January 1525. To me, this marks the decisive and radical break with the emerging Reformed Church of Zwingli. Dates and times can pass us by. Yet, we can be suddenly arrested by moments of what we later understand to be cosmic shifts in understanding. Here, the reforming

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[19] I use the term 'the isles' to be inclusive of the islands of Britain and Ireland and the surrounding groups of smaller islands as the Anabaptist network was not confined in the isles of one territorial jurisdiction, but moved across the boundaries of nations and peoples with a fluidity mirroring the original trans-local network in continental Europe.

[20] For instance, the Oxford group included myself as Deputy General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain; the Revd Professor Christopher Rowland; Dean Ireland, Professor of the Exegesis of Holy Scripture in the University of Oxford (Church of England); and the Revd Dr John Weaver, then a Fellow at Regent's Park College (Baptist) in Oxford.

[21] *Anabaptism Today* was published three times a year over an extended period from 1992 until 2003.

[22] I use the term 'baptistic', rather than the more typical 'Big B Baptist' as the insights I and many others have reflected over since the 1980s have not been confined to a narrower denominational, Baptist union or convention domain, but the journey has included Anglicans, independent churches, charismatic churches, United Reformed churches and many others alongside those in the four Baptist denominations in the isles — the Baptist Union of Great Britain, Baptist Union of Scotland, Baptist Union of Wales, and the Irish Baptist Network.

[23] Preserved in a unique codex in South Dakota and edited by A. J. F Ziegelschmid, *Die alteste Chronik der Hutterischen Brüder* (Philadelphia, 1943) translated as *Chronicle of the Hutterite Brethren 1525–1665* and edited by the Brethren (Plough Publishing House, 1989).

zeal of Zwingli faltered. In his reflection on Scripture, Zwingli had once had doubts about infant baptism, declaring,

> I thought it was much better that children should have their first baptism when they reached an appropriate age.[24]

This debate between friends, leading to a decisive act by Blaurock, Felix Manz, Conrad Grebel and others, focuses on an insight I described in *A Believing Church* as being radical. Radical, of course, means going back to our roots. It is used by some to mean departing from the accepted norms of whatever society we find ourselves in. Radicalism seems to provoke fears in governments and in juridical forms of denominational church government. Yet I am attracted to this other understanding. Growing up in Baptist churches, we often make the claim that we do not emphasise 'Tradition' as some other Christian World Communions do.[25] Yet, I still think that is a disingenuous response. Baptist unions, conventions, federations, associations, and churches are still, if we scratch the surface, full of traditions and policies which do not seem to be drawn out of the gospel message but have been accumulated over the years, sometimes centuries, of organised church life.

The actions of the twenty-first of January 1525 were mould breaking because they were formed out of carefully looking at the roots of believing, reflecting on the written-down accounts of the life and teaching of Jesus, and then a group of men (it seems their radical instincts did not initially apply the insight to women, though that soon followed[26]) acting on what they discerned in reading and re-reading and discussing together these foundational documents. In 1998, I asked the question of British Baptists, 'Are we a radical people — looking for a church formed out of the New Testament insights? What "traditions" do we put in the way?' This question still seems very relevant. It is one

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[24] G. R. Potter, *Huldrych Zwingli: Documents of Modern History* (Edward Arnold, 1978), p. 37.

[25] Christian World Communions is a term used in ecumenical circles to describe in a collective way the major Christian traditions: Catholic, Orthodox, Reformed, Baptist, Pentecostal, Anglican, and so on.

[26] The Anabaptist experience soon embraced women and we learn about their radical discipleship in, for instance, C. Arnold Snyder and Linda A. Huebert Hecht, *Profiles of Anabaptist Women: Sixteenth-Century Reforming Pioneers* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996).

rightly asked of what we now often call 'inherited church', that is to say, a church that, as I have hinted at earlier in this article, is shaped by the ways of being of the last century, not all of which quite seem to work in this century.

Do the Anabaptists go on teaching us about ever-reforming? To place one topic within this context which seems to present a struggle in churches in the isles, if not elsewhere, 'Does the life, words and actions of Jesus point us towards a church which is open to all?' Is there an inclusivity about the community of faith to be drawn from the life and teaching of Jesus, or is there a tradition of exclusivity? When I was a student at theological college, our New Testament tutor, the Revd W. E. Moore,[27] a man of passion, once preached a memorable sermon in our chapel on the theme 'if you think you're in, you're out, and if you think you're out, you're in'. Baptistic Christians can reflect a long time upon this insight. Are there any who are beyond, permanently excluded from the community of those who follow Jesus? In times past there have been those who excluded women, slaves, those who lacked a place or status in society.

That Anabaptist insight of being radical, going back beyond 'tradition' and the 'Traditions' to explore, perhaps in forensic detail, the implications of the life and teaching of Jesus, especially as we do it through the 'spectacles' of the 'Sermon on the Mount', may well still find us challenged anew in our understanding of being a gathering, intentional, convictional community of faith. On this anniversary, radicalism still calls.

Ecclesia of the Marginalised

Wherever we look in the Anabaptist story we are presented by gathering communities of those who might be judged a painful interruption to the accepted ordering of the nation state. Huldrych Zwingli understood the mayhem that might ensue if the instructions to baptise infants in their early months was cast aside. What would become of civic order? How would the Nation State, the authority of the Canton, be maintained if

[27] The Revd W. Ernest Moore was tutor at Rawdon Baptist College, West Yorkshire, from 1956 until the move to Manchester in 1964 and then a tutor at NBC until his retirement in 1981.

there was not some clear marking out of those who would one day be citizens? Had not the Emperor Constantine seen the need for a regulated church formed in the mirror of the state? Christianity had come from the 'outside' to the 'inside' with the so-called 'Peace of the Church', and in 380 CE the Emperor Theodosius I settled the matter in the Edict of Thessalonica, making a clear line between the church that accepted the Nicene Creed and proscribing those ecclesial communities who were not included, declaring them heretical and instructing that their goods and properties be confiscated.[28]

We know the understanding down through the centuries as enunciated by Martin Luther during the reformations — 'the faith of the Prince is the faith of the people' — and although the universalism of Roman Christianity was disjointed, during the reformations we emerge with national churches in the West, and later in the East, that are territorial and relate to specific rulers or governments.[29] Baptistic Christians have often struggled with the gathering intentional instinct to be wary of the principalities and powers of the state. We have been willing to acquiesce to positive engagement with the nation state in ways which are sometimes far from transparent. It would be invidious of me to give contemporary examples of where baptistic Christians have engaged with the state and civic authorities in ways which would not have been understood by the early Anabaptists, and indeed to mention some might well be to overlook others. Yet, as we mark 500 years since that Anabaptist event at Zollikon, it is a reminder that there are possible iterations to understand in our on-going learning.

