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### **Dimensions of Baptist Identity: Past and Present**

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The International Baptist Theological Study Centre offers the opportunity to explore key contemporary issues in an international academic environment. We would like to extend an invitation to join us in this conference which will explore the topic of Baptist – or, as some participants may prefer, baptistic – identity from different perspectives, including spirituality, theology, and practice. Both the constants and variables of identity will be discussed. What are Baptist identity markers and how have these been perceived, interpreted, developed, and lived out in different cultural settings? Papers from historical and present-day perspectives are welcome, as well as presentations focusing on Baptist relations with other traditions.

If you are interested in presenting a paper, please send the title and a short abstract (maximum 300 words) for consideration to Dr Toivo Pilli ([pilli@ibts.eu](mailto:pilli@ibts.eu)) before 10 November 2020. The papers are expected to be no more than 30 minutes in delivery.

For further information and registration contact Laura Dijkhuizen ([dijkhuizen@ibts.eu](mailto:dijkhuizen@ibts.eu)) or you can register online before 10 March 2021 via <https://forms.gle/eA6t6JxScm1pbJiGA>.

Papers will be considered for publication in the *Journal of European Baptist Studies*.

*Participants are responsible for their travel and accommodation arrangements. A limited number of travel scholarships are available for participants from low-income countries, depending on the number of applicants.*

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## Editorial

Church and State relations have always been a part of the Baptist story. The question ‘How to live true a Christian witness in the existing cultural and political realities?’ has accompanied Baptist identity over centuries, since the time of Smyth and Helwys. And it is not only a question for Baptists, but for all Christians. Sometimes it has helped to call for action. Sometimes it has led believers towards radical separation from the state, and sometimes it has been interpreted in a way that has prompted a movement towards closer cooperation, even to the verge of testing the church’s loyalty to Jesus Christ. And — to use a historical example — even in the former Soviet Union, which was an openly atheistic state, where churches were forced to withdraw from many areas of society, this multi-faceted issue of what is the Christian response or prophetic witness in front of earthly powers did not fully fade away. On the contrary, in some areas it was even intensified, such as in the theology and practice of underground churches.

This issue of the *Journal of European Baptist Studies* is dedicated to this old-new topic, exploring some classical patterns and bringing into discussion fresh perspectives. The articles take into account different contexts where church and state themes have been played out. As the Christian church lives in the midst of change, new challenges emerge, or rather, old challenges in new situations.

This volume could be conceived of as falling into three sub-sections. Firstly, three articles focus on general themes, such as issues of the separation of church and state, Baptist contribution to the development of the concept and practice of human rights, and secularism as an environment for religious freedom. The next three articles bring into the reader’s awareness the historical context. An example from early church history demonstrates that the Donatist’s doctrine of the separation of church and state was an expedient guideline rather than a radical principle. This raises a wider question: In what ways are convictions and practices actually linked? The following articles give additional material for thought, taking the reader into the nineteenth century, when in two different European countries, Norway and Ireland, the Baptists reacted to legislative developments. The last three articles in this issue of *JEBS* bring into discussion biblical and theological aspects: Where does or should obedience to earthly powers end? What are the relationships, if any, between biblical narratives and present-day conceptions of nationalism? Can believers’ communities learn other patterns of relating to the world than the gathered — and separated — way of being a church? It is almost symbolic that the last article in this volume rings a ‘missional bell’, reminding that discussion around relations of church and

the world cannot be detached from other topics, such as ecclesiology, worship and mission.

The next paragraphs of this editorial introduce the articles individually, taking a closer look at each. Uwe Swarat examines basic models and key concepts through the centuries, describing the Eastern Church model of the established church, the Roman Catholic model of political theocracy, the Lutheran doctrine of the two regiments, the Reformed Christocratic model and the Anabaptist model — and finally, the Baptist model, ‘which emphasises separation of church and state, but permits Christians to take on civil roles in society’. This survey offers a helpful axis of coordination where a reader may locate additional ideas and examples that emerge on later pages. Although pointing out other approaches, such as the Anabaptist reservations towards political involvement, Swarat prefers the Lutheran pattern as a platform for a conversation about how to be part of political–social structures, and he expresses conviction that this starting point enables Baptists to act ‘without authorising their politics religiously or politicising their faith’. Tony Peck highlights in his article that ‘Baptists have embraced a concern for human rights’, especially as an idea which guarantees religious freedom for all. The author refers back to historical examples and instances, but the main concern is that numerous violations of human rights and religious freedom are happening in our contemporary world. What should be a Baptist response to this situation? Do Baptists have historical heritage on which to build their present actions and witness? Two illustrations, enhancing the discussion, are specifically underlined: the Baptist contribution in the making and interpretation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the theology and prophetic witness of Martin Luther King Jr. The article brings the discussion into recent context, throwing light on both the scope and content of the notions ‘universal human rights’ and ‘religious freedom for all’. In the third article in this volume, ‘Christianity and Secularism: Prospects and Possibilities’, by Nigel Wright, a large panorama of secularism unfolds. Many Christians perceive ‘secularism’ as a negative tendency of the marginalisation of the Christian Church in society. Wright, however, argues that secular society forms an environment where the free churches find an opportunity to practice a non-coercive religion. In this environment, the state guarantees religious liberty for all. Nevertheless, developing a typology by which — in broad terms — the churches and social reality might be understood, Wright makes a distinction between ‘hard’ or ‘programmatic’ secularism and ‘soft’ or ‘procedural’ secularism. It is the latter that has potential to keep ‘the ring open as a non-sectarian and constructive arbiter for all productive religious contributions’. Paradoxical as it may sound, it is in the interest of churches to encourage ‘hospitable’ secularism as a civic strategy; and this is a soil

where the non-coercive model of being a church, committed to Christian worship and mission, can grow.

In the following three writings, an historical lens is used to investigate the topic. Tarmo Toom describes the understanding of the separation of church and state among the Donatists in the fourth century, and he reaches the conclusion that this teaching, in this controversial group, hardly ever functioned ‘as an absolute principle’, but rather as an ‘expedient doctrine’. The article reveals an intriguing contradiction between the evolving Donatist convictions of the separation of church and state, and their actual practice. Toom’s article, as a kind of historical mirror, offers for the present-day Christian church well-researched material for comparative self-evaluation. History becomes a conversation partner for today. The next article, by Gabriel Stephen, jumps over ‘a time gap’ into the end of the nineteenth century (1877–1891), and discusses how the Norwegian Baptist movement made their voice heard in the discourse on religious freedom in the conformist Lutheran state-church context. The article centres on Baptist criticism of the Dissenter Law, introduced in 1845, as the believers realised that the Law could not alleviate or eliminate disguised discriminatory tendencies towards minority religious communities. In addition, the Law implied that religious liberty was a concession, not an inherent right. The Baptist critical reaction was not limited to dissatisfaction in their inner circles: they became involved in civil disobedience, baptising younger persons than the Law allowed, and they corresponded with the top government leadership of the country to argue their case. Their efforts contributed to a revision of the Dissenter Law in 1891. The third article in this historical section, written by David Luke, illuminates Irish Baptists’ response to the Second Home Rule Bill, in 1893. Even if ‘Irish Baptists have historically adopted the view that religion and politics should not be mixed’ the political movement advocating Irish self-government within the UK, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, changed this practice — at least for a while. Baptists shared concerns with other Protestants that these developments, and passing the Bill, might strengthen the positions of the Catholic majority and limit or even crush the religious and civil liberties of the Protestant minority. Protestants, including Baptists, were ‘providing a religious rationale for resisting Home Rule’. The article points out the complexity of practising Baptist principles in the midst of political turmoil. It remains for further reflection why Irish Baptists lost interest in political engagement immediately after the Second Home Rule Bill was defeated in the House of Lords.

The last articles in this issue of *JEBS* use theological and biblical tools rather than historical. Joshua Searle locates the discussion into the context of the ongoing legacy of the Soviet system. Post-Soviet authoritarianism poses

challenges to believers' churches. Fear tends to hinder Christians from talking about 'social responsibility, justice, truth, freedom, solidarity or the transformation of society', and shapes a pseudo-theological justification for passivity. The article, nevertheless, emphasises, with reference to the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity and its aftermath, that Slavic believers have been 'led to the conviction that the church is called to engage with society'. But how and to what measure? And how to avoid a road towards 'the blasphemous deification of the state'? What steps would help post-Soviet evangelicals to move from the emphasis on personal salvation towards being agents of social transformation? Some answers, the author posits, could be found from Baptist and Anabaptist traditions. Helen Paynter gives voice to biblical theology, exploring questions which emerge when nationalistic ideology appears to be supported by biblical narrative. The author describes elements of ethnic nationalism, mapping the far-right 'terrain', and inquires if the scriptures, especially the Old Testament texts, actually endorse such ideology or not. The conclusion is that there is nothing in biblical themes that offers genuine support for ethnic nationalism. The 'physical categories of land and blood-line' — potentially nationalistic motives — have now, in the light of the work of Jesus Christ, been concretised into eschatological and spiritual categories. They are not other-worldly categories, but they are no longer in force, pending the eschaton. 'The misapplication of biblical tropes and themes may — ironically — give us purchase to address a group which would otherwise be outside our orbit'. Despite the dangers of far-right movements, Baptists are invited to speak a counter-narrative of inclusion and peaceableness. The concluding essay in this journal issue, in a way continuing from where the previous article ended, explores dimensions of mission. Mark Ord questions a widespread view that relations between the church and the world should be described with images of clear demarcation and substantial boundary between the two, and he challenges the separation that this approach seems to imply. Within this framework of thought, often perceived as part of Baptist identity, mission becomes a 'boundary crossing' transmission from one realm to another: delivering a message or servicing a need. The article probes another approach — that of 'two-way relations' between the church and the world — and is looking for an authentic faith that 'converts and transforms in both directions'. Ord argues, bringing into discussion the element of worship and sacramental theology, that formation is not linear, it works both ways: it is not only that church members deliver a good message for the world, the believers' communities, too, are shaped by their members' participation in the world. Christians are not only teaching others how to be disciples, but they are learning as well. The relationships between the church and the world are complex, and the borders are porous.

Church and state relations, and the connected aspects of religious freedom and human rights, political developments and secularism, continue to challenge Christian churches, theologically and practically. One may even say that Baptists or baptistic churches, because of their inherent identity markers which call for a witnessing discipleship in the world, are especially ‘obliged’ to deal with these topics while finding their way in existing cultures, and sometimes living under the shadow of majority churches or dominant religions. It requires courage of interpretation and hermeneutical efforts to probe into the questions of how to live a missional life — in this world, and still not from this world. Both diachronic and synchronic approaches, learning from historical developments and from the present-day realities, and crossing denominational and geographical borders while deepening the discussion, are relevant for this task. There are no watertight patterns, and Christian meaningful responses to the world — or culture or state or ideologies or politics, if a reader prefers more specific terms — are often not ready-made. And, as we are reminded, besides seeking for a response there is an important task of listening... This issue of the *Journal of European Baptist Studies* offers some insights and ideas for this ongoing process.

**Revd Dr Toivo Pilli (Editor)**



# **The Relationship between State and Church: Classical Concepts Examined from a Baptist Perspective**

Uwe Swarat

Baptists have long stood for freedom of religion and of conscience, and these two are inextricably bound together with the relationship between church and state. This paper examines the following church-state models: the Eastern Church model of the established church; the Roman Catholic model of political theocracy; the theology and praxis of Martin Luther's doctrine of the two regiments; the Reformed Christocratic mode; the Anabaptist model of strict separation of Christians from public affairs; and finally the Baptist model, which emphasises separation of church and state, but permits Christians to take on civil roles in society. The author concludes by pointing out the shortcomings of the state-church and theocratic models, preferring instead the Baptist model of state-church separation, which also attempts to implement Luther's doctrine of the two regiments.

## **Keywords**

State church; theocracy; the doctrine of the two kingdoms; separation of church and state.

## **Introduction**

One of the basic Baptist convictions from their beginnings at the start of the seventeenth century is that state and church must be separated. This has had effects in world history: the colony on Rhode Island, founded in 1636 in North America by the Baptist Roger Williams, was the first state in the modern era that guaranteed full religious freedom and freedom of conscience to all humans.<sup>1</sup> This direction was followed in 1791 by the United States of America in the First Amendment to the Constitution, which states amongst others: 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof'. President Thomas Jefferson interpreted this clause in a letter to the Danbury Baptist Association in Connecticut 1802 as building a wall of separation between Church and

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Uwe Swarat, 'Luther und Baptisten über Glaubensfreiheit', in *Religions- und Weltanschauungsfreiheit. Verfassungsrechtliche Grundlagen und konfessionelle Perspektiven*, ed. by Peter Antes and Heinrich de Wall (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2018), pp. 115-127.

State.<sup>2</sup> Since then this Baptist conviction has determined the relationship between state and church in the USA.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the expression *Baptist Principles* or *Baptist Distinctives* arose among Baptists. The advocacy of the separation of state and church and of freedom of religion and of conscience are almost always counted among these principles.<sup>3</sup> Thereby, it is crucial for a correct understanding that freedom of religion and the separation of state and church be inextricably joined together. The primary desire of the Baptists was and is to defend freedom of religion and conscience. For the sake of this freedom, a separation of state and church is necessary. When the state and the church are linked together, in whatever form, the freedom to practice a faith other than that of the official Church will be limited or even rescinded. For the sake of the freedom of religion and conscience the state should keep out of religious affairs.

In the following, I argue that the subject of the freedom of religion and conscience must give way to a more fundamental consideration of the relationship between church and state. I shall treat the Baptist thought on the relationship between church and state by comparing it with other lines of thought represented in Christendom on this relationship. I shall therefore attempt a kind of denominational typology of the state-church relationship in order to draw out similarities with and differences from the Baptist position as clearly as possible. This will be done, of course, from my own perspective, but hopefully so that members of other denominations might not feel completely misunderstood. Furthermore, such a typology requires considerable restraints in its depiction, so I shall not go into the various

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<sup>2</sup>Jefferson's Letter to the Danbury Baptists, <https://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9806/danpre.html>

<sup>3</sup> See Martin Rothkegel, 'Freiheit als Kennzeichen der wahren Kirche. Zum baptistischen Grundsatz der Religionsfreiheit und seinen historischen Ursprüngen', in *Baptismus. Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. by A. Strübind and M. Rothkegel (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), pp. 201-225.

A generally accepted listing of the *distinctive principles* of the Baptists does not exist; they basically serve as goals of communication, in order to demonstrate the historically grown profile of the Baptists among the plurality of Christian denominations. For a treatment of religious freedom and the separation of church and state as marks of Baptist identity see Study and Research Division, Baptist World Alliance, *We Baptists* (Franklin, Tennessee: Providence House Publishers, 1999), p. 31ff; and George H. Tooze, *Baptist Principles. With Practical Applications and Questions for Discussion* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2013), pp. 166-190; R. Stanton Norman, *The Baptist Way. Distinctives of a Baptist Church* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2005), pp. 163-183; Walter B. Shurden, *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms* (Macon, Georgia: Smith and Helwys, 1993), pp. 45-54; William Henry Brackney, *The Baptists, Denominations in America, 2* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), pp. 87-107; W. R. White, *Baptist Distinctives* (Nashville, Tennessee: Baptist Sunday School Board, 1946), p. 289; James Madison Pendleton, *Distinctive Principles of Baptists* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1882), p. 185.

H. Wheeler Robinson, *Baptist Principles* (London: Carey Kingsgate, 1925) only counts among Baptist principles conversion out of conviction, faithfulness to Holy Scripture and to the risen Lord whom it reveals, and the spiritual constitution of the church. All three are implied in the baptism of believers.

branches of the current discussion, but will only paint in broad strokes the basic historical models, which, however, reach into the present day.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Eastern Church Model of the State-Church Relationship<sup>5</sup>**

In the tradition of the Eastern Church the type of the state church or established church emerged. The term ‘Caesaropapism’ has been coined for this type. This means that the Caesar, the emperor, is at the same time the pope, the head of the Church. In the strictest sense this was only true in Russia. However, in Byzantium too, the Christian emperors understood themselves to be pre-eminent members of the church leadership and participated as such in the formulation of church doctrine and order as well as explicitly expressing themselves as theologians. This was most clear with Justinian (rule 527–565 CE), although Theodosius the Great (rule 379–394 CE) had already described himself as the bishop instituted by God for the external affairs of the church.<sup>6</sup> Admittedly, the current self-conception of the Eastern Churches does not correspond to the term Caesaropapism. The orthodox churches themselves use the terms ‘symphony’, or the ‘accord’ of state and church. According to this understanding, state and church stand free and independently beside each other, have different purposes, and still work together towards a common goal.

The normative understanding of the state here is the Christian state, a state that consciously understands itself to be an instrument of God in the service of the Kingdom of God — including the destruction of all non-Christian religions and Christian heresies. The Christianisation of the state is seen as a consequence of the incarnation of the Son of God, through whom all of nature is being transformed into the divine life. For the salvation-historical future nothing fundamentally new is expected, but rather only the consummation of the reality that already is. The Christian state is thus the present form of the Kingdom of God. That is in principle the orthodox understanding of the state.

In the specific historical encounter between state and church, the power in the regions of the Eastern Church has strongly shifted towards the state, so that the intended symphony of two independent entities has become

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<sup>4</sup> For a more complete survey, see Reinhold Zippelius, *Staat und Kirche. Eine Geschichte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, 2nd edn, new and revised (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Das Verhältnis von Staat und Kirche in der Orthodoxie*, Essener Gespräche zum Thema Staat und Kirche, 45, ed. by Burkhard Kämper and Hans W. Thönnies (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2011); Thomas Bremer, ‘Geistliche Würdenträger und politische Macht. Orthodoxie in Russland’, in *Die Ambivalenz des Religiösen: Religionen als Friedensstifter und Gewalterzeuger*, ed. by Bernd Oberdorfer and Peter Waldmann (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach Druck- und Verlagshaus, 2008), pp. 247-265; Panagiotis Demetropoulos, ‘Kirche und Staat in griechisch-orthodoxer Sicht’, in *Kirche im Osten*, Band 10, ed. by Robert Stupperich (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), pp. 22-33.