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[28] Emperor Theodosius I settled the matter, to his own mind, on the 'True Church' — namely, the church accepting the Nicene Creed and in communion with Rome. Yet, the church was more diverse than that. See, for instance, *The Origins of Christendom in the West*, ed. by Alan Kreider (T &T Clark, 2001).

[29] The national church often played a significant part in the ruling of the nation. In the United Kingdom, the Church of England (though not the reformed Church of Scotland) play a part in government by virtue of Bishops serving in the upper legislative chamber, though as the present British government seeks to reform the second chamber, the House of Lords, there is a campaign to have the State Church Bishops removed.

Part Two: 'A Believing Church' 1998–2024

My experiences arising out of the 500th anniversary of the birth of Zwingli and my encounter with the writings of Hubmaier led to a modest booklet of sixty-five pages. When it was published in 1998, I little thought it would spark a reaction and set others on their own journeys of seeking out Anabaptist insights to inform their own baptistic experience of following Jesus. I certainly did not imagine that other Baptist communities in Europe and beyond[30] would consider the booklet worth translating and publishing in their own contexts. Twenty-seven years on, I engage with some of the insights I promulgated in that book and ask, 'Has there been any abiding difference to the missional and ecclesial life of baptistic Christians in the isles?'

Alan Kreider wrote the foreword to the book, reminding readers of the post-modern context in which our believing now takes place. Writing then, the way in which churches existed in their daily life of worship and mission might rightly be thought of as an attempt to revive and renew the mid-century Christianity that struggled to be relevant in the post-World Wars' reality. No longer did a high proportion of children and young people have some engagement with the church on the street corner — afternoon Sunday School, uniformed organisations, youth club on a Friday night, Sunday School cricket teams playing in a local league. Fading also from sight was, at least in the isles, the era of mass evangelistic rallies with calls for repentance and thousands responding to be 'counselled' and encouraged to attend their local 'evangelical' church.[31] Already announced as 'disappearing from sight' was the notion of the omnicompetent minister of the 'Word and Sacrament', exclusively paid and supported by a single local congregation.[32] What no longer worked seemed increasingly clear, but where would fresh reforming streams emerge?

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30 The Spanish version of the book was translated and published by Chilean Baptists.

31 The last such large-scale rally I attended was in Hungary in 1989 when Billy Graham preached at a packed sports stadium in Budapest at the end of a European Baptist Federation Congress.

32 The Baptist Union of Great Britain produced a report in 1971 entitled 'Ministry Tomorrow' which predicted the demise of full-time stipendiary ministry. The time scale suggested was twenty years. It has taken longer, but this model of vocational leadership has significantly declined in the English North and Midlands.

Without doubt, we see fresh insights which come with increased clarity in what we now often term the 'missional church'. Many of these owe their roots to previous times and traditions. Churches have drunk the clear water out of several wells as we have sought to revive and renew our discipleship, and whilst I have felt particular inspiration in the life of Anabaptists and radical reformers of the 1500s, this is not to argue that these are inclusive for baptistic Christians.[33] Nevertheless, the focus of *A Believing Church* was with those who worked at studying the Bible with Huldrych Zwingli in the School of the Prophets[34] after sketching out the story of the first Anabaptists — both the 'good stuff' and the struggles of the early Anabaptists' intent, as so many of them before and since, to work out what it means to be the 'True Church'.

A Distinctive Lifestyle

In *A Believing Church* I used the story of Dirk Willems,[35] the Dutch Anabaptist who escaped from prison and ran across frozen ice. He was followed by his gaoler who fell through the ice. Willems stopped and returned to save him. This story from 1569 opened up something of the ethical values of Anabaptists, for which many in the first generations were noted and seemed to challenge a conformist lifestyle into which many twentieth-century baptistic believers had fallen. From the Anabaptists, issues such as truth telling and the sharing of goods offered critical lifestyle challenges. These past decades have seen several notable attempts to establish baptistic community living and rules of life which in some ways mirror early Anabaptist models. There has, I believe, been a fresh attempt amongst many baptistic Christians to engage more

[33] My own journey has also been greatly influenced by my friend the Revd Roy Searle and the 'Northumbrian Community' and their journey drawing on the wells of the Celtic Church. I have been stimulated in my interaction with Professor Stefan Paas of the Vrije University, Amsterdam, and his work on missional church planting and by my interaction with Professor Jon Sobrino of the University of Central America, and the insights from base communities continues to be transformative.

[34] The School of the Prophets marks a distinctive learning point in itself. Here is a scholarly community engaged together in biblical study. An insight still worthy of reflecting on over against the scholar in her or his study in splendid isolation.

[35] Thielman J. van Braght, *Martyrs Mirror: The Story of Fifteen Centuries of Christian Martyrdom from the Time of Christ to AD 1660* (Herald Press, 1950), p. 741.

seriously with ethical dimensions of how we live[36] and our care for creation.[37] Anabaptist lifestyle and the example of the early Anabaptist work in Moravia, where barren fields were turned into productive vineyards and where pottery with simple but effective designs was produced to support communal living, have, I believe, influenced contemporary baptistic communities to approach with fresh eyes our ethics and lifestyle, not least our relationship with the whole of the created order and our role as stewards and trustees.[38] These concerns came alive and were explored more fully during my time at IBTS in Prague, especially as we interacted with Dr Glen H. Stassen (and later, Dr David P. Gushee) with whom my colleague, Dr Parush R. Parushev, had an abiding friendship.

An Inclusive Ecclesia

In *A Believing Church,* I reflected on the notion of an inclusive community. Whilst Baptists talked much about the 'priesthood of all believers', I realised that my upbringing and teenage years had understood this in a less than adequate way. For instance, though British Baptists[39] claimed to have ordained women to pastoral ministry for over 100 years, until the 1960s very few women were accepted for ministerial formation and only a handful had exercised pastoral charge.[40] Many

[36] In the Baptist Union of Great Britain my former colleague the Revd Anne Wilkinson-Hayes spearheaded an important initiative, Five Core Values for a Gospel People, which arose from the denominational consultation of 1996. The story of this period of renewal of British Baptist life is expertly recounted by Ian M. Randall, *The English Baptists of the 20th Century* (Didcot: The Baptist Historical Society, 2005), especially p. 471 onwards.

[37] Keith G. Jones, 'Baptists and Creation Care', *Baptist Quarterly*, 42 (2008), pp. 452–476. See also *The Place of Environmental Theology: A Guide for Seminaries, Colleges and Universities*, ed. by John Weaver and Margot R. Hodson (Whitley Trust, UK, and the International Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007).

[38] Here I pay tribute to regular IBTS visiting lecturer, Dr Glen H. Stassen and his monumental work with David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in a Contemporary Context*, 2nd edn (Eerdmans, 2016).

[39] By 'British Baptists', I mean those in membership with the Baptist Union of Great Britain. The Baptist Union of Scotland, for instance, did not at that time recognise the ministry of women and does so only today in that it does not exclude a church that calls a woman as pastor.

[40] In the 100th anniversary year, the Baptist Union of Great Britain initiated a research project, Project Violet, named after the first woman minister, the Revd Violet Hedger. Project Violet reported to the Baptist Union Council in October 2024, and a plan of implementation of its recommendations is now under way.

British Baptist churches refused to recognise the ministry of women and a significant minority did not allow women to serve as deacons or elders, nor to preach.

At the time of my writing *A Believing Church* the issue was coming to a head in British Baptist life, as it was clear in many aspects of denominational life we had been operating with a male patriarchy. If the situation was out of balance in the isles, on engaging more directly with Baptist Unions across Europe, the attitude of churches and leadership was notably more hostile to women being recognised as having gifts of ministry and servant leadership and being allowed to recognise such gifts. Having been challenged by the historic witness of Anabaptist women,[41] I understood that to be truly baptistic we must engage male patriarchy wherever we encountered it in the communities claiming to follow Jesus. In the Baptist Union we established a 'Women's Issues Working Group' to advance inclusivity. In Prague I sought to ensure that our regular weekly eucharist with preaching was presided over by women in order to demonstrate to our students the inclusive call to women and men to the work of servant leadership. This was a serious challenge to some of our male students who had come from Baptist Unions which held to exclusive models of 'male headship', and to many of our female students it gave the courage to take hold of their sense of vocation and seek ways to exercise that in their own contexts.[42]

More recently, the challenge to be truly inclusive has brought the local church I am currently a member of to address the complex area of human sexuality and explore the teaching of Jesus to see if any are excluded from the gathering community because of their orientation. Drawing on the insights of Anabaptists and a communal approach to understanding the Bible, after a year of discussion and reflection we came to this common mind:

> We believe in being an inclusive Church — By this we mean we are striving to be a community of faithful disciples of Jesus who do actively wish to include people and not discriminate on any level on grounds of economic

[41] On their stories, see *Profiles of Anabaptist Women: Sixteenth-Century Reforming Pioneers*, ed. by C. Arnold Snyder and Linda A. Huebert Hecht.

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

> power, gender, mental health, physical ability, race or sexuality. We believe in Church which welcomes and serves all people in the name of Jesus Christ, which is Scripturally faithful, which seeks to proclaim the Gospel afresh for each generation and which, in the power of the Holy Spirit, allows all people to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Jesus Christ.[43]

Inclusivity must also lead to an adjustment of our baptistic denominational practice, which in many places has become marked by a juridical approach to interdependency, rather than a missional and collective approach. I tried to address this concern in a paper delivered to the Seventh Forum of the Consortium of European Baptist Theological Schools held in Odessa, Ukraine in July 2012.[44] It also requires a fresh look at our language, certainly where we have been inclined to focus on the notion of 'family', thereby marginalising those who are not part of a contemporary nuclear family, especially that significant group amongst us of single women, an element my friend, and former colleague, Dr Lina Toth, has focused on.[45]

Drawing and extending insights from the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century and extrapolating them to our current reality is no simple activity; but in this concern for inclusivity, which was heralded in those early gatherings of believers, it seems clear to me that the model of church developed by Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin and that focused on the academically qualified man [*sic*] presiding at the table and the font, preaching the Word in an authoritative way,[46] is not now, if it ever was, an appropriate and adequate baptistic model. The ministry for which I was formed in the 1970s, is no longer an omnicompetent model to which I, and indeed many others,[47] can give unqualified assent as we re-evaluate baptistic life in the light of insights from the Anabaptists.

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[43] 'Statement on Inclusivity', Shipley Baptist Church, West Yorkshire, 2020. The statement appears on the church website <https://shipleybaptistchurch.org.uk/inclusive-church/> [accessed 24 October 2024].

[44] Keith G. Jones 'Spirituality and Structures', *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, 13.2 (2013), pp. 29–49.

[45] Lina Toth, *Transforming the Struggles of the Tamars: Single Women and Baptistic Communities* (Pickwick, 2014*)*; *Singleness and Marriage After Christendom*, (Cascade Books, 2021).

[46] The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe coalesces around such a definition of where the True Church is to be found. Perhaps it is one good reason why Baptists do not belong in that fellowship?

[47] Stuart Murray Williams and Sian Murray Williams, *Multi-voiced Church* (Paternoster, 2012).

A Believing Church Has Meals A-Plenty

My journey of reflection using Anabaptist insights to inform my baptistic evaluation of Baptist churches has included a total re-assessment of the standard model of Sunday worship in English Baptist churches and, particularly, the place of eating. I first explored some of my ideas in the Whitley Lecture of 1999.[48] At the International Baptist Theological Seminary, I convinced my colleagues to substitute occasional community worship for daily morning prayer and, after meeting some opposition, a weekly eucharist with preaching. When, later, we founded the Šarká Valley Community Church as a multi-cultural baptistic community in membership with the Czech Baptist Union (BJB), we created a monthly eucharistic service where we shared a community meal together, during which bread was broken and wine[49] shared by the passing round of the common cup. This fell short of my personal desire for a weekly meal, but marked a considerable development from the Baptist church of my youth.

In 2012, I set out my thinking in this journal, offering a vision of gathering worship describing this as tentative proposals for reshaping worship in our European Baptistic Churches today.[50] I will not rehearse all my arguments here, though simply emphasise points of iteration as my thinking has developed over the past decade. I see even more that 'place' is important. Baptists drew lessons from Zwingli about iconoclasm and our buildings were plain and simple for several centuries. At one stage worship was very much for those already committed to the life of the believing community, but if, as I have argued elsewhere, in this post-Christendom world, we inevitably engage with the curious and the enquirer, then our porous churches need to inhabit a comfortable space and offer food as a way of drawing others into a 'safe space'. Of course, this is no new idea but the recovery of the

[48] Keith G. Jones, *A Shared Meal and a Common Table: Some Reflections on the Lord's Supper and Baptists* (Whitley Publications, 1999).