<sup>6</sup> For further discussion, see Demetropoulos, ‘Kirche und Staat’, p. 24ff.

a rarity. In the established church system of the Eastern Church, the state sets down the framework for the actions of the church. The state has a say in determining the order of the church, as well as the direction and extent of its actions. The church is definitely important for the state, partly for pragmatic-educative and partly for metaphysical reasons, because the state wants to ensure the receiving of heavenly assistance. Compared with other churches or religious organisations, the established church enjoys great privileges in order to render it as unrivalled as possible. In return, the church is expected to give a religious justification for the state and endorse the government's actions. Up to the present day this has been most obvious in Russia and in the Balkans. Religious freedom is understood by the Russian Orthodox Church to be the freedom of expression for Orthodox churches alone, and not the equal treatment by the state of all religious organisations and denominations.

### **The Roman Catholic Model<sup>7</sup>**

In order to show the difference between the Byzantine-Orthodox and the Roman Catholic models we can broadly say the following: while the Eastern Churches have developed the type of state church culminating in Caesaropapism, that is, the rule of the state over the church, the Roman Catholic Church developed the type of the rule of the church over the state, that is, a political theocracy. A symbol of this is the fact that after the middle of the eighth century the pope was the ruler over a worldly realm, the Papal state. Also, the institution of the ecclesiastical princes, above all the prince-bishops and the prince-abbots, as territorial rulers in the Roman-German Empire until 1806 was an expression of this church-state principle.

The reasons for the transition from the model of the state-church to that of the church-state lie in the historical development. In the fourth century Eusebius of Caesarea declared it to be a sign of divine providence that the Christian church could spread out in a world united in peace by the Roman emperor. The Christian-Roman worldwide monarchy, founded by Constantine the Great, appeared to him to be an earthly depiction of the heavenly world dominion of God.<sup>8</sup> However, the Christian worldwide

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Hartmut Kreß, *Staat und Person. Politische Ethik im Umbruch des modernen Staates* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2018), pp. 17-22; Joseph Listl, *Die Aussagen des Codex Iuris Canonici vom 25. Januar 1983 zum Verhältnis von Kirche und Staat*, Essener Gespräche zum Thema Staat und Kirche, Band 19, ed. by Heiner Marré and Johannes Stütting (Münster: Aschendorff, 1985), pp. 9-37; the same in *Kirche im freiheitlichen Staat*, Essener Gespräche zum Thema Staat und Kirche, Band 15/2, ed. by Josef Isensee et al., (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1996), pp. 957-988; Paul Mikat, 'Kirche und Staat in nachkonziliarer Sicht', in *Kirche und Staat – Festschrift für Bischof D. Hermann Kunst zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. by Kurt Aland and Wilhelm Schneemelcher (Berlin: De Gruyter 1967), pp. 105-125.

<sup>8</sup> See Adolf Martin Ritter, *'Kirche und Staat' im Denken des frühen Christentums*, *Traditio christiana*, 13, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), source no. 39; Hans Georg Thümmel, *Die Kirche des Ostens im 3. und 4.*

monarchy crumpled as a result of the migration of peoples that began in 375 CE. The Latin church father Augustine drew the conclusion that the Kingdom of God was no longer embodied in the state, but only in the church.<sup>9</sup> The mediaeval church followed him in this and asserted the claim that it alone was a universal institution. It struggled correspondingly with the Roman-German Empire, which likewise conceived itself to be the universal ruler.

The basic pattern in the Roman Catholic conception of the relationship between state and church can be most easily explained using the general correlation of nature and grace, according to the motto: Grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it.<sup>10</sup> All natural circumstances, including the state, will be perfected by being aligned with supernatural grace. As grace does not destroy nature, the state has an independence with respect to the church. Its being and form are determined by natural law. The onset of sin damaged the natural law. For this reason, the state requires the instruction of the church in order to recognise its own being and achieve its specific commission in a correct manner. The superiority of the church over the state arises therefore out of nature's fundamental need for grace, and so out of the divine world order.

As for the practical consequences to which these principles lead, these have been evaluated varyingly by the Roman Catholic Church throughout history. Roughly speaking, we can ascertain two main lines: radical theocracy on the one hand and moderate theocracy on the other.

Radical theocratic thinking was at its height in the Middle Ages, as the papacy desired to make the emperor and the princes into vassals of the church. The most important document of this line of thinking is the Bull 'Unam Sanctam' by Pope Boniface VIII in 1302. It is written there that the Church, and at its head the pope, have been given by Christ two swords,<sup>11</sup> a spiritual as well as a temporal one. And it states further:

Moreover, it is necessary for one sword to be under the other, and the temporal authority to be subjected to the spiritual. [...] And we must necessarily admit that the spiritual power surpasses any earthly power in dignity and honor, because spiritual things surpass temporal things. [...] For the truth itself declares that the spiritual power must establish the temporal power and pass judgment on it if it is not good. [...] We therefore declare, say, and affirm that submission on the part of every man to the bishop of Rome is altogether necessary for his salvation.<sup>12</sup>

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*Jahrhundert*, Kirchengeschichte in Einzeldarstellungen, I/4 (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1988), pp. 50-52; Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981); Hendrikus Berkhof, *Kirche und Kaiser. Eine Untersuchung der Entstehung der byzantinischen und der theokratischen Staatsauffassung im vierten Jahrhundert* (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1947).

<sup>9</sup> Ritter, 'Kirche und Staat', source no 59.

<sup>10</sup> 'Gratia non tollit naturam, sed perficit', Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I. 1.8 ad 2.

<sup>11</sup> Following on from Luke 22: 38.

<sup>12</sup> <http://media.bloomsbury.com/rep/files/primary-source-39-boniface-unam-sanctam.pdf>

In the modern era the papacy has not repeated such statements. There have, in some cases, been attempts to establish a rigorous and unified ‘Catholic state’. Examples of this are the Jesuit state in Paraguay from 1610–1767, or Spain under General Franco from 1936–1975. Even so, in modern times the moderate theocratic model is much more common than the radical theocratic model. According to this understanding, claims to temporal power do *not* belong to the essence of the Catholic church; the struggles of the mediaeval popes for political power must be understood in the context of their times and are not to be repeated. The church’s commission consists in winning over the political and social bodies to the principles of natural law using powers of persuasion as the authorised voice of God in the world. An important document for this train of thought is the encyclical of Pope Leo XIII in 1885, ‘Immortale Dei’.<sup>13</sup> It states, among other things, that the church is responsible for everything that concerns the ‘salvation of souls or the worship of God’. Everything else that includes the civil and political sphere has been subjected by God to the civil authorities. However, as the same people are concerned in civil society and in the church, and as it may happen that one and the same matter, for example marriage or schools, belongs to the jurisdiction of the state as well as to that of the church, it is necessary to have a ‘certain orderly connection’ between state and church. A separation of church and state is not appropriate in such matters, but rather, a ‘harmony’ (lat. *concordia*).

Thus, the moderate theocratic form does not strive for any political power for the church, it only expects that the church be allowed to be effective in a public manner in a religiously neutral state. This is to be ensured by means of treaties according to international law between the church and the state, so-called Concordats. The association of the natural orders of society and state with the supernatural orders of grace of the church ensues when the Catholic church exerts influence on society’s thoughts and actions through educating and nurturing the people. For this reason, the proliferation of Catholic schools and universities is particularly dear to the church. Even this moderate approach is essentially theocratic, in as far as it has in mind as an ideal imposing a Catholic character on the whole of society, including the polity.

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<sup>13</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_01111885\\_immortale-dei.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_01111885_immortale-dei.html)

## Martin Luther's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms or Regiments and the Regional Ruler's Church Rule

### Luther's Doctrine of the Two Regiments

Martin Luther's political ethics, and thereby also his determination of the relationship between state and church, is rooted in the differentiation of God's two kingdoms or regiments, that is, God's two ways of governing.<sup>14</sup> The historical significance of this doctrine consists in its being the first time in history that the traditional identification of lordship and salvation was lifted. The government of the world could now be understood to be profane and desacralised, and the spheres of politics and religion, state and church could be kept apart — at least in principle. This is even more notable as Luther naturally could not imagine the modern secular state, but rather, in accordance with his time, assumed a Christian state. Nevertheless, he detached himself from the notion of a sacral dominion, divided accordingly between temporal and spiritual authority, and set the course for a secular state order and the state's neutrality in religious and ideological matters. In spite of certain similarities, we must not confuse Luther's doctrine with Augustine's distinction between the City of God and the City of the Devil, nor with the mediaeval two-swords theory. Luther's doctrine has another characteristic. He arrived at it himself from the Bible — read through the lens of the doctrine of justification.

In its final form the doctrine of the two regiments states that God governs the world in a two-fold manner: through His 'spiritual regiment' and through His 'temporal regiment'. God's temporal regiment serves this earthly, *temporal* life; the spiritual regiment serves *eternal* life. The temporal regiment is concerned with the *preservation* of this world, the spiritual regiment with its *redemption*. The temporal regiment produces earthly and temporal justice (justice before humans), the spiritual regiment produces eternal justice (righteousness before God). God extends His temporal regiment over all people, including heathens and blasphemers. The spiritual regiment is restricted to God's people, because the spiritual regiment signifies the lordship of Jesus Christ through His Spirit in the hearts of the faithful. The Kingdom of God is also being built by means of the temporal regiment — but not the Kingdom of grace and of Jesus Christ, but rather the temporal Kingdom of God. Luther counts as part of this temporal Kingdom

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<sup>14</sup> Luther spoke on this subject several times, especially in 'Von weltlicher Obrigkeit' (1523) and in his sermons on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (1530-1532). Summaries can be read in Reinhard Schwarz, *Martin Luther – Lehrer der christlichen Religion*, 2nd impression (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), pp. 162-173; Christiane Tietz, 'Die politische Aufgabe der Kirche im Anschluss an die Lutherische Zwei-Regimenten-Lehre', in *Die politische Aufgabe von Religion. Perspektiven der drei monotheistischen Religionen*, ed. by Irene Dingel and Christiane Tietz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), pp. 259-273; Eilert Herms, 'Leben in der Welt', in *Luther Handbuch*, ed. by Albrecht Beutel (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), pp. 423-435; Paul Althaus, *Die Ethik Martin Luthers* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlags Haus, 1965), pp. 49-87.

of God not just the state authorities, but also marriage and family, property, economy and occupations. The doctrine of the two regiments is therefore not only concerned with the relationship between church and state, but with the whole gamut of the institutions of life in society. These institutions are, according to Luther, founded in the will of God the creator, and were already there before Christ and are independent of Christ. In the spiritual regiment only the authority of love and willingness to make sacrifices count; in the temporal regiment, above all in the state, the law, which is enforced by instruments of power, reigns. In the spiritual regiment only voluntariness counts; in the temporal regiment, resisters may be coerced. In the spiritual kingdom of God Christ reigns by means of His Word and Spirit; in the temporal kingdom God reigns through human reason.<sup>15</sup> The temporal orders should not be shaped by the gospel, but by the law, namely natural and historical law.

It is necessary, according to Luther, to distinguish carefully between God's two regiments, but not to divide them. It is one and the same God who reigns in goodness and mercy through both regiments. Nevertheless, the spiritual regiment achieves God's proper intention, namely eternal life, while the temporal regiment is merely a means to the end of achieving God's proper intention.

In his own time, Luther was most concerned that the two kingdoms and regiments should not be mixed with one another. For him, such a mixing occurred through the Roman papacy: the pope wants to make himself lord over the princes and the emperor, and earthly things like marriage laws should be regulated using canon law. However, on the other side, on the left-wing of the Reformation, Luther also saw a mixing of the two regiments. The enthusiasts, as he disparagingly called them, wanted to rule the world using the Sermon on the Mount and to forbid the swearing of oaths and military service, while the peasants drew political demands from the gospel. For Luther that is also impossible. One cannot rule the world with the gospel. One can only teach the conscience with the gospel, one may not interrupt the business of government with it. On the other hand, it is necessary to demand of the political rulers that they too do not mix the two regiments and intervene in the government of the church, or force their subjects to take up a particular faith. The authorities have no power over the faith and conscience of the people. Even their wars against the Turks were not to be led as holy wars in the name of Jesus Christ. So much, in all brevity, for Luther's doctrine of the two regiments.

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<sup>15</sup> Martin Luther: 'Man braucht keine Christen für die Obrigkeit. So ist es nicht nötig, dass der Kaiser ein Heiliger ist. Es ist nicht nötig für sein Regiment, dass er Christ ist. Es genügt für den Kaiser, dass er Vernunft hat' (Predigt am 23. Sonntag nach Trinitatis, 15.11. 1528, WA 27, 418, 2-4).



## The Development of the Regional Ruler's Church Rule

We cannot examine Luther's teaching without looking into the actual historical development that concerns the relationship between church and state in the countries that adopted the Lutheran Reformation. There the so-called Regional Rulers' Church Rule emerged, that is, the leadership of the church through the regional rulers (princes or town councils), and thus through the temporal regiment.<sup>16</sup> Such a constitutional structure is in tension with, or rather in contradiction to, the basic thinking of the doctrine of the two regiments. Nevertheless, Luther gave this development its decisive impetus.

In his tract 'To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation' of 1520 Luther called on the nobility, namely the German political élite, for aid in his Reformation enterprise. He differentiated between those reform propositions which the authorities could directly implement and others in which they could only indirectly be of help. For example, the worldly authorities have the right and the obligation to arrange for the termination of the various financial tributes to the Roman Curia. On the other hand, they were not responsible for such matters as the abolition of the demand for celibacy or the abolition of unspiritual rites such as having to kiss the pope's feet. According to Luther, such reforms may only be resolved by a church council. However, Luther called on the nobility for help in this case too, namely the convocation of such a church council, for Luther was faced with the problem that the pope and the bishops refused to do so. How might it nonetheless materialise? Luther pointed out that on the basis of the universal priesthood every Christian inherently has the right to convoke a council. In order to achieve this, those involved should have a position of authority within the Church. For this reason, Luther designates the regional prince as *praecipuum membrum ecclesiae*, a 'particular member of the Church'. As such — and not directly on account of his political authority — the prince should endeavour to convene a church council. On account of the particular historical situation Luther somewhat restricted his differentiation between worldly and ecclesiastical authority. He understood the state authorities' commitment, which he called for, to be an expression of a state of emergency, not a general rule.

The hopes Luther associated with this tract to the nobility soon came to nothing. The greater part of the German nobility did not endorse his reform

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<sup>16</sup> *Zwischen Ekklesiologie und Administration: Modelle territorialer Kirchenleitung und Religionsverwaltung im Jahrhundert der europäischen Reformationen*, ed. by Johannes Wischmeyer (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013); Gunter Zimmermann, 'Die Einführung des landesherrlichen Kirchenregiments', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 76 (1985): 146-168; Wilhelm H. Neuser, 'Kirche und Staat in der Reformationszeit', in *Kirche und Staat*, ed. by Aland und Schneemelcher, pp. 50-78; Karl Holl, 'Luther und das landesherrliche Kirchenregiment', in Karl Holl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, Band 1: Luther, 7th impression (Tübingen: Mohr, 1948), pp. 326-380.

propositions, but rather sought to suppress them. In view of that, Luther postulated that every local congregation had the right to carry out a reformation, and that meant above all, abolishing the Roman Mass, setting up a protestant worship service and dismissing ministers who did not preach the protestant faith. Luther spoke in this instance for the intervention of the local authorities in favour of the Reformation, once again by differentiating between the direct and indirect authority of the rulers. Luther stated that the authorities had direct warrant to prohibit the Roman Mass, because this was a public blasphemy. Indirect authority, that is authority accruing from membership of the church, could be practised by the authorities in the appointing of new, protestant ministers.

After 1525 it appeared to Luther that in order to consolidate the Reformation movement, it was important that rather than leaving such matters in the hands of local congregations alone, there should be a valid system across the whole region in the form of a unified church order in keeping with the ideas of the Reformation. Therefore, Luther requested his territorial sovereign, the Elector Johann, to carry out a visitation of all the church congregations in his territory. This visitation took place between 1527 and 1530 and founded the protestant state church of the Electorate of Saxony. If we examine the corresponding instruction of the Elector in 1527, we can see that the prince's understanding of his authority in the matter differed to Luther's. While Luther basically saw the visitation as an act of 'self-help from the church',<sup>17</sup> the prince wanted it to be understood as an expression of his fatherly care for his land. The prince saw himself as ruler not only for the earthly and physical well-being of his subjects, but also for their spiritual well-being.

Hence the instruction of the Elector of Saxony became the founding document of the regional ruler's church government, which would subsequently become determinant for the protestant regions in Germany. The regional governor is the *summus episcopus*, the 'supreme bishop' of the church in his region. What Luther had only considered as an emergency measure had become the normal occurrence and a principle of law. Here, as elsewhere in history, the power of events was stronger than the theory. Consequently, the Lutheran churches became more or less state churches. The appropriate juristic theory for this case, called the territorial theory, was later given at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by Christian Thomasius (1655–1728) and Justus Henning Boehmer (1674–1749).<sup>18</sup> They declared that the regional ruler has his power over the church not as a result of his position *in* the church, that is, not as *praecipuum*

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<sup>17</sup> Holl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, Band 1: Luther, p. 374.

<sup>18</sup> See Christoph Link, 'Territorialismus / Territorialsystem', in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Band 8, ed. by Hans Dieter Betz, 4th impression (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), pp. 165-166.

*membrum ecclesiae*, but as an outcome of his position over the church, namely in virtue of his authority over a particular territory. When not only protestants but also Catholics belong to this territory, then the protestant regional ruler is also the supreme bishop of the Catholics in that region. The practical management of the church was accomplished through consistories that had the legal structure of a government agency. This status was not changed until the overthrow of the rule of the nobles at the end of the First World War and the Weimar Constitution of 1918 and 1919.