[49] This was always good Anabaptist wine from the vineyards they developed on the rolling hills between Mikulov and Linz.

[50] Keith G. Jones, 'Gathering Worship: Some Tentative Proposals for Reshaping Worship in our European Baptistic Churches Today', *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, 13.1 (2012), pp. 5–26.

style of Jesus, with whom meal sharing was a basic activity. I believe the Anabaptist communities which emerged in the 1500s often demonstrated this missional style of Jesus and a recovery of regular porous[51] koinonia. Though others often agree with me when this is discussed, from agreement to action remains a difficult journey.

A Believing Church — the Affirmation of the World

In being baptistic and learning from Anabaptists I offer one final insight. Anabaptists had another aspect to their inclusivity. Alone of all the churches which emerged out of the reformations' milieu, they were not caught up in the geographical, territorially predominant model. Their way of being church focused on gathering and on being 'free' of the boundaries imposed by the nation state. Nor, hopefully, are we bound by strict Confessions of Faith, though many Baptists try to impose these on others. Applying an Anabaptist hermeneutic to my baptistic believing has created for me an ecumenical network of friends who follow Jesus, though they might worship in different ways to my own. The True Church, I have come to see, has many colours and hues and is not monochrome, but multi-coloured and sparkling with joyous difference. I anticipate this as an arabon, a foretaste, of the commonweal of God.[52]

On What Has Not Been Said

My list of insights from the Anabaptists which have changed my Baptist perspectives over forty years is not exclusive. I have not reflected further in this article on peace-making, missional congregations, separation of church and state, and how far Baptists have taken, or not taken, that journey. Freedom of religion and human rights remain a high priority with the Baptist World Alliance, but today the refusal of Anabaptists to be a part of the civil authority does not seem to resonate with baptistic Christians, and taking support from the state for our church-related activities is commonplace across Europe. Despite these omissions, I look at the period 1984–2024 as one in which many of a baptistic

[51] I have tried to explore a *koinonia* of porosity in my article on 'Gathering Worship'.

[52] The phrase 'kingdom of God' is not so helpful to me. Sadly, it has overtones of patriarchy and, living in a country where I am counted as a subject, not a citizen, I have chosen to opt for the more egalitarian word commonweal, which, I think, reverberates better with my understanding of the gospel.

inclination, Baptists and those from other communions, have gained a range of powerful insights in their attempts to follow Jesus and, certainly for myself, my Christianity has been clarified and radicalised by what I understand to be my baptistic foreparents.

Afternote: A Believing Church — Into a New Millenium

In the year 2000, I was asked to moderate a group of Baptist scholars from across the continents who were asked to prepare an address to Baptists when we gathered in Birmingham in 2005 to celebrate 100 years of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA).[53] Following a suggestion from my friend and colleague, the Revd Dr Nigel G. Wright, who served on that commission, we agreed a message couched in eschatological terms — a message for the future.[54] The message was too long to feature in the congress programme and we produced a much shorter summary which was presented to the congress. The full message continues to merit discussion and, indeed, I believe offers signs of how Anabaptist insights have gained traction amongst baptistic Christians and, in a small measure, Baptist churches, unions, conventions, associations, baptistic churches and even the BWA itself.

[53] For a full account see *Baptist World Centenary Congress: Official Report, Birmingham, England July 27–31, 2005* (Baptist World Alliance, 2006).

[54] Keith G. Jones, 'The Baptist World Alliance and Baptist Identity: A Reflection on the Journey to the Centenary Congress Message, 2005', *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, 8.2 (2008), pp. 5–17.

Book Reviews

Gina A. Zurlo, *From Nairobi to the World: David B. Barrett and the Re-Imagining of World Christianity* (Brill, 2023), 155 pages. ISBN: 9789004541030.

Reviewed by Peter Stevenson

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Whilst teaching an undergraduate module on World Christianity, the annual *Status of Global Christianity* reports, published by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC), provided valuable resources (the latest 2025 report is currently available on their website). Those reports paint an intriguing picture of a faith which continues to grow, especially in the Global South.

The Center continues the demographic research pioneered by the Anglican missionary, David B. Barrett. In this volume Gina Zurlo, Co-Director of CSGC, drawing upon a wealth of materials, including Barrett's day diaries, offers an appreciative but honest assessment of a complex character best known as the driving force behind the creation of the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (*WCE*).

In the opening five chapters Zurlo helpfully outlines Barrett's career path. Graduating from Cambridge University he worked for the Royal Aircraft Establishment from 1948 to 1952. His departure from the RAE was prompted both by a desire not to devote himself to the development of atomic weapons and by a call to missionary service. This led to an initial term of missionary service in Kenya from 1957 to 1961.

Moving to study in New York in 1962 proved a turning point in his life. Following a master's degree at Union Theological College, Barrett embarked on doctoral studies at Colombia University, which introduced him to the research tools of the social scientific study of religion. The first fruits of research employing those methods, adapted for an African context, surfaced in his 1968 publication *Schism and Renewal in Africa*. Although some voiced criticisms of his methodology, this book 'set him on the world stage as an expert in African religious movements' (p. 43). By exposing Christianity's vibrant presence across

the continent, Barrett alerted scholars to the crucial significance of Africa for World Christianity. Zurlo argues that his research helped undermine the secularisation theory which had predicted the fatal decline of religious communities in the twenty-first century (pp. 61–63).

Zurlo devotes serious attention to the lengthy process which produced the *World Christian Encyclopedia*. In Chapter 6 she explains how Barrett was invited to collaborate with Catholic scholars in Belgium, and Evangelical researchers in the USA, to create an updated version of the *World Christian Handbook*. However, under Barrett's direction the project changed shape significantly, with the *WCE* emerging in 1982 after thirteen years' gestation.

Zurlo rightly praises Barrett's achievement in creating the *WCE*, which challenged prevalent assumptions about the global health of Christianity through its careful and detailed research. She argues that his research laid the foundation for the recognition of the 'shifting center of gravity of Christianity' popularised by other writers (p. 125).

This study evaluates Barrett's work in its social, political, and religious contexts. Its honesty about the challenging aspects of his character enables a more rounded picture to appear. It merits attention because, as Zurlo concludes, the story of the visionary behind the *WCE* 'is both inspiring and shocking, but David Barrett was also simply human […] He praised God […] for people coming to faith while acknowledging his own "unpleasant temperament"' (pp. 130–131).

Christine Redwood, *Hear Her Voice: Preaching the Women of the Bible* (Cascade Books, 2024), 159 pages. ISBN: 9781666780949.

Reviewed by Rosa Hunt

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Michael Frost's foreword tells us that the author's trajectory is one from a conservative evangelical perspective to an exploration of feminist scholarship. This is not just a simple theological move, but rather carries with it a shift in epistemological and homiletic practice, due to a re-

evaluation of the overt and covert use of power. In other words, such a trajectory brings with it an awareness that the 'normal' way of doing things (like preaching) may in fact be the male way of doing things. And it also brings with it an awareness that by deliberately reading the biblical text through the hermeneutical lens of a minor, often female, character, we may then learn to read our world and its joys and sufferings through the eyes of the marginalised. It follows, therefore, that this is not a book teaching women how to preach, but rather a book for helping both men and women to become better preachers.

In the first chapter Redwood highlights a key issue: the hard work required to faithfully embody theology in a pastoral context. She points out that '[h]ow a preacher reads the Bible will shape the way they preach it. This is a complex space' (p. 2). This chapter summarises scholarly thought in an impressive number of areas — egalitarianism; patriarchy; complementarianism; christotelicism; inerrancy to name only a few — and also provides an overview of hermeneutical approaches. This is necessary in order for Redwood to state her own critical realist position and, of course, leaves the reader wanting to know more. However, it does read a little bit like a highly condensed literature review and maybe, in this book's context, less would have helped more.

In the rest of the book, Redwood takes us through the book of Judges as a case study of the way her preaching has implemented the theological principles she has set out in chapter 1. At the end of each chapter, she provides a sample sermon illustrating the homiletical principle she has been exploring. She also provides discussion questions and exercises. So, chapter 2 provides an academic justification for first-person narratives in preaching, drawing on the work of Mieke Bal, and the concept of counter-coherence, followed by a sample sermon in the voice of Achsah in Judges 1. Other chapters cover multi-voiced sermons, postcolonial readings, the role of anger in preaching, and issues of appropriation. The book finishes with a chapter reflecting further on the homiletic process itself.

This is an excellent book. Redwood challenges traditional perspectives likely to be held by some preachers, while wanting to remain firmly and unapologetically in the evangelical tradition, making her work less likely to be overlooked or dismissed. I recommend it

wholeheartedly. However, I wonder exactly to whom I am recommending this book. Redwood is, I believe (and with all her warnings about discerning authorial intent ringing in my mind), aiming this book at practitioners. But the sort of preachers she has in mind are pastor–theologians, and to benefit from this book, the reader must be prepared to sit and engage, however fleetingly, with the scholarship. This a book which takes time and effort to read, and I wonder whether those unfamiliar with hermeneutics will be able to garner enough from Redwood's overview to maintain their interest. I hope that it will become required reading on many a homiletics course, and that the preacher who picks it up will be inspired not only to try the exercises, but also to read further in the fascinating and crucial field of biblical hermeneutics.

Sunday Bobai Agang, *Endangered Moral Values: Nigeria's Search for Love, Truth, Justice and Intimacy* (HippoBooks, 2022), 128 pages. ISBN: 9781839732102.

Reviewed by John Okpechi

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This book caught my attention for the dual reason of its Nigerian context (I am originally from Nigeria) and its focus on social ethics (a core area of interest for me). In four sections of thirteen short chapters, its author boldly addresses the problem of moral deficit in the national life of Nigerian society. In a nutshell he posits that 'Nigerians […] are slowly but surely losing their grip on their moral and ethical bearings' (p. 2). He argues that Nigerians cannot fulfil their God-given potential until they 'rediscover their moral and ethical roots' (p. 3).

Dr Agang begins the thematic appraisal of the problem of Nigeria's troubled moral and ethical foundations by discussing, in the first section of four chapters, the failure of Nigeria to fulfil its naturally endowed leadership role in Africa, the impact of the sacred–secular divide and globalisation, the character of Nigeria's moral crisis, and the roots of Nigeria's morality. The second section of two chapters focuses

on two specific socio-cultural issues — tribalism and religion — that have plagued the nation and plunged it into wanton destruction of lives and properties. The third section of four chapters discusses possible solutions to the crisis of morality gripping Nigerian society. The closing section of three chapters addresses the implications of the dearth of national moral consciousness on national development in Nigeria, as well as issuing a call to action.

Overall, Agang's book is well written and makes for easy reading and comprehension. His ability to frame Nigeria's many troubles around morality and ethics is both novel and unique. His impressive use of Scripture in buttressing his arguments evinces his theological credentials and niche. He is not ashamed to point to the failure of religion in addressing Nigeria's enormous and existential challenges. His call for a more robust instrumentalisation of religion for the growth, development, and unity of Nigeria is fitting, given that Nigerians have been adjudged as highly religious.

Reading through *Endangered Moral Values*, one easily sees, strewn across its pages, the opinionated nature of the author's arguments. And of course, nothing is wrong with strongly enunciating one's views as Agang has skilfully done in his book. Yet, a couple of questions arise, whose answers could have greatly enhanced the book. For instance, the author does not make clear for the reader his definition of morality and ethics, especially in a multireligious Nigerian context. He simply assumes that what Nigerians need is a rediscovery of Christian morality and ethics (biblical ethics, as he points out in chapter ten). But Nigerians are not all Christians — they also are Muslims and African Traditionalists (among other religious affiliations apart from Christianity). Another important question that arises is whether Nigeria is a Christian nation that should be governed by Christian values, as Agang surmises. The pitfall of such argumentation is that those who are advancing the Islamic Sharia legal system in Nigeria are provided with added impetus. Constitutionally Nigeria is a secular nation, and any talk of morality should be broad and all-encompassing. Finally, Agang does not show that moral values are the only bedrock of any nation's development, since there are also developed nations that are immoral (depending on how one defines morality).

Nonetheless, I think the author has set an important agenda for academic and theological reflection in his book, and anyone interested in understanding the complexity of Nigeria's problem vis-à-vis religion and morality ought to read this book.