## **The Understanding of the State-Church Relationship in the Reformed Tradition**

In the course of the twentieth century it has become common to oppose the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms with the protestant-reformed model of the Kingdom of Christ.<sup>19</sup> This did not occur completely without reason, even though the conceptional contrast in this form was first worked out by Karl Barth and his followers in the twentieth century. In the Reformed tradition there have indeed been tendencies towards theocracy or Christocracy. Ulrich Zwingli expressly advocated the right of the Christian government to reform the church. Luther's followers and the Anabaptists protested against this, stating that the Kingdom of Christ is not external. Zwingli opposed this, saying the Kingdom of Christ is also external and visible, particularly in the ordering of civil life through the government.<sup>20</sup> He personally conceived himself to be a prophet who dispensed divine commissions not only to the Christian congregation, but also to the civil community.<sup>21</sup> In 1528 Zwingli even became the leader of the secret council of the city of Zurich, the real centre of power, thus making Zurich de facto a Christocracy under his leadership. Following this way, he sought to convert inner Switzerland to the protestant faith by military means in the second war at Kappel in 1531. Thus, he took up the sword and died by the sword (cf. Matt 26:52).

Martin Bucer, the Strasbourg reformer, did not fight like Zwingli as a soldier for the cause of Christ, but put forth his convictions about God's, or rather Christ's, sovereignty by literary means. When Christ says in Matthew

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<sup>19</sup> See Ernst Wolf, 'Die Königsherrschaft Christi und der Staat', *Theologische Existenz heute*, 64 (1958): 20-61; cf. Martin Honecker, *Grundriß der Sozialethik* (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 1995), pp. 14-31.

<sup>20</sup> See Zwingli's letter of 4 May 1528 to Ambrosius Blarer in Konstanz. In the original Latin in *Huldreich Zwinglis Sämtliche Werke*, Band IX (Corpus Reformatorum, Band XCI, Leipzig 1925), pp. 451-467; in German translation with introduction and annotation: Hans Rudolf Lavater, 'Regnum Christi etiam externum', in *Zwingliana*, Band 15 (1981), pp. 338-381; cf. Alfred Farner, *Die Lehre von Kirche und Staat bei Zwingli* (Tübingen, 1930); Gottlob Schrenk, *Gottesreich und Bund im älteren Protestantismus vornehmlich bei Johannes Coccejus* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1923; reprint Gießen: Brunnen-Verlag, 1985), pp. 158ff.

<sup>21</sup> See Neuser, 'Kirche und Staat'.

28:18 that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him, then, according to Bucer, that includes political power.<sup>22</sup> This concept of ‘Christ’s kingdom’ influenced Bucer’s whole Reformation work and was summarised in his book ‘De regno Christi’, which he wrote in 1550 towards the end of his life. This book was addressed to the young English king Edward VI, the successor to Henry VIII, with the intention of inducing him to restructure the whole of society and the state in accordance with the ideas of the Reformation. ‘A civil society, consecrated to Christ the Lord, (*republica Christo Domino sacra*)’ should come into being, in which the biblical laws (including the Old Testament judicial laws) should frame the highest norms.<sup>23</sup> Bucer’s work accordingly contains fourteen detailed recommendations for laws pertaining to the creation of a truly Christian society, which stretch from the religious education of children to the keeping of the sabbath, laws on marriage and the use of the death penalty for adultery. King Edward VI did not consider following these recommendations, but shortly afterwards the Puritans attempted to put them into practice, especially with regard to the keeping of the sabbath.

In his political ethics, John Calvin differentiated himself significantly from both Zwingli and Bucer, as he was closer to Luther than they were. In Geneva he encountered a protestant state church, which he affirmed, but did not transform into a theocracy.<sup>24</sup> Neither he nor any other minister ever belonged to the city council. Calvin fought instead for autonomy for the church in the face of the council by advocating an independent church discipline instead of the usual moral discipline that was exercised by the authorities. To this end he established a Consistorium, that comprised six church ministers alongside twelve elders from the ranks of the city council. The Consistorium had only a spiritual authority and not a worldly one. The elders often also wanted to exercise church discipline in a milder manner than that advocated by the ministers, resulting in a long tug-of-war until eventually Calvin’s followers attained a majority in the council. From this time Calvin also had a decisive influence on the politics in Geneva, and therefore stood on the borderline of a theocracy — without however crossing it.

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<sup>22</sup> Martin Bucer Opera Omnia, Series I: Deutsche Schriften, Band 6.2 (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1984), pp. 96, 174.

<sup>23</sup> Martini Bucer Opera Latina, Vol. XV: De Regno Christi, Libri Duo, 1550, ed. by Francois Wendel (Paris: Presses Univ. de France, and Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1955), p. 289; English Translation in *Melanchthon and Bucer*, ed. by Wilhelm Pauck, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), p. 384. Cf. Eike Wolgast, ‘Bucers Vorstellungen über die Einführung der Reformation’, in Eike Wolgast, *Aufsätze zur Reformations- und Reichsgeschichte* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), pp. 304-318; Andreas Gäumann, *Reich Christi und Obrigkeit. Eine Studie zum reformatorischen Denken und Handeln Martin Bucers* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2001); Wilhelm Pauck, *Das Reich Gottes auf Erden. Utopie und Wirklichkeit. Eine Untersuchung zu Butzers ‘De Regno Christi’ und zur englischen Staatskirche des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, Leipzig: De Gruyter, 1928).

<sup>24</sup> See Neuser, ‘Kirche und Staat’.

In his opus magnum, the *Institutio christianae religionis*, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which appeared in its final form in 1559, Calvin broadly followed Luther with regard to the relationship between state and church. Calvin too summarised the relationship between church and state under the term two regiments (Inst. III.19,15; IV.20,1-3).<sup>25</sup> He saw the difference between the spiritual and the temporal regiments as being founded in the fact that spiritual freedom and temporal freedom are different from one another. It is possible to be enslaved in the civil realm and yet be free in Christ. The kingdom of Christ has just begun in this world and time. Until that time is fulfilled, the temporal regiment, with all its laws, is necessary, so that the evil of humans is kept within limits. Like Luther, Calvin distinguishes between the Kingdom of God, the Father, who rules the world in his omnipotence, and the Kingdom of Christ, which is neither worldly nor carnal, but rather spiritual and is accomplished through the preaching of the Gospel and through the Holy Spirit. Christ exercises his royal office only in the church with the aim ‘that we may attain to the heavenly life’.<sup>26</sup> Calvin speaks nowhere about a sovereignty of Christ over the world outside the church.

## The Anabaptist model of the State-Church Relationship

The Anabaptists of the sixteenth century formed a many-faceted, in no way uniform movement, which can only be cursorily sketched out here. I shall do this by first considering the Southern German Anabaptists whose views on the theme of church and state are relatively uniform,<sup>27</sup> and then I shall treat Balthasar Hubmaier as a special case.

According to the Southern German Anabaptists, the authorities have been installed by God and are to be respected as a good agency, no matter if they are devout or ungodly. Therefore, active resistance or revolution do not

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Judith Becker, ‘Die Königsherrschaft Gottes bei Calvin und im frühen reformierten Protestantismus’, in *Die politische Aufgabe der Religion*, ed. by Dingel and Tietz, pp. 277-297; Gunter Zimmermann, ‘Die politische Bedeutung der Zwei-Reiche-Lehre’, *ZEE*, 31 (1987): 392-410; Joachim Staedtke, ‘Die Lehre von der Königsherrschaft Christi und den zwei Reichen bei Calvin’, in *Reformation und Zeugnis der Kirche. Gesammelte Studien*, ed. by Dietrich Blaufuß, Zürcher Beiträge zur Reformationsgeschichte, 9 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1978), pp. 101-113; Josef Bohatec, *Calvins Lehre von Staat und Kirche mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Organismusgedankens* (Breslau: M. und H. Marcus, 1937); Karlfried Fröhlich, *Gottesreich, Welt und Kirche bei Calvin*, Aus der Welt christlicher Frömmigkeit, 11 (München: Reinhardt, 1930); Hans Baron, *Calvins Staatsanschauung und das konfessionelle Zeitalter*, Historische Zeitschrift, Beiheft 1/1 (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 1924).

<sup>26</sup> Calvin, *Institutio* II.15.4.

<sup>27</sup> See Eike Wolgast, ‘Stellung der Obrigkeit zum Täufern und Obrigkeitsverständnis der Täufer in der ersten Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts’, in Wolgast, *Aufsätze zur Reformations- und Reichsgeschichte*, pp. 506-536; Hans Joachim Hillerbrand, *Die politische Ethik des oberdeutschen Täufern. Eine Untersuchung zur Religions- und Geistesgeschichte des Reformationszeitalters*, Beihefte der Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte, VII (Leiden: Brill, 1962); cf. Andrea Strübind, *Eifriger als Zwingli. Die frühe Täuferbewegung in der Schweiz* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2003), pp. 456-462, 552-568.

come into the question. The installation of the authorities was necessary on account of sin. For that reason, the authorities are to pursue and punish evil-doers. In matters of the faith the authorities have no mandate. When they wish to rule over belief and conscience, they contravene the limits of their God-given offices. In this case no one is obliged to obey them, but is duty-bound to resist them, albeit only with passive, non-violent resistance. It is the authorities' remit, willed by God, to guarantee freedom of belief and conscience for their subjects. They never have the right to decide on matters of faith. Conversely, the Christian congregation has no authorisation in the political domain. These statements do not remind us by chance of Luther's doctrine of the two regiments; some Anabaptists expressly appealed to Luther. That state and church should be separated is something they learnt from the Bible under Luther's instruction.

Unlike Luther though, the Anabaptists were absolutely convinced that it was *not* appropriate for a Christian to serve as a magistrate.<sup>28</sup> The Anabaptists did not wish to participate in the defence of the land, nor in the court of lay assessors, and did not allow themselves to be elected to the town council. They justified this by pointing to the example of Jesus and his commandment that his disciples should not be like the rulers of the gentiles and the high officials (Matt 20: 25). True followers of Jesus should therefore exercise no office of authority, not even a legitimately organised one, but should allow themselves to be persecuted. In view of the fact that the Anabaptists recognised the authorities to be a good order of God, the refusal to participate in them seems inconsistent. It results, however, from the fact that the Anabaptists drew a sharp distinction between the church and the world as being two entities that had no common areas. This meant for church members the commandment to be segregated from the world.<sup>29</sup> In view of the needs in the world, the Anabaptists asked with Paul (1 Cor 5:12), 'What business do I have with those outside the church?' A follower of Jesus does not concern themselves with the world's problems. They consider themselves to have been sent into the world only for the sake of mission.

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<sup>28</sup> 'Das Schwert ist eine Gottesordnung außerhalb der Vollkommenheit Christi', Schleitheimer Artikel von 1527, in *Die Kirche im Zeitalter der Reformation, Kirchen- und Theologiegeschichte in Quellen*, Band III, ed. by Heiko A. Oberman, 3rd revised impression (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1988), p. 142. 'The sword is ordained of God outside the perfection of Christ' (Schleitheim Confession, [https://anabaptistwiki.org/mediawiki/index.php?title=Schleitheim\\_Confession\\_\(source\)](https://anabaptistwiki.org/mediawiki/index.php?title=Schleitheim_Confession_(source))); see also 'The Schleithem Confession, 1527', in *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, ed. by William L. Lumpkin, 6th printing (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1989), p. 27).

<sup>29</sup> 'Nun gibt es nie etwas anderes in der Welt und in der ganzen Schöpfung als Gutes und Böses, gläubig und ungläubig, Finsternis und Licht, Welt und solche, die die Welt verlassen haben, Tempel Gottes und die Götzen, Christus und Belial, und keins kann mit dem anderen Gemeinschaft haben' (Schleitheimer Artikel von 1527, in: Oberman, p. 141f.) English translation: 'Now truly all creatures are in but two classes, good and bad, believing and unbelieving, darkness and light, the world and those who [have come] out of the world, God's temple and idols, Christ and Belial; and none can have part with the other.' (Schleitheim Confession, [https://anabaptistwiki.org/mediawiki/index.php?title=Schleitheim\\_Confession\\_\(source\)](https://anabaptistwiki.org/mediawiki/index.php?title=Schleitheim_Confession_(source))); see also 'The Schleithem Confession, 1527', *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, ed. by Lumpkin, p. 26

References to the Old Testament, where men of God brandished the sword and tendered oaths were not accepted by the Anabaptists. Since the coming of Christ there were different rules for the church and the world. Swearing an oath in court or taking a citizen's oath, as well as the exercise of power, were not permissible for a Christian.

The segregation from the world that the Anabaptists practised entails having another conception of 'world' and 'worldly' to Luther's. These terms do not in Luther's writing have the negative sense of the dominion of sin or of Satan, but rather denote the earthly temporal life of humankind. Christians too belong to the world in this neutral sense. The negative concept of 'world' as the realm from which Christians are saved is also known by Luther — but this concept fades into the background in the context of the doctrine of the two regiments.

The idea that a follower of Jesus should not exercise any office of authority was a majority view among the Anabaptists, but was not shared by one of the outstanding Anabaptist theologians, namely by Balthasar Hubmaier.<sup>30</sup> After his expulsion from Waldshut, he went to Nikolsburg in Moravia and in 1526 founded the first Moravian Anabaptist congregation. In questions of political ethics Hubmaier was close to Luther. Hence there soon arose disputes among the Anabaptists in Nikolsburg. Hubmaier saw it as possible for a Christian to carry the sword under orders from the authorities and to wage war, whereas Hans Hut stood for complete nonviolence.<sup>31</sup> After two disputations, no agreement had been achieved; indeed the argument continued after Hut's death in 1527 and the burning at the stake of Hubmaier in 1528. Hubmaier's adherents were called 'sword-bearers', while Hut's were called 'cane-bearers', because the latter (according to Mark 6:8) did not carry a sword, but a staff. After 1529 nothing more is heard of the sword-bearers; the future in the Anabaptist movement belonged to the advocates of radical nonviolence.<sup>32</sup>

## The Baptist Model

The Baptists did not have their historical roots in the Anabaptist movement, but in the English Reformation. Since the kings and bishops rejected out of hand the Puritan demands for an extensive Reformation of the Church of

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<sup>30</sup> See Torsten Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier. Seine Stellung zu Reformation und Täuferum 1521-1528* (Kassel, 1961), pp. 451-475; Carl Sachse, *D. Balthasar Hubmaier als Theologe* (Berlin, 1914).

<sup>31</sup> In his writing 'Von dem Schwert' [On the Sword], in 1527, Hubmaier considers all the Bible verses with which his opponents argued their case, and sought to refute them (Balthasar Hubmaier, *Schriften, Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte*, 29 (Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1962), pp. 434-457).

<sup>32</sup> See Clarence Bauman, *Gewaltlosigkeit im Täuferum. Eine Untersuchung zur theologischen Ethik der oberdeutschen Täuferums der Reformationszeit*, *Studies in the History of Christian Thought*, III (Leiden: Brill, 1968), pp. 57-65.

England along Calvinist lines, several Puritan-influenced congregations split from the state church and fled abroad from the consequent persecution. Among others, the separatist congregation in Gainsborough (Lincolnshire) under the leadership of its pastor John Smyth decided to emigrate — not to North America, as did a little later the Pilgrim Fathers — but to Amsterdam. Out of this Puritan separatist church of English people in Dutch exile emerged in 1609 the first Baptist church.<sup>33</sup> Theological discussions among the English exiles had led Smyth to the particular insight that infant baptism did not conform to Scripture, but that people should only be baptised when they gave a personal confession of faith. Accordingly, his congregation were baptised (again) after giving their confession of faith. They had thus taken a position very close to that of the Dutch Mennonites, who as descendants of the early Anabaptists had also replaced infant baptism with the baptism of believers. One year later, Smyth and the greater part of his congregation decided to join the Amsterdam Mennonites. A minority, however, under the leadership of the lawyer Thomas Helwys, refused to take this step.

What factors kept the group around Helwys from becoming Mennonites, although they shared the same understanding of baptism? They were persuaded that the Mennonites had on some points a false doctrine, namely in their understanding of the incarnation of the Son of God, of the keeping of the sabbath, of the historical continuity of the true church, and of civil authorities. For us, only the last point is relevant here. In the confession of faith formulated by Helwys in 1611, ‘A Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam’,<sup>34</sup> the position of the first Baptists concerning the civil authorities is formulated in three of the twenty-seven articles.

Article 9 explains the independence of the church from the state by saying that Jesus Christ is the only Lawgiver for the church. In the New Testament he has set down an absolute and perfect rule of direction, which no prince, nor any whosoever, ‘may add to, or diminish from’. This was written in complete agreement with the ideas of the Anabaptists.

Article 24 treats the authorities explicitly and states among other things:

That magistracy is a holy ordinance of God; that every soul ought to be subject to it, not for fear only, but for conscience’ sake. Magistrates are the ministers of God for our wealth, they bear not the sword for nought. They are the ministers of God, to take vengeance on them that do evil.

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<sup>33</sup> See James R. Coggins, *John Smyth’s Congregation. English Separatism, Mennonite Influence and the Elect Nation*, Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History, 32 (Waterloo, Ont.: Herald Press, 1991).

<sup>34</sup> Text with introduction in William L. Lumpkin and Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 2nd revised edn (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2011), pp. 106-114.



These statements too, closely aligned with Romans 13, could be made by both Anabaptists and Baptists. But the Baptist confession goes further, noting:

And therefore they may be members of the church of Christ, retaining their magistracy; for no ordinance of God debarreth any from being a member of Christ's church.

With this sentence the Baptists disassociate themselves from the Mennonites and all other Anabaptists. The Baptists state, in contradiction to the Anabaptists, that if the magistracy is an ordinance of God, then it cannot be a sin when Christians participate in the magistracy. As an explanation the confession continues as follows:

They bear the sword of God; which sword, in all lawful administrations, is to be defended and supported [...]. And whosoever holds otherwise, must hold, if they understand themselves, that they are the ministers of the devil, and therefore not to be prayed for, nor approved, in any of their administrations; seeing all things they do, as punishing offenders, and defending their countries, state, and persons by the sword, is unlawful.

The short Article 25 is also directed against the Anabaptists. This treats the swearing of oaths and declares:

That it is lawful in a just cause, for the deciding of strife, to take an oath by the name of the Lord.

The position taken up by the first Baptists concerning the relationship between state and church thus recognises that the authorities, who wield the sword, as per Romans 13 are a good ordinance of God. Taking up offices of government and exercising the powers pertaining to these offices by Christians, as well as the swearing of oaths, was correspondingly regarded as justified and necessary. A segregation of Christians from the world, as practised by the Anabaptists, was not seen by the early Baptists to be right.

That the separation of state and church was an important matter for Thomas Helwys and his small congregation is also shown in his writing *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*, which he addressed in 1612, on the occasion of the return of his congregation to England, to none other than King James I.<sup>35</sup> This is the first piece of writing in the English language that demands freedom of religion. The Presbyterian or congregationalist-minded Puritans, from whom the Baptists evolved, were not devotees of religious freedom, whereas the Baptists certainly were.<sup>36</sup> Helwys explained in his book that the king had received a temporal realm with temporal power from God, but also that Christ alone is entitled to have lordship over the church. The

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<sup>35</sup> Thomas Helwys, *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity (1611/1612)*, ed. by R. Groves (Macon, Georgia: Mercer, 1998). Cf. Coggins, *John Smyth's Congregation*, pp. 105-107, 130-132.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Stephen Brachlow, *The Communion of Saints. Radical Puritan and Separatist Ecclesiology, 1570-1625* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 230-267.

king can regulate the bodies, lives, and possessions of people, but not their immortal souls nor spiritual matters. Transgressions against the spiritual ordinances of the New Testament are not to be avenged by worldly punishments, but with the spiritual sword and reprimands. Thus, Helwys had formulated the basic ideas of Luther's doctrine of the two regiments, although, as far as we know, he was not acquainted with the pertinent texts of Luther. Obviously, he came to this differentiation through his own thinking. More clearly than Luther, he demanded religious freedom not only for his own church, but for all humans, also for the adherents of other religions:

For men's religion to God is between God and themselves. The king shall not answer for it. Neither may the king be judge between God and man. Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews, or whatsoever, it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure.<sup>37</sup>

King James did not take this admonishment to heart, but let Helwys be arrested immediately upon his return to England. Helwys died in 1616, probably without having been freed from imprisonment. His little congregation gained a foothold in England, won over many other groups and congregations for their cause and founded one of the main streams of the English Baptists.

According to the first Baptists, the authorities have no right to lord it over the souls of their citizens nor to enact directions for the practice of religion or church order. The church and its members' practice of the faith should be free from state interference, just as religious convictions of any shape or form should be tolerated by the state. The state is not entitled to pass judgement on religious matters. Inasmuch as the state is a good ordinance of God for the preservation of public peace and security, Baptists participate in everything necessary to accomplish this task. They are involved not only in the affairs of their church, but also in general affairs. This theological and political concept of Thomas Helwys was taken up in the following decades in England and North America and enjoys to the present-day wide consensus among Baptists throughout the world.

## **Critical Review**

Our look at the historical-denominational typology of the church-state relationship has shown that we can distinguish between three main types: the state-church model; the theocratic model and the model of separation of church and state.

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<sup>37</sup> Helwys, *A Short Declaration*, p. 53.

The state-church type developed out of the Eastern Church orthodoxy, the theocratic type from the Roman Catholic Church. Among the protestants, the Lutheran churches adopted the state-church type, and the Reformed churches to a large extent the theocratic or Christocratic type. The model of separation between state and church was developed theologically by Martin Luther, but was not put into practice by the Lutheran churches. It was however implemented by the Anabaptists and the Baptists — albeit in a different way in each case.

Common to the state-church and theocratic types is that both assume the internal unity of Christians and citizens, throne and altar, church and state, religion and law, salvation and sovereignty. This model of unity was designated in the middle ages by the term *respublica christiana*, the ‘Christian state’. In German theology the term *Corpus Christianum* has been used for it in the last one hundred and thirty years.<sup>38</sup> It is obvious that the unity of political power and religion expressed here does not fit in with the New Testament understanding of the church. Whoever desires to follow the New Testament witness and differentiate theologically between salvation and sovereignty will find that both of these models of the relationship between church and state must be excluded, as they are not legitimate possibilities.

They are to be excluded for their own specific reasons as well. The state-church model is a serious threat to the church because it deprives the church of its freedom, which it needs in order to fulfill its remit towards the citizens and the state institutions. A church that gives up its freedom by allowing itself to be instrumentalised for worldly goals has ceased being a witness to Jesus Christ and his world-overcoming gospel. A state that makes use of the church in this manner has also stopped being a state according to the creation will of God. It does not content itself with regulating the temporal areas of life, but encroaches on the authority of the church and places itself thereby in the position of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church.

The theocratic or Christocratic model is no better. Here too, state and church relate to one another in such a manner that both are in contradiction to their remits. A church that sets itself up to be the supreme political judge of state and society and assumes leadership for the actions of state and society goes beyond the limits of its authority. It attempts thereby to arrange the temporal lives of humans according to precepts for which most people do not fulfill the necessary internal pre-conditions. The Kingdom of God, in which God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven, cannot be realised by political means; it will rather break in when Christ returns and history, as we

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<sup>38</sup> See Heinrich de Wall, ‘Corpus Christianum’, *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. by Hans Dieter Betz, 4th impression, Band II (1999), pp. 466-468.

know it, will be culminated. Until then, this kingdom is being achieved in certain respects in advance through the Holy Spirit who is transforming the believers according to the likeness of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, this sanctifying work of the Spirit is limited to the believers and therefore cannot be used as a norm for political activity. A church that nevertheless makes this attempt is forgetting the fundamental difference between church and state and is trying to pre-empt the world-changing work of Christ by means of political action. That is nothing other than spiritual arrogance. This leads to the result that the church employs worldly categories and methods, when it speaks to and acts with respect to the world, so that the world is only seemingly made Christian, whereas in reality the church is made more worldly. Neither the state-church nor the theocratic models can be considered as an adequate concept for the relationship between state and church.

It is a different matter with Luther and Calvin's doctrine of the two kingdoms or the two regiments.<sup>39</sup> With this doctrine the unity of the so-called *Corpus Christianum* was dissolved; the state and the church were allocated different justifications and differing functions. Admittedly, Luther endorsed a state-church order for the Reformation, but he did this on the understanding that it was an emergency situation. The regional ruler's church rule, as was established in the Lutheran churches, is the opposite of what Luther's political ethic tried to achieve. With the doctrine of the two regiments the basic difference between state and church was clearly worked out and the way smoothed out for freedom of religion and freedom of conscience. This doctrine is not bound up with the state-church situation, in which it emerged, but can be helpful in situations where the church does not have any political power, and nevertheless does not wish to retreat from public life. We should pay attention to one of Luther's reasons why one cannot rule the world with the gospel: true Christians, who have not only been baptised but also believe and live as Christians, are so few, that the governments of the world cannot take their standards from the gospel.<sup>40</sup>

The Anabaptists and the Baptists share the conviction that the state is an endowment of God for ordering external living conditions, but does not have power over the souls of humans and thus over their faith and consciences, and have thereby adopted Luther's basic differentiation between the two kingdoms or regiments. The Anabaptists and the Baptists differ from each other in the question of whether Christians can in good

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Uwe Swarat, 'Jenseits der Taufkontroverse – Wo sich Baptisten Luther anschließen könn(t)en', in *Luther und die Reformation aus freikirchlicher Sicht*, ed. by Volker Spangenberg (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), pp. 31-53.

<sup>40</sup> See Volker Leppin, 'Grenzen und Möglichkeiten der Obrigkeit – Zu Entstehung und Kontext von Luthers Zwei-Reiche-Lehre', in *Die politische Aufgabe der Religion*, ed. by Dingel and Tietz, pp. 247-258.

conscience involve themselves politically. Most Anabaptists gave the answer no, most Baptists said yes. The separation from the state as propagated by the Anabaptists did not comply with the Baptist view of the authorities as an ordinance of God. With this the Baptists were and are confronted with the question as to how they can involve themselves politically, without circumventing the separation of state and church, politics and religion. Not only is the separation from the world not an option for Baptists, but neither is Christocracy.

I am touching upon a theme here which deserves a longer treatment. I must however come to a close now, and shall therefore only hint at the fact that the doctrine of the two regiments can offer us orientation in this question. With this doctrine Luther has made it possible for Christians not to pull back from the world, in spite of their holding fast to the Sermon on the Mount and the discipleship teachings of Jesus, but to participate in the dealings of the state, which according to Romans 13 is an ordinance of God, a minister of God, and does not wield the sword in vain. Luther expressly challenges Christians to take up political office. The Christian does not only belong to the spiritual kingdom of God, but also to the earthly kingdom. Distinguishing between the two kingdoms or regiments goes through the heart of a Christian. Correspondingly the Christian must act in various manners, depending on the role they are playing — whether they are being required to act as a person of the world or as a Christian, as a public figure or as a private one.<sup>41</sup> The two roles are linked by the loyalty to God's commandment and to love, which is lived out in both cases as the purpose of their actions and as an inward attitude of the agent. In this sense Christians can involve themselves politically, without authorising their politics religiously or politicising their faith. That too is separation of state and church in practice.

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<sup>41</sup> Jürgen Habermas has likewise spoken about a 'necessary distinguishing between the roles of a church member and that of a civil citizen'. Conflicts of interest between religion and the secular state can only be avoided when this distinguishing of the role of religion is not enforced externally but is 'convincingly reasoned from the religious perspective itself'. This is precisely the case in Luther's doctrine of the two regiments. See Jürgen Habermas, *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion. Philosophische Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), p. 269.

# Baptists and Human Rights<sup>1</sup>

Tony Peck

This article was written as a response to the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 50th Anniversary of the death of Martin Luther King Jr. It explores Baptist perspectives on human rights in historical, theological and contemporary contexts. It examines how the foundational commitment of Baptists to religious freedom for all inevitably has wider implications for human rights as a whole, a link which Baptists have not always made, sometimes to their cost. The scope, content and source of human rights are explored, and in each of these aspects Baptists have much to contribute, and at the same time have found much that is deeply challenging to their theology and practice. In the contemporary world, Baptists continue to see the foundation of human rights as located in the sovereignty of God rather than being foundational in themselves. Following Michael Westmoreland-White, it is suggested that Baptists see talk of human rights as a *lingua franca* rather than as a form of *esperanto*. This leaves open the possibility that Baptists can contribute to public discourse by searching for common agreement on the *application* of human rights in the contemporary world with those whose foundational moral vision may be different from their own.

## Keywords

Baptists; human rights; religious freedom

## Introduction

From their own historical experience, and as part of those core convictions that form their identity, Baptists have embraced a concern for human rights, especially from the starting point of religious freedom for all. This paper seeks to make a Baptist contribution to the thinking and reflection around the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Dr Martin Luther King Jr, arguably the greatest Baptist exponent of, and activist for, human rights.

In September 2017 I stood near the conflict line between eastern Ukraine and the territories occupied by Russian-backed forces, known as the 'People's Republics' of Luhansk and Donetsk. These two regions have been

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<sup>1</sup> A version of this paper was first given as part of the lecture series, 'Human Rights and Social Justice: Commemorating the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 50th Anniversary of the assassination of Dr Martin Luther King Jr', given at the Oxford Centre for Christianity and Culture, Regents Park College, Oxford, UK, on 26 November 2018.

the subject of an ongoing violent conflict between Russia and Ukraine in which 10,000 Ukrainians have already lost their lives, and about 1.5 million men and women have become IDPs (Internally Displaced People). Together with other European and world Baptist leaders, I stood next to a memorial made out of the Russian shells that have rained down on that town in the so-called ‘grey’ or ‘ceasefire’ zone.

As I looked at the wall of a bombed-out block of flats I saw a beautifully drawn face of a popular local teacher, who in her class taught pupils who now fight on opposite sides of this conflict. Her picture is a symbol of hoped-for reconciliation as she looks out towards the conflict zone. I looked with her, and saw the border, the conflict line. Beyond, a red danger sign: the forests are mined. Inside the Occupied Territories life is even worse, with increased poverty, little work, and people still being killed in the conflict. We have 85 Baptist church communities in the two Occupied Zones and we try to support them and their communities as best we can.

In one of our churches in the grey zone we met a number of women — *babushkas* — who told us of their constant fear of shells being fired at their village from inside the Occupied Zone, usually fifteen minutes after the International Ceasefire Monitoring office closes for the day. They told us that they could no longer go to the forest to collect wood to heat their homes because the whole area is heavily mined. One of our European Baptist Federation (EBF) aid projects last year was to provide these women with alternative heaters for their homes. ‘How long must this go on?’ they asked us.

A week before our visit, armed militia entered one of our Baptist churches in the occupied territory of Luhansk and confiscated the building and its contents. Since our visit to eastern Ukraine, a law has been passed in the Luhansk territory that makes all churches, mosques and religious groups illegal, except those of the Russian Orthodox Church. No meetings of more than five people will be permitted in homes. A similar law is planned for the Donetsk territory.

It is difficult to believe these numerous violations of human rights and religious freedom are happening in 2018, and a conflict that at its heart is between two avowedly Christian nations. I could, of course, have spoken about other parts of our EBF region as well, especially Syria and Iraq. In forming our response to human rights challenges, we always have in our minds the real suffering of real people and how we as Baptists and, indeed, all people of goodwill, can be most effective in helping them.

## **Partnership**

As European Baptists we do not, of course, address violations of human rights alone. The European Baptist Federation is a member of the Conference of European Churches with its human rights office in Brussels.<sup>2</sup> We are a non-governmental organisation (NGO) in association with the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe, an intergovernmental organisation that has human rights as one of its key priorities; and together with the Baptist World Alliance, we have a high-level entry point to the United Nations in New York, in Vienna and, especially the human rights office in Geneva.

In recent years the EBF has established a small team of three people who can research abuses of religious freedom and human rights and who also travel regularly to Geneva to contribute the experience of Baptist communities on the ground to the Universal Periodic Reviews on human rights the UN carries out on different nations. In recent times, we have done this for Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, based on our own visits there, and we are also currently finding ways to raise the human rights situation in eastern Ukraine.

As European and British Baptists we are together a ‘stakeholder’ in the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on International Religious Freedom, where, of course, we find that presenting issues of religious freedom also involves other abuses of human rights, for example among the Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar.<sup>3</sup>

Working in partnership with and being connected to others is therefore a crucial part of what we do. And indeed, we find many common points of conviction and concern about human rights with both religious and secular bodies. But the question I have set myself to answer in this paper is ‘What do we Baptists especially, if not uniquely, bring to the table from our history and our identity? What is our Baptist contribution to the wider debate and concern about the defence of human rights in our world today?’

Let me now acknowledge the two anniversaries that provided the impetus for the lecture series at which this paper was first presented.

## **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

An earlier lecture in the series described something of the twists and turns of the story of the forming of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in

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<sup>2</sup> See Elizabeta Kitanovic, ed, *European Churches Engaging in Human Rights* (Brussels: Conference of European Churches, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> <https://appgfreedomofreligionorbelief.org/> [accessed 20 October 2018].



1948,<sup>4</sup> and undoubtedly also the significant role played by the churches and especially by the Lutheran, Frederick Nolde.

Baptists had been at the meeting of the UN in San Francisco in 1945 that first discussed the wording of the UN Charter. They represented what was known as the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty in the USA, formed in 1939 to represent all the four main Baptist denominations in the USA at that time, north and south, black and white. The chairperson of that committee, J M Dawson, narrated in his memoirs the sense of expectancy he experienced:

To that meeting I carried a hundred thousand petitions from Baptists, North and South, white and Negroes, asking that the Charter to be adopted would include guarantee of full religious liberty for every human being.<sup>5</sup>

In this particular concern the Baptists were to be disappointed because there is no specific mention of religious freedom in the Charter. Dawson later addressed the Baptist World Congress in Copenhagen in 1947 on the progress towards the Declaration of Human Rights. As is well known, the US Protestant Churches, including some American (Northern) Baptists under the leadership of Lutheran, Frederick Nolde, sought to argue for a necessary link between religious freedom and all other freedoms; or as the conclusion of John Nurser's definitive account of the significant role of the churches in the process towards the Declaration has it, 'Faith and Human Rights need each other'.<sup>6</sup>

Dawson's hope expressed to the Baptist World Congress that the United Nations 'inaugurate a new birth of religious freedom around the world' was realised, at least in aspiration, in Article 18 on religious freedom. Its eventual adoption was helped by both Eleanor Roosevelt and the Ahmadi Muslim, Sir Mohammed Zafrullah Khan, foreign minister of the newly independent Republic of Pakistan. He crucially expressed his support for the Article in its entirety, including the clause referring to the right to change one's religion.<sup>7</sup>

Here we have the first significant theme when thinking about Baptists and human rights. From their early history Baptists have begun with an emphasis on religious freedom for all, and have tended to see human rights as a whole through that lens. As I will explore later, this perspective has had its strengths, but where their own religious freedom has been 'exchanged'

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<sup>4</sup> Dr Peter Petkoff, 'Religious Voices and the Making of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights', Lecture, Regent's Park College, Oxford, 12 November 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in David F. D'Amico, 'Baptists and Human Rights', *The Center for Baptist Studies*, <http://www.centerforbaptiststudies.org/hotissues/baptistshumanrights.htm> [accessed 16 October 2018].

<sup>6</sup> John Nurser, *For All Peoples and All Nations: Christian Churches and Human Rights* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005), pp. 172-180.

<sup>7</sup> Nurser, *For All Peoples*, p. 167.

for tacit support for abuses of other human rights it has led Baptists to some very difficult places.

## **Martin Luther King Jr**

We now turn to the other anniversary, that of the assassination of Dr Martin Luther King Jr. He is of course a Baptist of whom all Baptists can be proud, though this was not always true in his lifetime, especially in the USA.