Joseph V. Carmichael, *The Sung Theology of the English Particular Baptist Revival: A Theological Analysis of Anne Steele's Hymns in Rippon's Hymnal* (Wipf & Stock, 2021), 227 pages. ISBN: 9781725270848.

Reviewed by Brian Talbot

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This book is a revision of a doctoral thesis examining the fifty-two hymns of Anne Steele (1717–1778) that were found in the printed editions of London Baptist minister John Rippon's hymnbooks. After a thorough chapter covering previous scholarly contributions in this field that set the scene for this study of Steele's work, the book contains a helpful outline biography of Steele. It highlights her continuing health problems (probably malaria) and states that 'she often composed her hymns from within the crucible of suffering' (p.42). Anne Steele came from a committed Particular Baptist family. Her father William Steele (1689–1769) was the pastor of the Broughton Baptist Church in Hampshire. Ancestors of both her father and her mother Anne (1684–1720) had endured years of religious persecution as dissenters in the previous century. It is clear that the tightknit Particular Baptist circles in which she grew up, together with her own health issues, contributed to the depth and theological insights expressed through her compositions.

Another chapter outlines the setting of her hymns and of Rippon's hymnbooks. Carmichael reminds us that exclusive psalmody had been the normative pattern for English Protestant worship prior to the end of the seventeenth century. The religious landscape of worship services had changed dramatically with the introduction of hymns as a means of articulating their praise. Isaac Watts was the predominant independent contributor who led the way in writing hymns that were familiar in the worship services of English Baptist congregations at that time; however, Anne Steele features among the small number of major

contributors of hymns that would be familiar in Particular Baptist circles and found in the various printed editions of Rippon's hymnbook.

A later chapter helpfully highlights the literary circles in which Steele mixed and the formative influence of Isaac Watts's approach to hymn writing, which served as a model on which she created her own hymns, although she also developed her own style of composition as she crafted a mix of 'deep theological truths and personal experience' (p. 109). In a male-dominated world, Steele was the 'only female hymn-writer from her generation whose hymns have stood the test of time (p. 113).

The last major chapter of this book covers a critical appraisal of the hymns selected for Rippon's hymnals. The author highlights the breadth of her doctrinal coverage, and states that her hymns displayed a theological cohesion with the Second London Confession (1677), together with a focus on the theological characteristics of the Evangelical Revival, namely in her approach to the Bible, the cross, and evangelism. Carmichael builds effectively on the work of earlier Steele scholarship by notable authors such as Cynthia Alders, J. R. Broome, Nancy Cho, Sharon James, and J. R. Watson. This critical examination of the significance of Anne Steele's hymns is warmly commended.

David P. Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics: Core Convictions for Christians Today* (Front Edge Publishing, 2022), 330 pages. ISBN: 9781641801249.

Reviewed by Nividi Kevichüsa

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This book consolidates material from Professor Gushee's introductory classes, which he taught at Mercer University. It is a detailed yet simpler version of *Kingdom Ethics*, which he co-wrote with Glenn Stassen. This book adds more topics, has a total of twenty-five chapters, and has questions after each chapter, which is helpful for students delving into

this subject for the first time. The book also comes with a QR code at the end of each chapter, providing the readers with an audio and a YouTube version.

The book has three primary sections: the first deals with the basic definition of (Christian) ethics; the second covers twelve topics, focusing on a Christian understanding of virtue and personal life; the third discusses the role of faith in politics.

The first part presents a biblical understanding of ethics. Christians generally look at Scriptures to answer ethical issues in the world; however, Gushee says it is not as simple as that (p. 32). The biblical message is not a one-size-fits-all, and our interpretation can sometimes be flawed, due to human limitations. Gushee argues that inner transformation precedes global transformation (p. 51). He mentions Thurman's vision, where the onus is on the oppressor's need to transform rather than the world to be transformed. However, Gushee also refers to movements like Liberation Theology and the Social Gospel Movement as examples of how Christians can transform the world through social and political participation (p. 63).

In the second section (chapters 8–19) the author develops twelve key issues: Truth telling, Sacredness, Justice, Love, Forgiveness, Creation, Patriarchy, Race, Economics, Gender, Sexuality, and Marriage. His stance on the ethics of economic inequality in our current consumerist culture should be given attention, as the enticement of luxury and wealth in our world is growing rapidly. He calls for a move from worshipping mammon to toppling mammon (p. 208) — a radical shift from materialism to minimalism.

In the third section, Gushee presents the political aspect of ethics, based on church and state relations, and the errors in the criminal justice system in his country. He calls himself a Baptist Separatist, perhaps wary and cautious about the strenuous relationship between church and state (p. 255). His stance on the role of church and politics appears to align with Stanley Hauerwas and John Howard Yoder, and not so much with the likes of Oliver O'Donovan or Rowan Williams. Nevertheless, when the state is corrupt or distorted, Gushee advocates active participation and calling it out. He argues that Christians and the

church should not be passive bystanders when the state misuses its power and responsibilities; however, Gushee disapproves of the church using a public platform to spread its missional and religious goals.

In the last two chapters, the book tackles the moral responsibility of Christian ministers, and the challenges of being a follower of Christ.

Gushee claims that most Christian states or countries have a 'crisis of truth' (p. 104), and we can never claim we have 'arrived' (p. 38). This book serves as a stern and humble reminder that even though we worship a perfect God, human beings' fallible nature means that we may never have all the answers, but we continue to be seekers. The book will be helpful for theology students, church workers, and lay Christians keen to understand and examine the concept of (Christian) ethics. It also provides a coherent view on understanding personal and public ethics and the role of Christians in addressing contemporary moral issues.

Darren Cronshaw, Steve Taylor and Marguerite Kappelhoff (eds), *Transforming Work. Missiological Perspectives for the Church in the World* (Brill, 2024), 478 pages. ISBN: 9789004696228.

Reviewed by Tim Noble

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In the past few decades there has been an increasing interest in theological reflection on work. This volume, published as part of Brill's Theology and Mission in World Christianity series, contributes to this discussion and takes it further by reflecting on the role of work in mission as well as mission in work. The twenty-two authors are predominantly from Australia and New Zealand, with some others based in the USA or Europe, but representing a slightly wider geographical spread (including Africa and parts of Asia).

In order to give a more united feel to the book, contributors were asked by the editors to address their different themes in

conversation with three specific sources. The first is the classic work of David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*. Three aspects are chosen here. The first is moving beyond what the editors see as Bosch's over-emphasis on ordained ministry to look at the role of the laity as the principal actors in mission. Second, what does mission or ministry by the whole people of God look like today, over thirty years after Bosch's book? And third, to concentrate on 'the nature of God's mission as it fills marketplaces, workplaces and the whole of daily life' (p. 7).