On the morning of 16 August 1964, Dr King addressed the European Baptist Federation Congress meeting in Amsterdam. One of the treasures in our EBF archive is a film of that occasion, including the sermon he preached.<sup>8</sup>

There is some evidence that in accepting the invitation to Europe (when, by the way, he visited both West and East Germany) he and his aides were aware that he might have a more sympathetic hearing among European Baptists as a whole than among Baptists in the USA.

Though obviously weary, he preached with his customary eloquence, and powerful use of metaphor, on Jesus's parable of the man who knocks on the door at midnight asking for bread (Luke 11: 5-8). He spoke of the 'midnight' of the world's darkness, of those who knock on the door of the church looking for answers, and even if they do not seem to receive them immediately, eventually sensing that midnight gives way to the dawn, and that there is hope in the Christian Gospel.

In his preaching, writing and campaigning for human rights, Martin Luther King drew especially on the prophetic witness of the Old Testament, the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere, as well as on the non-violent action tradition of Gandhi, to articulate the suffering and injustice of his African-American community denied their full civil and political and economic rights.

In this he followed another Baptist tradition, perhaps not always so prevalent among us, of campaigning for justice and freedom for the oppressed. This is seen, for example, in the Baptist involvement in England and Jamaica at the forefront of finally ending slavery in the British Empire in the early nineteenth century. On the other hand, the split between the Northern and Southern Baptists of the USA that happened about the same time was over the question of defending or abolishing the institution of

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<sup>8</sup> The entire sermon can be viewed at <https://anderetijden.nl/artikel/673/Martin-Luther-King-preekte-in-1964-in-Amsterdam> [accessed 15 November 2018].

slavery. However, several of the earlier Baptist pioneers in America showed particular concern for the rights of American Indians and American blacks.<sup>9</sup>

A concern for freedom from slavery continues today with, for instance, the formation in 2005 of the European Baptist Federation Anti-Human Trafficking Project. It works with others to encourage both measures to prevent the trafficking of women and girls, often from eastern to western Europe, and projects such as shelters that care for the victims. It is a small contribution in the continuing of this Baptist concern for the care of those Jesus called ‘the least of these’ in terms of freedom and justice for the downtrodden and oppressed.<sup>10</sup>

So these two encounters of Baptists with the two anniversaries remind us of the dominant tradition among Baptists (at their best, and we must also confess our failures in this regard) to stand for religious freedom for all, and also of being at the forefront of justice for the oppressed, the most outstanding example of which is Martin Luther King Jr. A concern for human rights as a whole brings these two aspects together.

## **Baptist Theological Reflection on Human Rights**

Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration, some Baptists have sought to articulate a more integrated theology of human rights and its relationship to that primary Baptist concern for religious freedom for all. These include James E Wood,<sup>11</sup> who succeeded Dawson as the Executive Director of the Baptist Joint Committee in the USA, and also Thorwald Lorenzen,<sup>12</sup> Glen Stassen,<sup>13</sup> Neville Callam,<sup>14</sup> and Paul Fiddes.<sup>15</sup> Writing in 1986, James Wood declared that

there has never been a greater need for Baptists to demonstrate their genuine and unequivocal commitment to human rights and their profound concern for human values within the social and political structures of today’s world. In this, Baptists can claim to possess no special competence, no superior wisdom, and no ready-made formula for the implementation of a programme of human rights at home

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<sup>9</sup> James E. Wood, ‘Baptists and Human Rights’, in *Faith Life and Witness: The Papers of the Study and Research Division of the Baptist World Alliance 1986-1990*, ed. by William Brackney and Ruby Burke (Birmingham AL: Samford University Press, 1990), pp. 257-267.

<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.ebf.org/anti-trafficking-materials> for EBF Resources [accessed 20 November 2018].

<sup>11</sup> James E. Wood, *Baptists and Human Rights* (Macleans, VA: Baptist World Alliance, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Thorwald Lorenzen, ‘Towards a Theology of Human Rights’, *Review and Expositor* 97 (2000): 49-65.

<sup>13</sup> Glen Stassen, *Just Peacemaking* (Louisville KY: John Knox Press, 1992), especially Chapter 6; and, *A Thicker Jesus: Incarnational Discipleship in a Secular Age* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), pp. 64-70.

<sup>14</sup> Neville Callam, ‘Human Rights and the Baptist World Alliance’, in *Pursuing Unity, Defending Rights: The Baptist World Alliance at Work* (Falls Church VA: Baptist World Alliance, 2010), pp. 97-129.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Fiddes, ‘Theological and Biblical Foundations for Human Rights’, and ‘Religious Rights and Principles within the Baptist Tradition’, unpublished papers. I am grateful to Professor Fiddes for giving me sight of these.

or abroad. Nevertheless, impelled by a biblical faith, Baptists must now or in the future, identify themselves with the cause of human rights for all persons, everywhere.<sup>16</sup>

The European Baptist Federation is one of six regional bodies of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA). In its Annual Gatherings and Congresses the BWA has made important declarations about individual human rights in the context of war and racism; and has expressed support for the rights of women and children, social and economic rights, as well as religious freedom. There is an annual award for a Baptist who has made an outstanding contribution to human rights, and past recipients include former US President, Jimmy Carter.

On human rights as a whole, the BWA declared the following in its Congress in Stockholm in 1975:

We believe that God has made humankind in his own image and that he endows us with certain human rights which Christians are obliged to affirm, defend, and extend: the right to necessities of life includes the rights of all persons to have access to life, liberty, food, clothing, shelter, health, education, the right to work, and the pursuit of happiness including a quality of life that allows adequate development of human potentialities.<sup>17</sup>

Paul Fiddes has noted that from the eighteenth century onwards, Baptists tended to adopt the language of ‘natural’ or ‘inalienable’ rights, particularly from the French and American Revolutions, without much critical reflection on them. But now from these official BWA statements there is what he calls a ‘firmer theological grounding’ that natural and inalienable rights are endowed *through the making of human beings in the image of God* (emphasis mine).<sup>18</sup>

Five years later, at the next BWA Congress, a Declaration on Human Rights was adopted which made this even clearer.

Human rights are derived from God – from his nature, his creation and his commands. Concern for human rights is at the heart of the Christian faith. Every major doctrine is related to human rights beginning with the biblical revelation of God.<sup>19</sup>

This picks up a very contemporary concern on the part of Baptists and other Christians about the way in which human rights seem to have become detached from a clear moral foundation and are often now seen as ‘foundational’ themselves. This is expressed by Thorwald Lorenzen, who for many years taught at the International Baptist Theological Seminary at

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<sup>16</sup> Wood, ‘Baptists and Human Rights’, p. 265.

<sup>17</sup> Cited by Fiddes, ‘Religious Rights and Principles.’

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> ‘Declaration on Human Rights’, in *Celebrating Christ’s Presence Through the Spirit: Official Report of the Fourteenth Congress 1980*, ed. by Cyril Bryant and Ruby Burke (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1981), p. 246.

Rüschlikon, Switzerland, in his essay ‘Towards a Theology of Human Rights’. He says:

The problem and the challenge is clear; unless a universally moral foundation for human rights is discovered and agreed upon, human rights will increasingly be emptied of their validity and authority, and they will continue to be functionalised to serve national economic, and other ideological interests [...] It belongs to our task to argue that any understanding of the *humanum* that brackets out the need for a relationship with God is deficient.<sup>20</sup>

I will return later to the challenge that he poses here.

Neville Callam, the General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance from 2007 to 2017, whilst acknowledging that the Baptist understanding of human rights ‘fits well into, and is continuous with, the general human rights theory that has been advanced within the wider ecclesial community’, nevertheless sums up what he terms the ‘characteristic peculiarities’ of Baptists. Among those he cites are the following two:

- the assertion of the primacy of religious liberty, such that other human rights may be said to be implied by the right of religious liberty;
- a biblically inspired vision in which creation, redemption and covenant as dimensions of God’s dealings with humankind are highly significant for human rights understanding.<sup>21</sup>

From all this we begin to see the contours of the way in which Baptists have reflected on human rights. Baptists have prioritised a concern for religious freedom, usually but not always religious freedom for all, and have seen other rights as derivative from and dependent on it. Some of them at least have sought to articulate a clear biblical and theological basis and vision for human rights.

So, in making a Baptist contribution to the contemporary debate about human rights, what is it from our own tradition and identity that we draw on?

## Historical Perspective

First of all, we have a unique historical perspective. In 1612, the first Baptist leader in England, Thomas Helwys, made his famous plea for religious freedom for all, including for those of the Jewish and Muslim faiths, as well as for those he termed ‘heretics’. So far as we know, Helwys was the first person to articulate religious freedom for all in the English language. It was an idea before its time that came to flower in the period of the Commonwealth thirty years later, long after Helwys’s lonely death in Newgate Prison.

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<sup>20</sup> Lorenzen, ‘Towards a Theology’, p. 56.

<sup>21</sup> Callam, ‘Human Rights and the Baptist World Alliance’, p. 116.

In his account of the early English Baptists, Stephen Wright makes the perceptive remark that this commitment had wider implications for the ordering of society. This was especially true if, as Helwys allowed, Baptists could become magistrates, and presumably use that position to oppose compulsion in religion and thus also stand in the defence of other freedoms. Wright concludes that ‘this amounted to a theoretical foundation for political activism’ — and indeed it remained ‘theoretical’ for the next thirty years.<sup>22</sup>

But in the 1640s, at the time of the Commonwealth, came the General Baptist and Leveller, Richard Overton, who as a young man had been part of the remaining Baptist–Mennonite congregation in Amsterdam following the return to England of Thomas Helwys to found the first Baptist church in London. In a very different religious and political context Overton explored the implications of Helwys’s view of religious freedom for all in his pamphlet ‘An Appeal to the Free people’. To this he attached a Draft Bill of Rights. Here religious and civil liberty belong together; certainly freedom from coercion of religion, but also freedom of the press (Overton was a printer and publisher). He also added the right not to be placed under arbitrary arrest or tortured, and went on to state the right to life, including the basic needs of life: free education of all, housing, care for orphans, widows, the old, and the disabled. Alongside these were the right of the poor to maintain their portion of land and not be imprisoned for debt, the right to dignity in community, a participation in a church of one’s choice, participating in government regardless of beliefs, and the right to petition parliament.

Glen Stassen describes Overton’s ‘Appeal’ as ‘the first comprehensive doctrine of human rights’. This view was supported by, for instance, Ernst Troeltsch and others who have pointed to the radical English puritan movements as the origins of modern human rights.<sup>23</sup>

So, as the seventeenth century unfolded, we see that Baptists were at the forefront of arguing for religious freedom for all and also extending this freedom into other areas of life.

In the centuries that followed, especially from the early nineteenth century onwards, Baptists in Europe nearly all began as persecuted minorities themselves, deprived of their religious and human rights by an alliance of government and state church or state religion. Examples would include Czarist persecution of Russian Baptists and the severe persecution of Romanian Baptists in the 1920s.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Stephen Wright, *The Early English Baptists, 1603-1649* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), p. 74.

<sup>23</sup> Stassen, *A Thicker Jesus*, pp. 67-70.

<sup>24</sup> Tony Peck, ‘Against the Tide: Episodes Highlighting the Situation of Religious Freedom for Baptists in Central and Eastern Europe’ in *Baptists and the World: Renewing the Vision*, ed. by John H.Y. Briggs and Anthony R. Cross (Oxford: Regents Park College, 2011), pp. 105-111.

And indeed, in a few countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia it is still the case today that Baptists are subject to harassment, fines, the refusal to allow them to legally register their churches, and even the imprisonment of their pastors.

Therefore, from our more than four-hundred-year history we know what it is like to suffer not just a denial of our religious freedom, but the loss of other rights as well.

## **Baptists and the Scope of Human Rights**

From this historical perspective we have a conviction about the scope of human rights. Thomas Helwys argued for *universal* religious freedom, as some continental Anabaptists had argued before him, and he may well have had contact with some of them in his time with John Smyth in Amsterdam.

So in his book ‘The Mystery of Iniquity’,<sup>25</sup> where he severely castigates every Christian tradition but his own, Helwys nevertheless argues for religious freedom for all and names the other two Abrahamic faiths, as well as those who might be considered in some way ‘heretical’, as also having the right to religious freedom.

In the years that followed, Baptists were not sure about this universal appeal and sought to modify or put restrictions on it. For instance, the particular Baptist Confession of 1677 restricted liberty to all opinions that were ‘not contrary to Scripture’. Others wanted to draw the boundaries to exclude Roman Catholics. They were probably not at all convinced about religious freedom for Jews and Muslims.

The ‘universal’ appeal of Helwys tended to be submerged in the centuries that followed him but re-emerged in the twentieth century, in the era of a concern for an end to the horror of world war and for the declaring of universal human rights as a key part of building the peace.

And indeed, whilst Helwys spoke to a very different society than our own, his words speak well into our contemporary world. Thus, the commitment that Baptists bring from their tradition to religious freedom for all and not just for themselves, is something that has brought us recognition and respect, and importantly, something that transcends narrow ecclesiastical or nationalist concerns. So, for example, in its first major report published in 2017 on the state of religious freedom around the world, the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief includes this reference:

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<sup>25</sup> Thomas Helwys, *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity (1611/1612)*, Classics of Religious Liberty 1, ed. and introduced by Richard Groves (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1998).

It took the courage of people like Thomas Helwys, a Baptist minister who publicly advocated religious liberty at a time when to hold such views could be dangerous, to help change English practice [...] Helwys was the first person to outline in the English language what we now know as Article 18.<sup>26</sup>

And at the launch of that Report in the Speakers' House in Westminster, which I attended, Lord Ahmad, an Ahmadiyya Muslim and Minister of State at the Foreign Office, went out of his way to commend the witness of Thomas Helwys as foundational and inspirational for our approach to human rights and religious freedom today. (Since then, Lord Ahmad has been appointed the very first UK Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief.)

But it has to be said that for Baptists, the appeal to universal religious freedom and universal human rights still has its challenges. I discovered this at the Baptist World Alliance Annual Gathering in Zurich earlier this year (2018), when I mentioned the on-going legacy of Helwys in terms of religious freedom for all in our world today. I was sharply rebuked by the Nigerian Delegation who could not accept that we should hold religious freedom for all when there is such a vicious, violent, and tragic conflict with Boko Haram in their own country. They went on to say that even holding this vision for ourselves in the United Kingdom is somehow to encourage this kind of terrorism.

This demonstrates that in time of conflict, or war, or in the face of the threat of religiously-sponsored terrorism, holding to an ethic of religious freedom for all is much more challenging. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration recognises this with its third clause that states:

Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

Thus, some Baptists in a number of central European countries have supported their governments in erecting fences and walls to prevent Muslim refugees from entering their country, whilst welcoming the trickle of refugees who profess Christianity. I have to say it is rather strange for me to see Baptists quote with approval slogans like 'We are the last barrier of Christian civilisation in Europe!' Although it should be noted that other Baptists in that same region have, however, worked tirelessly for the human and religious rights of all refugees.

In 2016, Russia signed off draconian laws greatly restricting the activity of non-Russian Orthodox religious groups, including Protestants

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<sup>26</sup> Great Britain, UK Government, *From Rhetoric to Reality*, Report of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, (London: Government Publications, 2017), Article 18, p. 16.



such as ourselves, and making the Jehovah's Witnesses completely illegal — all in the name of anti-terrorism. It took courage for Russian Baptists to protest this, specifically citing the situation of the Jehovah's Witnesses.<sup>27</sup> This affects not only religious freedom but also the associated rights of free speech, freedom of assembly and association, and freedom from arbitrary arrest and imprisonment. I have already indicated how, under Russian influence, the situation of the Jehovah's Witnesses is now being extended to every non-Russian Orthodox religious group in the Occupied Territories of Luhansk and Donetsk that were seized from Ukraine. And at present (November 2018), we are very concerned about the situation in Bulgaria, where despite it being an EU member State and signing up to the European Convention of Human Rights, the government proposes severe restrictions and even the removal of legal status from minority religious groups, again in the name of combating religiously-inspired terrorism. Local Baptists have been in the forefront of opposition to this, and there are recent signs that under that and international pressure the government is softening its stance.<sup>28</sup>

So, navigating such a world as ours with a commitment to universal human rights and the characteristic Baptist commitment to freedom of religion or belief for all, brings many challenges both from inside the Baptist community and outside. Yet despite that, I believe that our continuing commitment to Helwys's radical vision of universal religious freedom and its associated human rights is a precious gift we bring to the table when we engage with others in defending human rights and religious freedom.

## **Baptists and the Content of Human Rights**

We have seen that in the human rights arena Baptists have tended to lead with their commitment to religious freedom for all, but that there have always been Baptists, from Richard Overton onwards, who saw the implications of that and linked it with other freedoms in society and in the world. And in many cases of what appear to be religiously motivated human rights abuses today, religious freedom is almost inevitably linked with the loss of other freedoms. Examples include the persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, and Islamic State persecution of both Muslims and Christians in Syria and Iraq. Nevertheless, at crucial points it has been important to remind Baptists that they must not be so concerned about their

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<sup>27</sup> The letter from the Russian Baptist Union can be accessed in English at <https://sukofamily.org/an-open-letter-to-vladimir-putin-from-russian-baptists-about-religious-freedom/>. See also the 'Resolutions of the Baptist World Alliance in 2017', <http://bwanet.org/bwa-resolutions-2017> [both accessed on 18 November 2018].

<sup>28</sup> I am happy to report that a few weeks after I gave the original paper in November 2018, the Bulgarian Government withdrew the offending legal clauses of the proposed legislation.

own religious freedom that they are somehow prevented from standing up to other human rights abuses.

One example of this, which has now been well documented by Baptist historians in both England and Germany, is the position of German Baptists in the 1930s and throughout the Second World War. Baptists in Germany had known persecution in the late nineteenth century and discrimination against them and restrictions on their activity from the time of German Unification. After Hitler became Chancellor in 1933, he and Reichsbishop Ludwig Müller reached an accommodation with the Baptists. They were required to merge with the Christian Brethren, and to adopt the ‘Fuhrer Principle’ in their leadership, with the promise that they would have more freedom than ever before to preach the Gospel and evangelise in Germany. In return they were expected to keep silent about the fate of the Jews or the other dreadful abuses of human rights and dignity taking place in Germany. And that is exactly what happened throughout the whole Nazi period. There was intensive evangelistic activity in Germany’s towns and villages on the part of the Baptists, but few examples of resistance to Nazi policies and certainly not from the Baptist Union as a whole.<sup>29</sup>

In 1984 German Baptists made a Statement of Confession to the European Baptist Federation Congress in Hamburg about the stance of German Baptists during this period. It includes these words:

We, the German Baptist Union, are humbled by having been subordinated often to the ideological seduction of that time, in not having shown greater courage in acknowledging truth and justice. We pray to God that we may learn from this part of our history, so that we may be more alert to the ideological temptations of our day.<sup>30</sup>

It is significant to me that this ties in with an observation made by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writing in 1939 as he returned home to Germany from the USA to the full horror of what awaited him. He wrote a reflection on his experience of what appeared to be the almost total religious freedom enjoyed in the United States. He makes the point that religious freedom is more than that which a State grants to the churches. On the part of the churches, how they handle whatever freedom they have is crucial; it is possible to be so grateful for your religious freedom that you cease to speak prophetically to your nation. Thus, Bonhoeffer says:

The freedom of the church is not only when it has possibilities [of freedom given to it by the State] but only where the Gospel really and in its own power makes room for itself on earth, even and precisely when so such possibilities are offered

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<sup>29</sup> The best account of this in English is by Bernard Green, *European Baptists and the Third Reich* (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 2008), especially Chapters 1-3.

<sup>30</sup> Green, *European Baptists*, pp. 232-233.

to it [...] where thanks for institutional freedom must be rendered by the sacrifice of preaching, the church is in chains, even if it believes itself to be free.<sup>31</sup>

This remains a challenge for BapStists in many places, even in the EBF region today, and shows the importance of not placing an exclusive emphasis on one's own religious freedom at the expense of all else. We need to set our Baptist commitment to religious freedom within the context of the whole field of human rights, and where rights appear to clash, we must work with others to resolve the difficulties with an eye to the common good.

## **Baptists and the Source of Human Rights**

My final point with respect to the contribution of Baptists to contemporary human rights has to do with the source of human rights.

Helwys and other early Baptists in the seventeenth century, saw religious and other rights as grounded in a vision of the sovereignty of God and the rule of Christ over the community just as much as the individual. This then relativises and restricts the right of the King or government to determine the consciences and religious preferences of their subjects. In his handwritten preface to the copy of his book addressed to King James 1, Helwys said, 'The King is a mortal man and not God, therefore has no power over the immortal souls of his subjects, to make laws and ordinances for them and to set spiritual lords over them.'

As we have seen, in the eighteenth century, Baptists tended to take as their starting point for thinking about rights the language of 'natural' or 'inalienable' rights from the French and American Revolutions. But today, in a society dominated by secularism, the challenge posed by Thorwald Lorenzen, as quoted earlier, remains: Can a universally moral foundation for human rights be discovered and agreed upon? And if not, does this not put human rights at the mercy of national, and other ideological interests? Is Lorenzen right to state that 'any understanding of the *humanum* that brackets out the need for a relationship with God is deficient'?

As Christians and as Baptists, I think, I hope, we would thoroughly agree. But in the field of human rights, and when faced with how to tackle the abuse of human rights, we will need to be doing it in partnership with those of other belief systems, religious and otherwise. Contemporary Baptists have been addressing this issue.

In his as yet unpublished paper 'Theological and Biblical Foundations for Human Rights', Paul Fiddes suggests that we can seek common ground

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<sup>31</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 'Protestantism Without Reformation', in *No Rusty Swords*, ed. by E. Robertson (London, Collins, 1965), pp. 104-105.

with secular approaches in terms of exploring together the common ground of human worth and dignity, together with its associated ideas of love, compassion and forgiveness. Christians will have their own perspectives on these, rooted in such concepts as the sovereignty of God, the image of God and the desire of God, that might be quite close to those of other religions such as Islam. Fiddes goes on to suggest that secular human rights talk and theological understanding can be placed side by side, allowing one to illumine the other, especially in two of the biggest challenges to human rights today: the concern about an excessive individualistic approach that deems human rights to be a personal possession; and the challenge to restate human rights that is not so closely bound to the language of western democracy.

I believe this to be a potentially fruitful approach to this question of a universal basis for human rights. However, in spite of seeking common ground with those who do not see the actions of a Creator God as foundational for human rights, I nevertheless agree with Paul Fiddes' conclusion, that the defence of human rights will always need some concept of the sovereign rule of God and the rights of God.<sup>32</sup>

This remains something of a dilemma and a paradox in working with others who see human rights as foundational in themselves. Perhaps it challenges Christians to theologically explore further and more thoroughly the universal meaning and implications of the *imago dei* with reference to human rights. At any rate, it convinces me that those whose faith does embrace the creator God as the source of human dignity should not abandon that part of the public square concerned with human rights.

Another Baptist who has addressed the question is social ethicist Michael Westmoreland-White from the USA. His view sees human rights not as having a universal *foundation* but a universal *application*. At the same time, he argues, we must recognise the diversity and distinctive voices of different moral traditions and communities that make up a given society and the international community itself. In order to do this, says Westmoreland-White, we should not see human rights language as a kind of *esperanto* that leads to the moral equivalent of a monoculture. But rather human rights should be seen as a *lingua franca*, a trade language, or international diplomatic language, which provides a common way for communities with disparate moral visions to come together to negotiate and agree about what constitutes human rights and their application in a changing world. This is a dynamic process which requires that the language be developed and filled out by participants who will be open to the insights of others who may come

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<sup>32</sup> Fiddes, 'Theological and Biblical Foundations'.

from very different starting points, and also who will be open to themselves being challenged and changed by the experience.<sup>33</sup>

This approach is one in which all faith groups should be able to articulate their convictions with integrity, using the *lingua franca* of human rights to keep engaged in agreeing them and defending them when they are abused, and also one that allows us to raise difficult questions and challenges with each other. The overall aim is to learn from each other and find a common way forward on human rights to which all can contribute.

I have long been convinced that what we need to do is to be present in, and if necessary open up, spaces in our public life nationally and internationally where this *lingua franca* of human rights can be shared and explored as we face common challenges. Recently, I was able to experience this working in a very positive way. For the first time, on behalf of UK and European Baptists, I attended the Stakeholders' Meeting of the group that supports the work of the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group (or APPG) on International Religious Freedom that I mentioned above. Around the big table, together with one of the two Parliamentary Chairs of the APPG (an MP from the Democratic Unionist Party of Northern Ireland), were representatives of the Mormons, Open Doors, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, the British Humanist Association, the Sikh Community, Muslim Community, Jewish Community, and myself as a Baptist. Baha'i and Hindu representatives sent apologies. We met to agree together on what religious freedom priorities the APPG should raise in the UK Parliament. We came from our very different standpoints but found ourselves with a common concern and common focus that enabled us together to speak about Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, persecuted Christians in the Middle East and persecuted atheists in Bangladesh. I was glad to be at that table.

## Conclusion

I have endeavoured in this paper to suggest something of what Baptists can usefully contribute from their own tradition and theology when seeking a common way forward in human rights, while at the same time allowing themselves to be continually challenged by that tradition and theology. In essence, what we bring is a continuing commitment to the universal scope of human rights; a commitment to see the emphasis on religious freedom as inextricably linked with human rights as a whole; and, to a dialogue with more secular approaches, we bring our convictions that human rights find their source in the sovereignty of God and the rule of Christ. And I have

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<sup>33</sup> Michael Westmoreland-White, 'Setting the Record Straight: Christian Faith, Human Rights and the Enlightenment', *The Annual of the Society of Ethics*, Vol 15 (1995): 75-95.

followed the suggestion that by seeing human rights as a *lingua franca*, we are enabled to speak and to act together to alleviate some of the most challenging situations of suffering of our time.

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# Christianity and Secularism: Prospects and Possibilities

Nigel G. Wright

‘If society would not be Christian, at least the church could be’

David Fergusson, *Church, State and Civil Society*, p. 43.

This article proposes a strategy by which countries that have detached from their Christian or religious roots and embraced some form of secularism may nonetheless be understood in a positive light as arenas for religious liberty and action. It argues, in contrast with common assumptions, that free church or radical baptist perspectives do rightly aspire to a form of Christendom by which nations may be profoundly influenced by non-coercive and non-Constantinian conceptions of church and state that guarantee justice and religious liberty for all. However, such a vision will not be realised until the eschaton and, given the declining state, at least in Europe, of the Christian churches, is a distant prospect. A pragmatic engagement with secular political concepts therefore comes into view. However, a clear and crucial distinction needs to be made between differing versions of secularism. ‘Hard’ or ‘programmatic’ secularism is ideologically hostile to any forms of religion and so cannot act as a constructive conversation partner. By contrast, ‘soft’ or ‘procedural’ secularism views itself as hospitable to religious perspectives and communities, keeping the ring open as a non-sectarian and constructive arbiter for all productive religious contributions. The challenge for free church Christians therefore becomes critiquing all attempts of hard secularists to pursue their agenda by masquerading as soft secularists. Paradoxically, the Christian interest is in maintaining its own guiding visions of what the state and society ought to be while at the same time encouraging soft, hospitable and impartial secularism to be true to itself in the interests of all.

## Keywords

Secularism; church; non-sectarian; hospitable; hostile; free church; typology

## Introduction

In this paper I intend to argue that whereas civic secularism is not the preferred societal option for Christians, it may well represent the most realistic future shape of advanced societies and therefore has to be reckoned with. Moreover, it both offers a number of political benefits that are advantageous to Christian faith and practice and should be maximised, and also presents a context which can assist the churches in maintaining authentic

Christian witness. None of this is to minimise the genuine challenges to faith that such a society can pose.

A number of clarifications are helpful at this early stage. The first is to distinguish between church, society and state. By 'church' I shall be referring to the multiple gathered communities that define themselves as Christian by both faith and practice. The more important distinction to be made for our purposes is between 'society' and 'state'. Society is the phenomenon of organised and intentional communities that inhabit a territory. By and large it is not accurate to describe societies as wholly 'secular' since they inevitably embrace a variety of religious traditions and communities. There may be a range of persons and groups that are religiously non-aligned and these may well be described as secular, but societies as a whole are more likely to be plural than secular by reason of the presence of multiple religious movements within them. This may be illustrated by reference to the 2001 census in the United Kingdom as interpreted by Professor Paul Weller. The census of that date revealed that of those who answered the relevant questions, 71.6 per cent of the population self-defined as 'Christian', 15.5 per cent as of 'no religion' and 5.2 per cent as adherents of other religions. These figures justified his conclusion that UK society should be regarded as 'three-dimensional', that is to say as being 'Christian, secular and religiously plural'.<sup>1</sup>

Such analysis should give us pause before we claim that society is secular. The figures in the UK did indeed shift away from Christianity in the census of 2011, with the Office for National Statistics indicating that by that time 59.3 per cent identified as Christian. The decline has been further confirmed by the British Social Attitudes Survey of 2017 in which, for the first time, the number identifying as 'non-religious' exceeded 50 per cent. Despite these undoubted shifts, Weller's claim that society is three-dimensional rather than uniformly secular can be allowed to stand. Yet society is not the same as 'state'. According to Max Weber, 'a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory'.<sup>2</sup> The state therefore is the forceful hard edge of a society which exists primarily to preserve and to promote the interests of a society with ultimate recourse to force. The state may be religious in nature, promoting the interests of one religious monopoly, or it may be secular in nature without bias to any one religious interest. The upshot of this analysis is that it is possible to have a plural or

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Weller, *Time for a Change: Reconfiguring Religion, State and Society* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2005), pp. 72-3.

<sup>2</sup> Max Weber, 'Politics as Vocation' in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. by H.H. Gerth and C.W. Mills (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1948), p. 78.



even religious society which is served by a secular state, and part of the discussion that follows explores these realities.

It is equally possible, of course, to live in a society and a state that have, by reason of history, untidy and messy social and political arrangements, and this is certainly true of my own country of reference, the United Kingdom. Despite domestic claims that the UK is a secular society and a secular state, neither claim is straightforwardly true. British society, as we have seen, is three-dimensional rather than secular, and granted that there is in England an established Church of which the monarch is Supreme Governor as well as Head of State, and that in Scotland there is a national Church which is Presbyterian in polity and of which the monarch is the First Member, it is clear that ‘secular’ does not begin to address the complexity. Like many countries, the legacy bequeathed by history is distinctive. Nonetheless this does not prevent people speaking and acting as though ours is a society with an agreed secular polity.

## **Towards a Typology**

Clarifications attempted, we move then to explore that relationship between Christian churches and secularism both as an ideology and as a civic strategy. I intend to do this by developing a typology which sets out in broad terms the possible ways in which the churches and social reality might be understood. I wish to do this in distinction from two previous and highly influential attempts to generate typologies that are associated with the names of Ernst Troeltsch and H. Richard Niebuhr and which at this point it becomes necessary to summarise.

Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923) was both a theologian and philosopher and published in 1912 his work *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen*, translated into English in 1931 as *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, Volumes 1 and 2.<sup>3</sup> After surveying the history of Christian social teaching he concluded that there were to be found within it three broad types which he distinguished as the church-type, the sect-type and mysticism.<sup>4</sup> Each type appealed to scripture for justification, and only together did they exhaust the breadth of biblical teaching. Mysticism does not immediately concern us here. The church-type was characterised by the quality of universality, and the contrasting sect-type by that of intensity. ‘Universality’ is to be understood here as the desire to recognise that all things have been made by God and are to be brought under divine lordship,

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<sup>3</sup> Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, Volumes 1 and 2 (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1931).

<sup>4</sup> Troeltsch, *Social Teaching*, Volume 2, p. 993.

and this includes both culture and government, leading to a unified and integrated approach to the whole of human existence. By contrast, ‘intensity’ refers to the desire to remain true to the Christ of the Gospels, to the way of the cross, to uncompromised obedience to the one who was ‘crucified under Pontius Pilate’. Whereas the former gives impetus to the desire to annexe the secular in the service of the religious and so unites church and state, the latter leads to a degree of estrangement from worldly power and sets the church over against the state. The radical traditions, to which baptists<sup>5</sup> can be seen to belong, are to be placed firmly within the sectarian tradition.

It is here that we locate a problem with this typology. For a start, although the words ‘church’ and ‘sect’ may have been intended by Troeltsch in a purely sociological way, describing the social ways of existing that these types are deemed to represent, it is hard not to read them theologically, or even polemically. In which case the ‘church’ category emerges with much greater prestige, whereas the ‘sect’ type suggests something narrower, more limited, more self-concerned, perhaps even more bigoted in nature. Side-stepping the question of whether any of this could be fair criticism, the dice have definitely been loaded in a certain direction, and that is against the ‘sectarian Protestantism’<sup>6</sup> to which baptists belong.

There can be no denying that this has been an enormously influential approach and that Troeltsch’s work has classical status. A similar thing might be said about H. Richard Niebuhr’s seminal work *Christ and Culture*.<sup>7</sup> Here again Niebuhr deals with ideal types, five in number, of the ways in which Christ has been deemed to relate to created but fallen human culture throughout history. The ‘Christ against Culture’ type, which Niebuhr saw illustrated by the various Anabaptist movements deriving from the sixteenth century, but particularly by the Amish of North America, sets fidelity to Christ over against accommodation to culture in an intensification of Troeltsch’s sect-type. This is a retreat from the public into the private. The ‘Christ of Culture’ type accommodates to culture to the point where no conflict between the two is experienced and so could be exemplified by Liberal Protestantism. This is a merging of the private with the public so that the church becomes a religious echo of public culture. The ‘Christ above Culture’ type is seen by Niebuhr as the centre ground occupied historically by the church according to which Christ makes sense not only of the church’s story but of the whole of creation, which finds its true nature in the Logos from whom all things derive their rationality. Yet public culture is called to

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<sup>5</sup> I here adopt the convention of using ‘baptist’ to refer inclusively to the wide spectrum of radical movements that share baptistic values similar to those of Baptists.

<sup>6</sup> Franklin H. Littell, *The Origins of Sectarian Protestantism* (New York: Macmillan, 1952; repr.1964), p. xvii.

<sup>7</sup> H Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York/London: Harper and Row, 1951; repr.1975).

a fulfilment in the Christ who is most clearly known in the church and so judges culture at the same time as elevating it. ‘Christ and Culture in Paradox’, illustrated chiefly by Lutheranism, detects a kind of dualism between Christ and culture so that any relation between them is more likely to be derived through conflict rather than a smooth cohesion. Finally, Niebuhr is working towards what seems to be his preferred type, which is ‘Christ the Transformer of Culture’, illustrated in history, he believes, by such illustrious names as Augustine, Calvin and F.D. Maurice. Christ redeems and transforms the public culture.

Ideal types such as those we have encountered are meant to be broad categorisations rather than narrow pigeon-holes. Unfortunately, this is precisely what they can become, being used to sideline certain ways of thinking. Polemically Niebuhr’s approach can be used to nullify certain groups whom others might consider come into the ‘Against Culture’ category. Arguably those same groups might place themselves in the ‘Transformation of Culture’ ballpark, maintaining that they simply opt for a less-assimilated way of pursuing this goal. The Niebuhrian analysis begins to weaken once certain pertinent points are made. Is it possible, for instance, to be ‘against culture’ when those groups that are deemed to take this stance are themselves in the process of creating their own culture? They may be in conflict with the *dominant* culture but cannot be against culture *per se*. More tellingly, culture, even dominant culture, is not monolithic. Within it there is a multiplicity of cultures, some of which are to be welcomed and some not. It is not possible therefore to be for everything or in favour of nothing. Concerning the radical groups, David Fergusson puts it this way:

Rather than forsaking the world as H.R. Niebuhr suggests in his famous typology, they serve the world by disclosing new possibilities. The radical position can be presented as not so much straight rejection of secular political rule as the adoption of an independent standpoint that provides a perspective from which to offer critical discrimination upon a broad range of cultural forms. It offers not withdrawal but criticism both positive and negative.<sup>8</sup>

It seems then, as though the world might be ready for a new typology, one that avoids the biases and the bluntness of those just considered. The typology I propose seeks to address the realities of the churches, society and the state and, in order to make good on the title of this paper, to address questions of Christian faith and secularism in particular. I propose to address these questions and to develop the typology by means of a Hegelian dialectic of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, and so to propose the following categories:

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<sup>8</sup> David Fergusson, *Church, State and Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 43.