The second dialogue text is Norman Thomas's *Readings in World Mission*. This aims to encourage a more global reach, demonstrating how the ministry of the whole people of God is lived around the world. And the third dialogue text is the entry on 'Laity' in the *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, written by Elisabeth Adler and Jonah Katoneene. Here especially they focus on four concepts developed in the text: 'Christ in the world', 'Church and world', 'ministry of laity', 'ordained ministry', and then add a fifth, 'maturation' (p. 11).

These five themes form the basis for the division of the book. There is not space here to outline the various chapters. All that can be said is that they offer a wide diversity of approaches. Some are from a more directly biblical perspective (focusing on Paul), some are case studies, some are more general reflections. Although most of the contributions focus on what might be called a traditional understanding of work, there are some nods in the direction of the precarity of work and reflecting on the post-work society.

There are a number of positive contributions from this book. Its very existence encourages further debate and reflection on work and mission — work as place for mission, as well as mission as and in work. It is also good to hear in more detail the richness of the Australian theological world, which is not always given its rightful place in contemporary English-speaking mission studies.

Slightly more critically, there is a sense that this book is reflecting on a world that is ceasing to exist. The nature of human labour is undergoing a profound transformation and that will have inevitable repercussions for Christian mission too, no doubt positive and negative. For many people, work is insecure, fragile, badly paid, full of danger and

anxiety, and though this is present in the book, I would have preferred this reality to be stressed more. The use of the three dialogue partners gives the book a greater structural unity but sometimes feels rather artificial. Overall, this is an important and valuable contribution to the debate about mission and work and will benefit anyone who is interested in the topic (which, given how central it is to the lives of the vast majority of us, should be everyone!).

Pieter L. Lalleman (ed.), *Challenging to Change: Dialogues with a Radical Baptist Theologian. Essays Presented to Dr Nigel G. Wright on his Sixtieth Birthday* (Wipf & Stock, 2020, originally published by Spurgeon's College London, 2009), 206 pages. ISBN: 9781725287716.

Reviewed by Ksenija Magda

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I should have noticed this book back in 2009 when Dr Wright and I shared spaces at EBF, which brought him even to our home in Čakovec, Croatia. I am glad the book found me now, as a re-published issues from 2020, although that year everyone was too traumatised to think about anything properly. By now Christians know that we need to rethink church. Starting with Wright's agenda as proposed and commented on in this volume is a better place than many.

This celebratory volume in honour of Nigel G. Wright consists of thirteen essays by recognised, predominantly British, scholars and church people. There is also a foreword by the editor, an introduction by David Coffey, a global Baptist leader, and short tributes by friends and colleagues. A list of Wright's major works is added near the end.

The work exhibits facets of Wright's overarching work, centring on the church as a factor of change in the world. This interest can be traced back to his MTh and PhD days. The book includes issues important in Baptist (and baptistic) discussions which are still relevant but may also have new aspects. Wright's method includes learning from

history, but not without critical probing of theories to find ways useful for the practical life of the contemporary church.

The volume examines inescapable Baptist doctrinal subjects like 'inter-church cooperation' (R. Brown, D. Tidball), being 'born-again', 'believer's baptism' (R. A. Campbell), and the difficult question about the 'freedoms of church and society' (J. E. Colwell). It adds questions about practical church matters like the duties of ministers, leadership, and 'inclusive representation' (C. J. Ellis, R. A. Ellis, P. Goodliff), church planting and evangelism (S. Murray). But it also covers aspects of wider ecclesiology (S. Holmes, S. Murray), especially relating to the role of the Holy Spirit in the church. For Wright the Holy Spirit is the power by which the church overcomes evil (P. Fiddes, T. Small).

All these issues have been handled by Wright in a new way, often called 'radical'. In a Baptist setting 'radical' can mean two things: 'radically different' from what the Baptists expect and hence problematic, or 'radical' in the sense of the Baptist/Anabaptist reformation. For most contributors in the volume, both apply to Wright. When some call Wright 'conservative' this means that he will not easily reject the history of Baptist values to pursue wild new dreams. When he is called 'radical' this means that he is pointing to how Baptists could do better in practising what they believe about ministry and the church (to rephrase N. Clark's comment noted on p. 105). Wright himself describes his position as 'Friendly. Mainstream. Rooted' ('British Baptist Theologians No. 4: Nigel G. Wright', 8 May 2026, Andy Goodliff, blog <https://andygoodliff.typepad.com>[Accessed 23 April, 2025]). That kind of Baptist is important for many of us who lack such Baptist examples. In a sentence: this is a valuable little book to read and especially discuss not only with Baptists.

Aldrin M. Peñamora and Bernard K. Wong (eds), *Asian Christian Ethics: Evangelical Perspectives* (Langham Global Library, 2022), 378 pages. ISBN: 9781839730740.

Reviewed by David McMillan

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Asian Christian Ethics is published as part of the series Foundations in Asian Christian Thought. The series aims to offer 'innovative introductions to key topics that are biblically rooted, contextually engaged and theologically rich'. Contextual reflection is a priority for the series and this book offers a fine example of contextual reflection as well as important theological and ethical insights. Divided into two sections, the first eight chapters are gathered under the theme of the Ethical Way of Life, the following seven contributions are themed as Ethics in the World. The first section themes such as moral formation, divorce, business, and bribery provide the starting point for consideration of the ethical way of life. The second section addresses the themes of creation care, political and political theology, homosexuality, wealth and poverty, caste systems, and peacemaking.

In the introduction the editors address the contextualisation of ethics, highlighting the difference between a Western and Asian approach. Critiquing the tendency for Western Christian ethics to be 'I-self' focused, they explain that an Asian approach has a 'we-self' focus, a distinction that is immediately obvious from the list of contents which includes chapters on 'Identity, Local Wisdom, and Moral Formation' and 'Honor Your Father and Your Mother'. The editors and contributors are not dismissive of Western Christian ethical reflection. You will meet engagement with scholars such as Cavanaugh, Volf, Bonhoeffer, Hauerwas, and MacIntyre, as well as Aristotle and Plato, but you will also encounter a huge array of Asian scholars. You will, however, also meet Confucius and Jesus in conversation on the theme of filial obligations, providing a thoroughly cultural and Christian perspective on family structures, community implications, and memorials to the deceased. Gandhi will join the conversation with Confucius and Jesus on the theme of 'the good life'. The conversation

is respectful, engaging, and ultimately enriches the understanding of the kingdom of God and the call to a culturally engaged discipleship. A striking feature of the book is that as virtue ethics has more recently come to the fore in Western ethical discussion, Asian ethicists work from that premise as part of the outworking of their cultural heritage.

I imagine that the majority of the Asian scholars referenced will be unknown to most Western readers, but it is clear that there is a vibrant and growing Asian Christian scholarly community who, while grounding their reflection in an Asian context, have much to offer the wider Christian family. For example, in the opening chapter, 'Identity, Local Wisdom and Moral Formation', Florian M. P. Simatupang addresses the need for 'ethical redemption' of the concept of 'evangelical' and offers reflection on the Asian emphasis of local wisdom as a corrective to the competitive and divisive attitudes that exist within the evangelical community.

For a Western reader, reading this book provides the opportunity to engage with both the familiar and the unfamiliar — we meet some familiar ethicists and concepts but also a critique or corrective that emerges from the Asian cultural context. I warmly recommend this book for general reading and particularly for inclusion in Western taught courses on ethics.

Augusto Rodríguez, *Being Missional in Times of Crisis: Leadership, Ministry, and Church Insights from the Acts of the Apostles* (Wipf & Stock, 2023), 122 pages. ISBN: 9781666763256.

Reviewed by Damon McCaskill

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Critics argue that the church is exceptional at performing activities like offering, singing, remaining inward-focused, and so on. However, for the church to minister to humanity effectively, it must restart. Unfortunately, it is Covid-19 that has provided the church with the opportunity. Instead of activities, the church must execute its mission

(Matthew 28:19–20). That is easier said than done. Churches face budgeting responsibilities, fostering social connections, and navigating various political leanings, making it difficult to remain consistently missional.

In the aftermath of the Covid-19 crisis, Augusto Rodríguez instructs church leaders in this book about actively engaging the world. He urges local congregations to be missional during this challenging time. His effort is layered. First, resulting from the pandemic, Rodríguez endeavours to prepare church leaders for mission ministry. Second, he employs the early church as a model, thus demonstrating how present-day congregations can overcome crises. Third, Rodríguez writes to mentor church leadership with insights learned from the study of the early church in the Book of Acts. Instead of aiming his work at the academy, his ultimate goal is instructing churches to become a hybrid ministry.

Hybridisation combines online and in-person services. Traditional in-person worship will continue, unless public health issues arise. Online worship serves members who cannot physically attend. Reasons for this may include illness, social distancing, and natural disasters. Complementing streaming worship services, Rodríguez encourages churches to establish small groups. He asserts these hybrid cell groups can impact an entire city. Furthermore, he declares that cell groups are the only way the church can accomplish the Great Commission of making disciples. I disagree. Christians believe God is able. My grandmother would say, 'He can make a way out of no way.'

While this book emphasises the shift to hybrid ministries, Rodríguez begins by exploring how the church can adopt a missional stance during a pandemic. Following the church's example in Acts, he develops an understanding of leadership, ministry, and church organisation in times of crisis. For Rodríguez, organised leadership is aware of the challenges facing the church. He also maintains that the church must proclaim the gospel across cultural barriers.

Rodríguez has charted a pathway for churches to thrive. Nonetheless, his reference to Ronald Reagan as an example for motivating Christians is problematic. Further, one can certainly agree

about the importance of missionaries being prudent not to impose their values on the cultures they serve; however, in history there have been calamities that followed missionary presence upon native cultures. Does this suggest association with civil religion, a topic that would require more thorough discussion? In the light of the discourse developed in this book, I hope mission ministries will promote the gospel rather than civil religion.

David P. Gushee, *The Moral Teachings of Jesus: Radical Instruction in the Will of God* (Cascade Books, 2024), 200 pages. ISBN: 9781666744767.

Reviewed by Peter Stevenson

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This outstanding book conveys a prophetic message to the church which demands careful attention and prayerful action.

David Gushee observes how some leave church because 'their churches no longer seem to have much to do with the Jesus whom they are supposed to be about' (p. xi). At a time when there are siren voices suggesting that Jesus's teaching is too weak, Gushee responds by inviting Christians 'to attend closely to what Jesus said about how his followers should live' (p. xi). To enable this vital process, he explores forty passages drawn from all four Gospels.

One of the book's strengths is that it exemplifies a way of handling biblical texts with scholarly integrity, which opens up their contemporary relevance. This book demonstrates a healthy approach to interpreting the Bible; and on that basis alone it merits a very warm welcome. That healthy exegesis, drawing upon a rich mix of conversation partners, serves an ambitious purpose. It seeks to confront the church with the 'radical spiritual and moral surgery' (p. 196) needed if believers are to live according to the values of the kingdom of God.

David Gushee is well known to readers of *JEBS* through his work with the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and IBTS, and as the co-author of *Kingdom Ethics* with the late Glen Stassen. In exploring challenging texts, such as the command to love your enemies (Matt 5:44), Gushee adopts Stassen's *transforming initiatives* interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount. This views Jesus's teachings as 'triads: traditional righteousness, followed by a sinful pattern, and concluding with a transforming initiative' (p. 57). Employing this methodology results in a fresh reading of these texts, which challenges readers to embark on a costly way of living which goes against the grain of an aggressive, materialistic culture.

Gushee restricts his comments on each of the forty chosen 'pericopes' to 1500–1600 words. Each short, readable chapter contains a feast of 'solid food […] for the mature' (Heb 5:14) and for young believers alike. Reading this book slowly provides rich spiritual nourishment, by enabling readers to hear again the disturbing and inspiring voice of Jesus calling them to follow him. There is a depth of power in these reflections on the Gospels, which contain striking echoes of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's criticism of 'cheap grace' in *The Cost of Discipleship*.

At a time when churches need to grow disciples who make disciples, this book offers a rich resource for anyone wanting to explore what genuine Christian discipleship looks like in the contemporary context.

This prophetic study calls the church to rediscover the path of costly discipleship, for 'God wants a radically reoriented humanity. But that begins with a vanguard group, the church, that will radically reorient in this Godward direction and who will fearlessly choose to play by God's rules, not by messed up human patterns' (p. 197).

To become that kind of fellowship the church needs a process of 'retraining into practices Jesus taught' (p. 197), and this book makes a stimulating contribution to that process.