Both participating and possessing

Not participating and not possessing

Participating without possessing

Beneath each of these headings there will be a number of sub-categories sometimes requiring significant discussion.<sup>9</sup>

## **The Suggested Typology**

### **Both participating and possessing**

In this perspective the Christian church lays claim not only to participating in the public realm but also possessing it in the sense that it lays down the truths and the ideology which undergird, determine and shape that realm. In other words, Christianity offers itself and is accepted as the dominant worldview and metaphor by which the whole of life is to be negotiated in both public and private dimensions. Yet under this general heading there are distinctions to be made about how this is done and what its implications might be.

Epistemological optimism is the key: God's truth can be known through reason and revelation and can be authoritatively interpreted by the church. This truth should be applied to the public realm since it is beneficial for all: it is the truth of God. Within this overall heading I differentiate three approaches.

#### *Theocracy*

Theocracy looks for the immediate rule of God on earth through the powers that be. In contradistinction to Islam, theocracy has been an uncharacteristic approach in Christianity perhaps because of its trenchant criticism of the fallen and disobedient nature of human powers, a criticism that tends towards a duality of church and state. It has been most closely approached in the 'Caesaropapism' of the Eastern Church from the sixth to the tenth centuries, with remnants in the idea of the Holy Roman Empire, and in the rule of the Russian Czars. If there is a problem of the public and the private, then according to theocracy it is easily solved: any distinction between the two is abolished. What is publicly confessed by the ruler is to become the private faith of the subject. It is worth pointing out that the recent and shocking emergence on Syrian and Iraqi territory of the alleged Caliphate of the so-

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<sup>9</sup> I first proposed this typology in a published lecture to the Industrial Christian Fellowship in November 2003 entitled 'Participating without Possessing: The public and the private in Christian discipleship'. It received further attention in my *Free Church Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2005), pp. 270-79. What follows both repeats and extends this material.

called 'Islamic state' is an extreme and profoundly alienating example of a theocratic principle, though plainly not from within a Christian framework.

### *Constantinian Christendom*

To be distinguished from theocracy is Constantinian Christendom, for although the first Christian Roman Emperor wished to use the Christian religion as a means of legitimating his own rule, and was followed in this by some of his successors, not least Theodosius I, the Western Church by and large fell short of full-blown theocracy. There are, after all, two cities and according to Augustine the City of Man is not the same as the City of God. The latter, as an other-worldly and future reality, calls the former into question and exposes its self-seeking and rapacious powers. Augustine launched a remarkably robust critique of imperial power: kingdoms without justice are like criminal gangs.<sup>10</sup> Characteristically, the Western Church retained the binary language of Church and State: a tension existed between the two despite whatever partnership they had. Nevertheless, this is *Christendom* in that the church interprets and determines the public realm. And it is *Constantinian* in that the partnership between church and state led to the willingness of the church to enforce its truth as public truth through the use of the state's coercive powers. It is precisely here, of course, that the Anabaptists located the Fall of the church. The church-state nexus has rightly been the object of much criticism and suggestion for reform.<sup>11</sup>

Although Constantinianism is associated with those state and established churches that have dominated western and eastern European history, it should be noted that the churches of the magisterial Reformation were content to continue in this tradition. Not only were they slow to put an end to religious persecution, they were willing to justify it on theological grounds. In Scotland, for instance, the Reformed Church established itself as the national Church and largely followed John Calvin in justifying its persecutory activities. As with the execution of Servetus on grounds of heresy, in 1697 the Edinburgh divinity student Thomas Aikenhead was executed for heresy. David Fergusson summarises those arguments in favour of religious repression as four-fold: (i) Intolerance was justified in order to maintain religious purity within a community and this was the responsibility of civil rulers; (ii) It was justified for the good of heretics themselves since temporal discipline was preferable to eternal punishment. Enforcing the faith was therefore in the long-term interests of those coerced if it saved them from hell; (iii) It was necessary in order to maintain divine honour, to avoid blasphemy and to fulfil the first commandment; and (iv) Since religion is a

<sup>10</sup> Augustine, *City of God* (London: Penguin, 1972), p. 139.

<sup>11</sup> See not least here my own *Disavowing Constantine: Mission, Church and the Social Order in the Theologies of John Howard Yoder and Jürgen Moltmann* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000).

universal phenomenon and all societies must have a religious identity, a society must favour one religion over others.<sup>12</sup>

In enumerating these arguments, we perhaps begin to see why it is that the desire for a secular rather than a religious state began to take hold. But there remains under this main heading a third option to consider.

### *Non-Constantinian Christendom*

The term 'Christendom' is often used in an undifferentiated way which overlooks the complexity of the phenomenon. Yet there have been those who wished to ensure that society and state remained substantially Christian while unhooking religious belief from state power so as to permit freedom of conscience and toleration of religious diversity.<sup>13</sup> It did this for well-articulated theological reasons. David Fergusson has identified some of these as they began to emerge first in the sixteenth century from Erasmus onwards, and then in the seventeenth, and thus in advance of the emergence of any secular articulation of toleration and religious liberty in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These include the convictions that Christ made no attempt to coerce men and women to embrace his doctrines or to join the church; that it was possible to embrace the essence of the Christian faith while disagreeing on non-essentials; that coercion is futile and counter-productive of genuine piety; that conversion is voluntary and cannot be forced; and that there is a need to listen to those who have opinions contrary to our own in order to foster growth in understanding. Tolerance can be productive.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to these arguments we may add two more. Firstly, the Christian doctrine of election, particularly characteristic of the Reformed tradition, affirms the freedom of God to choose those whom he purposes to gather into the elect community of the church. Whatever formulations of this doctrine we may prefer, and there are options, it is surely right to stress the freedom and initiative of God in the work of election. It is not for the state to usurp the divine freedom and to seek to do what only God can do. A religiously coercive state is pre-empting the work and grace of God in the work of salvation that is God's alone and is pursued through the witness and proclamation of the churches. Secondly, in persecuting people for their religious beliefs, or lack of them, the state alienates citizens who potentially have the power to enrich society and contribute to the wider well-being of the community. Religious freedom therefore works for the good of society

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<sup>12</sup> Fergusson, *Church, State and Civil Society*, pp. 82-4.

<sup>13</sup> It might be observed that the constitution of the United States of America was framed in part in reaction to the religious oppression many migrants had endured in Europe.

<sup>14</sup> Fergusson, *Church, State and Civil Society*, pp. 80-81, 84-7.

as a whole by valuing its citizens for their humanity irrespective of religious affiliation.

It should be clear by now that I am concerned to anchor the radical, baptist tradition within this particular emerging trajectory. It was not, so far as I can see, that the first baptists were arguing for a secular, far less a god-less or pagan state. Although they undoubtedly had concerns about the compromised state of Constantinian religion, their desire was not that society or state be de-Christianised but rather re-Christianised in the direction of the true example of Christ and the early church: the state was not to coerce in matters of religious conscience. Its concern was temporal, not spiritual. In these matters Christians owed it respect and obedience. Its duty was the maintenance of society for the free exercise of religion in non-coercive and non-persecutory form.

I might venture the thought that this remains the free church Christian vision. Our ideal is the Christianisation and consequently the humanisation of society and state, but precisely in such a way as to avoid the coercive methodologies that have been associated with this ideal in times past. These are inconsistent with the Christ whom Christians profess. Whether this continues to be a realisable vision is something to which we shall return. However, the vision exists as an eschatological vision, a hope for the fullness of time in the light of which present reality is to be examined and found wanting and which guides the Christian community as to how to live and what to advocate.

We now turn to the dialectical opposite of the first type I have described.

### **Not participating and not possessing**

If the rise of the Christian faith to fulfil the role of public truth is astonishing, it is equally amazing to chart that process by which it was displaced. This is generally attributed to the secularising effects of the post-Enlightenment period, the outcome of which was the gradual removal of Christian faith from its public role to the realm of private belief and a few vestigial and arcane cultural artefacts. If the concern of the advocates of non-Constantinian Christendom was that the public religious ideology should not be imposed within the private world of the religious conscience, the antithetical concern of post-Enlightenment secularism has been that the private religious conscience should not be allowed to lay claim to the public realm, which was to be the domain instead of a supposedly neutral 'reason'. Christian faith therefore did not only not possess the public realm, it was only to be taken seriously if it was prepared to submerge its identity, lay aside its own forms of moralising and reasoning, and participate in the public realm by accommodating itself to the methodology of secular reasoning.

The real focus in this section concerns what I identify here as ‘Hard Secularism’. Hard secularism is more than a political theory. It is a metaphysics and takes its lead from scientism, which is more than a method of gaining knowledge and understanding. There is a difference between science as a methodology (which is to be applauded) and scientism as an ideology (which is to be resisted). The latter will often masquerade as the former. Scientism is a materialistic, atheistic worldview hostile to religion, which it sees as a force for superstition and which it is only prepared to tolerate insofar as it does not have significant social or political effects upon public existence or other people. Privatisation of religion is, according to this account, a containment strategy, since faith is perversely persistent and proceeding against it only strengthens it. The most effective strategy therefore is to ignore it, to hold it as of no significance, to draw attention wherever possible to its decline and marginality. Active faith and belief are ‘fundamentalism’, and religious practice is ‘cultic’ and possibly ‘abusive’. Hard secularism would possess the public realm as its own territory and displace religion by allowing its participation only on the terms laid down for it by hard secularism itself.

Hard secularism has been most visible in the twentieth century in the various atheistic and communist regimes that have to a degree defined the century’s history. It has shown itself to be every bit as persecutory and hostile as any religious state up until the present century, and more so. It has also shown a notable lack of success in eradicating the religious instinct. Yet I shall shortly argue that it conceals itself behind other more benign forms of secularism and that it exists as a hostile impetus even in free societies. Christians can only resist this ideology and need to be equipped both intellectually and spiritually to identify when it is in operation, and to unmask it as a substitute for authentic religious faith and as a potentially persecutory phenomenon. This kind of secularism can be as intolerant as any state religion and for many religions other than Christianity, ‘a state which acknowledges the higher authority of spiritual and moral realities is one which is to be preferred to secular alternatives’.<sup>15</sup> This brings us to the third element of the typology and the one we intend to advocate.

### **Participating without possessing**

The Christendom vision of the whole of society as subject to the Lordship of Christ was never of itself wrong. What was wrong was the attempt to achieve this vision prematurely by means of coercion. I find myself in agreement here with a comment by Gerald W. Schlabach on that trenchant critic of Christendom, Stanley Hauerwas, when he says:

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<sup>15</sup> Fergusson, *Church, State and Civil Society*, p. 188.



Anabaptists who reject historic Christendom may not actually be rejecting the vision of Christendom as a society in which all of life is integrated under the Lordship of Christ. On this reading, Christendom may actually be a vision of shalom, and our argument with Constantinianisms is not over the vision so much as the sinful effort to grasp at its fullness through violence, before its eschatological time. Hauerwas is quite consistent once you see that he does want to create a Christian society (*polis, societas*) – a community and way of life shaped fully by Christian convictions. He rejects Constantinianisms because the 'world' cannot be this society and we only distract ourselves from building a truly Christian society by trying to make our nation into that society, rather than be content with living as a community-in-exile.<sup>16</sup>

Since the gospel works by persuasion not coercion, the church must content itself with the rising and falling of its influence in any given society and culture since to employ other means than this would be to impose its truth prematurely and oppressively upon others, thus compromising the very nature of the church's mission. Participation in the public realm where this is possible can never be foregone, since this would be to deny the public truth of Christ. But this witness is sustained with a view to the eschatological fulfilment of Christ's reign.

Of the positions I have explored, non-Constantinian Christendom is the nearest approximation to what I describe, reflecting the belief that the groundings of a healthy, tolerant and free society are more securely rooted in this theological soil than in reductionist and hostile secularism or some alien totalitarianism. But we now live after any form of Christendom, a perception that is widely acknowledged.<sup>17</sup> So there is a further item of the landscape to note and this is 'Soft Secularism'. It might otherwise be classed as 'civic secularism'.

As distinct meanings of the term 'Christendom' needed to be differentiated, so with secularism. Similar things might be said about Christianity as a whole: there is a variety of Christianities not just one monolithic version. Likewise, it is now commonplace to note that there were Reformations not just one Reformation. As there is a difference between science as a methodology and scientism as an all-encompassing metaphysics (or anti-metaphysics) requiring its own leap of faith, so we are wise to distinguish between the hard secularism that is essentially an atheistic worldview and the soft secularism that is a political strategy designed to hold together religiously and ideologically diverse societies. The 'secular' is here portrayed as a common meeting ground for people of all faiths and none, that

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<sup>16</sup> Cited by Hauerwas himself without reference in *After Christendom? How the church is to behave if freedom, justice and a Christian nation are bad ideas*, 2nd edn (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), pp. 7-8.

<sup>17</sup> David Smith, *Mission After Christendom* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2003); John Hall, *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997); Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004).

which may be held in common by all, a ground where all might meet without fear of persecution or discrimination and where the goods of a society are not subject to any form of religious or confessional test. This can be seen in direct contrast to the religious state against which it is a clear reaction. A society might remain highly religious whilst still being served by a secular state (examples: India and, historically, Turkey). People of religious conviction might quite consistently hold to their own convictions in the private sphere of conscience whilst advocating a secular, non-sectarian state. This approach would be rooted in the commitment to love one's neighbour as oneself, that is, to accord to others those same social and political benefits I would wish to claim for myself. There is therefore full religious/Christian participation in the life of both society and state, but not in a way that denies the same degree of participation to anyone else.

The distinction between hard and soft secularism can further be illuminated by differentiating between *programmatic* and *procedural* secularisms or between *hostile* and *hospitable* secularisms. Soft secularism is simply a way of operating fairly and justly within plural societies. It aims at tolerance, temperance, hospitality and accommodation. It should be acknowledged that, with all this said, soft secularism can be applied with greater or lesser degrees of resolution: some forms of soft secularism are quite hard! French *laïcité*, for instance, is more resolute in excluding religion from the public sphere than is American secularism, which can include prayers in the ceremony for swearing in the President, which act actually takes place on the Bible. One approach is suspicious of the potentially divisive effect of religion, the other encouraging of its potential contributions. There is a range of civic secularisms and these will vary from country to country. Soft, or civic, secularism can value the public and societal role of religion while believing that for historical reasons, rooted not least in the religious conflicts of previous centuries, religion itself is corrupted when what should be a matter of voluntary commitment becomes wedded to political power.

Granted that Christendom has passed and that the non-Constantinian vision remains an eschatological hope, soft secularism may be the best model for social existence currently on offer or potentially realisable within the European realm. Christians might prefer to 'possess' the public realm more comprehensively and benignly, but short of a long series of massive revivals of the Christian religion in its free-church variation this is not on offer. Soft secularism remains the best available option. It is a position with which we can do serious business. This is not to say that it is without its own dangers against which we must remain vigilantly on guard. Chief among these is the undoubted fact that hard secularism can use soft secularism as a cloak or disguise for pursuing its own agenda. Where this happens, it needs to be

unmasked, and this can be done by appealing to soft secularism's own declared aspirations of tolerance, respect for difference, and non-discrimination. A further danger is that soft secularism leads to the cultivation of a culture of disbelief, of agnosticism and potential indifference which undermines the obedience of faith. As a counter-point to this it should be pointed out that no society or state can operate without some shared vision of the good, and the search for such a vision compels us to pose questions about purpose and meaning, and thus to draw upon the elements of religion itself. Political liberalism is essentially a procedural ethic designed to provide the space in which individuals may negotiate their own meanings. When it comes to casting a substantive vision of the good it becomes parasitic. There are challenges here. But I wish to conclude this paper by drawing attention to what seem to me to be the advantages for free church Christians and others of living in a secular state.

## **Life in a Secular State**

### **Freedom to be the church**

This paper began with a quotation: 'If society would not be Christian, at least the church could be.' I have taken it, and some other strands of thought, from Professor David Fergusson of the University of Edinburgh, and it comes from a discussion of the Anabaptists. It is preceded by the statement, 'The success of this movement involved a renunciation of every attempt to master the world.'<sup>18</sup> The point is that once the church gives up the idea that it is its responsibility to maintain a national identity or manage the world, it is freed for its primary and unique task of witnessing to Christ. Fergusson puts it so:

There is a sense of liberation in the realisation that the church no longer speaks for society, exercising a central role in promoting consensus and achieving social stability. This frees the representatives of the community to speak on distinctively Christian grounds, to fulfil the fundamental task of bearing witness to the faith, and to set aside the burden of being the state's major partner within civil society.<sup>19</sup>

None of this precludes Christian individuals taking a full and active part in the political process or in the architecture of civil society. But when they do so, they do so as competent persons who happen to be Christians rather than as formal representatives of the Christian church. Christian communities make their contribution and live out their witness when they are faithful in word and deed to the one who has called them and is at the centre of their gathered life.

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<sup>18</sup> Fergusson, *Church, State and Civil Society*, p. 43.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

### **Freedom to be authentic**

One of the criticisms of Constantinian Christendom is that it succeeded in abolishing the category of the ‘world’ by co-opting the world into its own life. It failed thereby to sanctify the world but succeeded in corrupting its own life. It would seem, therefore, that reinstating the category of the ‘world’, the realm beyond the church that is not church, is a necessary step in fostering authentic Christian communities. The authenticity of the church depends paradoxically upon the existence of the ‘world’. Some years ago, I heard the then Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom and Commonwealth, Sir Jonathan Sacks (now Lord Sacks), give an address in which he referred to the *stetls* within the Jewish Pale of central Europe. He spoke of Jewish caution about the practice of excommunication. In a non-plural society, to be excommunicated from the synagogue was equivalent to a death sentence, since the excommunicated were shunned by the community and therefore deprived of the very means of life. The pressure to conform, to go through the motions of religious observance in order not to be put at risk, was therefore very considerable, leading to the weakening of synagogue life. It struck me at the time that if people belong to our communities primarily because they are afraid not to, then authentic Christian communities would lie beyond our grasp. Societies in which it is acceptable to be secular allow people not to belong to the church without fear of retribution or discrimination, and in this way increase the likelihood that those who do hold fast to the church will be sincere in doing so.

### **Freedom to worship and work**

Secular states proclaim their commitment to comprehensive religious freedom and make it clear that they subscribe to the relevant international documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights. Article 18 of the former declares:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.<sup>20</sup>

Article 9 of the Convention reiterates this and adds the further provision,

Freedom to manifest one’s religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ian Brownlie, ed., *Basic Documents on Human Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 18-19.

<sup>21</sup> Brownlie, *Basic Documents*, p. 246.

Ostensibly therefore, civic secularism protects and safeguards religious freedom in unambiguous terms. The fact that these safeguards are self-declared allows that whenever they are infringed, those who are at risk can appeal to the self-definition of secular states in their own defence. The tension remains that different rights might on occasion come into conflict with each other (for instance ‘gay rights’ versus religious rights) in which case the criterion of ‘reasonable accommodation’ might be appealed to. However reasonable accommodation needs to be practised both by and towards religious groupings. And Christians safeguard their own freedoms not least by being vigilant for the freedoms of others.

### **Freedom to participate**

Although civic secularism precludes the possibility of Christianity possessing the public sphere, and the advantages of this have been noted above (under ‘Freedom to be the Church’), it leaves the field open to Christian participation in all legitimate activities of both society and state. Acting as the salt of the earth, there is every reason why Christians should involve themselves in building up communities and nations. It is also understandable that given the force of the powers that oppose them, Christians should feel themselves prey from time to time to ‘multiple overwhelmings’<sup>22</sup> and to ‘chronic exasperation’.<sup>23</sup> A pessimistic note was struck by Alasdair MacIntyre in his justly famous book *After Virtue* when, in view of the moral disintegration he noted in modern culture, he prophesied that a new dark age was upon us: ‘This time however the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time.’<sup>24</sup> His call for communities of virtue and civility to keep the light shining certainly needs to be heard.

More optimistically however, the possibilities for conversation and common endeavour are not completely lost. We are still shaped by our Christian heritage to a considerable extent: there are men and women of goodwill beyond the boundaries of the church; there are common causes that may be made with those of other faiths; there remains an extensive consensus as to what constitutes moral action; and the doctrines of general revelation and common grace indicate that God has not left his world without a witness (Acts 14:17). Two themes in particular furnish ground on which Christians and their dialogue partners might meet: our shared humanity, and the social quest for the common good. Believing that human beings are made in the image of God and that God in the incarnation of Christ has bestowed on

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<sup>22</sup> I owe this term to Professor David Ford of the University of Cambridge.

<sup>23</sup> A term coined by John Macmurray and cited by Fergusson, *Church, State and Civil Society*, p. 108.

<sup>24</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A study in moral theory* (London: Duckworth, 1992; repr. 2000), p. 263.

humans the highest honour, Christians are the true humanists who can work with those of other religions and of none who care about humane and decent values. And it is generally considered that Catholic social teaching has bequeathed the concept of the common good to modern political thought. These twin ideas offer much scope for participation in the public realm for the good of all.

### **Freedom to integrate and not to assimilate**

Civic secularism provides for the Christian faith the opportunity to integrate into society without losing identity and distinctiveness through assimilation. Moreover, as a tradition of faith, the commitment of free church believers should be well adapted to surviving and contributing under modern conditions. The commitments to voluntary affiliation exemplified in believers' baptism, to strong congregational life and consensual government, to liberty of conscience and religious freedom count as strengths in such an environment, as does a history that has avoided persecution of others and the rejection of religious compulsion. These qualities are surely those that belong to the future of Christianity even for those who have adopted other ways of being church in times past.

### **Conclusion**

Although churches of a baptist faith and order might as their highest preference work towards the formation of states and societies according to their own principles of obedience to Christ and grace towards all, such a state remains an unlikely prospect in any future that we are able currently to foresee. Soft or civic secularism remains the most likely alternative prospect and whatever its challenges, it holds open considerable positive possibilities for life and mission.

‘But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.’  
(Jeremiah 29:7)

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# An Expedient Doctrine:<sup>1</sup> Separation of Church and State in the Donatist Controversy

Tarmo Toom

The aim of this article is not to introduce Donatism as such, or to rehearse what is known about it. Rather, the focus is on a single aspect of Donatist thought — the shaping of the idea of the separation of church and state. On the basis of Donatist martyrologies, imperial documents, Optatus of Milevis's seven books usually known as *Contra Parmenianum Donatistam*, and some of Augustine's relevant treatises and epistles, it will be shown how, in time, the Donatists' initial collaboration with the empire turned into an eventual confrontation with the empire, and how the doctrine of the separation of church and state began to act as justification for their collective change of mind.

## Keywords

Church and state; Donatism; persecution; separatism; early Christianity

## Introduction

In one of his booklets, John Caputo makes an interesting observation.<sup>2</sup> To paraphrase him, one should notice the all-important conjunction 'and' in the phrase 'church *and* state'. Sometimes 'and' announces a happy coming together of two things: for example, when a pastor says, 'I pronounce you husband *and* wife'. Other times, however, the same conjunction poses an insurmountable challenge and opposition: for example, when it is used in a statement 'Democrats *and* Republicans'. Likewise, the conjunction 'and' in 'church *and* state' can be understood in many ways, and there is a long history of understanding it in both positive and negative ways. The Donatist controversy was primarily about figuring out the Christian community's relation to the Roman state and society;<sup>3</sup> about how to understand the conjunction 'and' in the phrase 'church *and* state'.

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<sup>1</sup> The word 'doctrine' needs to be taken with reservations. At least in the early period, one is equally justified to use the words 'idea', 'notion', or 'attitude'.

<sup>2</sup> J. D. Caputo, *Philosophy and Theology, Horizons in Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> See the classic W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952), especially pp. 141-226. Calling various separatists 'Donatist' was common in the Middle Ages and in the period of Protestant Reformation(s) (M. A. Gaumer, 'Donatists Abound!!! The Polemical *Ressourcement* of Late Antique Villains in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods', in *The Uniquely African Controversy: Studies on Donatist Christianity*, ed. by A. Dupont and others, Late Antique

The relation between church and state has been ambivalent from the beginning.<sup>4</sup> When Christians turned to their about-to-be canonised New Testament for guidance,<sup>5</sup> they found primarily two sets of texts: pro-state loyalty texts (e.g. Rom 13:1–7, although the exact meaning of *exousia* is controversial; 1 Pet 2:13–15) and anti-state disloyalty texts (e.g. Rev 13), as well as everything in between.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the New Testament mentions both the God-given power of earthly rulers, and also the satanic behaviour of secular governments. It teaches both the ‘ethics of subordination’ and the ‘ethics of resistance’.<sup>7</sup> Hence the ambivalence, hence the problem of interpretation!<sup>8</sup> The constant ups and downs of the uneasy relations between church and state meant constant oscillation between the two sets of texts.<sup>9</sup> The Donatist controversy illustrates well the increasing dominance and the eventual absolutising of the anti-state set of texts, until the crystallisation of the conviction that church had to be separated from the state.

But first a word about the nature and character of the available evidence. The literary information available for the Donatist controversy(ies)

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History and Religion 9 (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), pp. 30-70; and J. Hoover, “‘They Bee Full Donatists’: The Rhetoric of Donatism in Early Separatist Polemics”, *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 15/2 (2013): 154-76). For example, Melancthon wrote in his *Loci*, ‘The Anabaptists revive the errors of the Donatists’ (Philipp Melancthon, *The Chief Theological Topics: Loci Praecipui Theologici 1559*, trans. by J. A. O. Preus (St Louis: Concordia, 2011), p. 249). Yet the differences were important as well: later separatists were usually not limited to a particular geographical location and/or nationality, and above all, later separatists were not calling the members of the ‘state-church(es)’ graciously ‘brethren’ (Optatus, *c. Parm.* 1.3-4; *Optat de Milève: Traité contre les donatistes*, ed. by M. Labrousse, SC 412 (Paris: Du cerf, 1995), pp. 176-80; *Optatus: Against the Donatists*, trans. by M. Edwards, Translated Texts for Historians 27 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997), pp. 2-4). For the question of the authenticity of Optatus’s account, see B. Kriegbaum, ‘Zwischen den Synoden von Rom und Arles. Die donatistische Supplik bei Optatus’, *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae* 28 (1990): 23-61, especially pp. 35-49.

<sup>4</sup> For this topic in general, see H. Rahner, *Church and State in Early Christianity*, trans. by L. D. Davies (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> True, one should not suppose that the New Testament contains clear doctrines, which would be unambiguous and normative for every Christian. ‘We cannot read a few “timeless truths” about the “state” off the surface of the N[ew] T[estament]’ (N. T. Wright, ‘The New Testament and the “State”’, *Themelios* 16/1 (1990): 11-17 (p. 11)).

<sup>6</sup> Oscar Cullmann contended that, in the New Testament, we do not find ‘a renunciation of the State as such as a matter of principle; but neither do we find an uncritical acceptance’ (*The State in the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1956), p. 5 and pp. 18-20); cf. M. E. Doerfler, ‘Introduction’ to *Church and Empire*, Ad Fontes: Early Christian Sources (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), pp. xi-xii.

<sup>7</sup> W. E. Pilgrim, *Uneasy Neighbors: Church and State in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), pp. 7-36, 145-80.

<sup>8</sup> ‘The fountainhead of all false biblical interpretation and of all heresy is invariably the isolation and the absolutising of one single passage’ (Cullmann, *The State in the New Testament*, p. 56), and we might add, ‘one single set of texts’. A well-known Canadian Mennonite scholar, Arnold Snyder, who taught me Anabaptism, admitted that his father’s Bible opened easily in certain places — in the places of the favourite verses of Anabaptists.

<sup>9</sup> I remember a telling transformation, which I discerned in the statements of Estonian Baptists, after the country regained political independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. During the Soviet occupation, at the top of the hierarchy of the cited texts were the ones from the Book of Revelation. But after 1991, Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 made it to the top.



is contradictory.<sup>10</sup> The polemical nature of sources, either Donatist or Caecilianist,<sup>11</sup> has to be taken very seriously, because ‘the available literary sources come from the active protagonists in the dispute’.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, features such as selective, one-sided, and tendentious information, biased assessment, distorted facts, baseless accusations, overstatements, and rhetorical put-downs of the other side are some of the characteristics of the available sources. Optatus told Parmenian, ‘I believe you have acted subtly for the purpose of seducing and deceiving the minds of your audience’ (*c. Parm.* 1.9) and called Donatist documents pejoratively ‘records of some kind (*aliquos*)’ (*c. Parm.* 1.22).<sup>13</sup> At least it was equally clear to both parties that their opponents were twisting and distorting the evidence. In fact, perhaps we will never know what exactly happened, for as Optatus put it, ‘Truth is hindered by zeal’ (*c. Parm.* 5.3) — only that this would be the case for both the Donatist and the Caecilianist accounts.

## Under Emperor Constantine

In the history of the Christian church, the issue of the relation between church and state surfaced with new urgency during the seismic political shifts of the fourth century.<sup>14</sup> What was later called the Donatist church<sup>15</sup> came into

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<sup>10</sup> For example, there exist both Donatist and Caecilianist versions of the *Passio Ss. Dativi, Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum* (which is better known as *The Acts of Abitinian Martyrs*, henceforth *Acta Abit.*) and *Sermo de passione Donati et Advocati* (*Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa*, ed. and trans. by M. A. Tilley, Translated Texts for Historians 24 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), p. 52). There are also diametrically different accounts of the same incident (e.g., *Pass. Marc.* 12 versus Augustine, *c. litt. Pet.* 2.20.46).

<sup>11</sup> It has been difficult to find proper names for the participants in the Donatist controversy. Both sides wanted to be called ‘catholics’ and considered themselves to be the establishment. For example, when Optatus spoke in the name of Caecilianists, he said, ‘Us, the catholics’ (*c. Parm.* 1.3; 5.1). On the other hand, *Acta Abit.* 19 explicitly claimed that the Donatists were the ‘catholic church’. Evidently, such discourse was part of the struggle for rhetorical dominance. Therefore, and among others, J. J. O’Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), pp. 14–15, has proposed an arguably more neutral name ‘Caecilianists’ for anti-Donatists. This would create a fairer symmetry after the respective founding bishops — Donatists (Donatus) and Caecilianists (Caecilian) — without pre-judging which of the parties was more ancient and widespread (i.e. catholic) in Roman North Africa. However, both parties deeply disliked these very designations and, therefore, constantly debated the issue of naming. See J. A. Hoover, *The Donatist Church in an Apocalyptic Age*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 18–24; and P. Marone, ‘The Use of the Term “Catholic” in the Donatist Controversy’, *Pomoerium* 6 (2008): 81–91.

<sup>12</sup> J. Whitehouse, ‘The Course of the Donatist Schism in Late Roman North Africa’, in *The Donatist Schism: Controversy and Contexts*, ed. by R. Miles, Translated Texts for Historians 2 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), pp. 13–33 (p. 15).

<sup>13</sup> *Contra Parmenianum Donatistam* was written in response to Parmenian’s *De ecclesia traditorum* in 364–67 CE, and edited by Optatus himself in the 380s.

<sup>14</sup> Augustine, *ep.* 43.1.4–7.20; Introduction to *SC* 412:57–72.

<sup>15</sup> Again, ‘Donatist’ is a pejorative name given by Caecilianists. Augustine loved to call the separatists *pars Donati*, ‘Donatus’ party; that is, emphatically not ‘Christ’s party’ (e.g. Augustine, *c. litt. Pet.* 2.39.94; *c. ep. Parm.* 2.2.5; cf. Optatus, *c. Parm.* 3.3).

existence during the time of Emperor Diocletian, when ‘the storm of persecution spread throughout the whole Africa’ (Optatus, *c. Parm.* 1.13).<sup>16</sup> Shortly after the persecution was brought to an end, in 312 CE, Emperor Constantine gained control over Roman North Africa; that is, ‘in those provinces which the divine Providence has freely entrusted to [his] fidelity’ (Eusebius, *eccl. hist.* 10.5).<sup>17</sup> Constantine immediately bumped into ecclesiastical infighting, into the problem of a divided church in North Africa. Obviously, he did not particularly like the Christian divisions for his own imperial reasons. No doubt, he wanted to have a religiously unified empire. In late antiquity, religion and state were thoroughly integrated and thus considered inseparable. Religion and its ceremonies were perceived as a unifying force and a mark of one’s loyalty to the state.<sup>18</sup>

Having secured his God-given power, Constantine ordered that the property taken from Christians should be restored to them, that Christian clergy should be exempt from civil duties, and more particularly, that the Bishop of Carthage, Caecilian, could use the imperial funds for his flock (Eusebius, *eccl. hist.* 10.5–7).<sup>19</sup>

However, not everyone welcomed the imperial support for Bishop Caecilian. Donatist Christians had not tolerated any sort of co-operation with ‘pagan’ persecutors and therefore accused their opponents of being collaborators during the hours of testing. ‘You call us *traditores*’ (Augustine, *ep.* 105.1.2). Although also guilty of collaboration,<sup>20</sup> Donatists were relentless in their rejection of the legitimacy of Caecilian’s episcopacy. Their argument was that he had been consecrated by a *traditor*, Felix of Aptunga, and thus, his whole ecclesiastical community was contaminated with sin. In 311 CE, Donatists elected their own schismatic bishop Majorinus. Optatus contends that by doing so, Donatists destroyed the God-given peace (John 14:27) and shattered the unity of the African church, the ‘one dove’ (Song

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<sup>16</sup> B. Kriegbaum, *Kirche der Traditoren oder Kirche der Martyrer?: Die Vorgeschichte des Donatismus*, Innsbrucker theologische Studien 16 (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1986), pp. 59-129.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Dan 2:37, 4:22; Wis 6:3; Rom 13:1, and Clement of Rome, *Cor.* 61, ‘For you, Lord [...] have given them their sovereign authority’.

<sup>18</sup> One of the functions of a religion is to strengthen social cohesion within a community (E. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. by C. Cosman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001; first published 1912), p. 46).

<sup>19</sup> Eusebius explicitly mentions the ‘epistles of the emperor [i.e. Constantine]’, which were ‘addressed to the bishops, with honours and superadded donations of monies’ (*eccl. hist.* 10.2).

<sup>20</sup> Optatus, *c. Parm.* 1.13-14; 6.1. A particularly telling case was that of a Donatist bishop Silvanus, Caecilian’s formidable opponent, who was accused by his deacon in a secular court of being a *traditor* (Optatus, *c. Parm.*, App. 1; Augustine, *c. litt. Pet.* 1.21.23; 3.57.69-58.70). (As an Appendix, Optatus’s *Contra Parmenianum Donatistam* includes a dossier of ten historical documents.) ‘They [i.e. Donatists] themselves handed over the Books’ (Augustine, *Ps. c. Don.* B; cf. *bapt.* 2.6.9). A Donatist, Cresconius, claims however that Silvanus was victimised because of his refusal to side with Caecilianists (Augustine, *Cresc.* 3.30.34). See B. D. Shaw, *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 75-78.

of Songs 6:8; *c. Parm.* 1.1–2, 10, 15; 4.6; cf. Cyprian, *ep.* 73). ‘From this point on, two rival altars were erected and two parallel church hierarchies began to oppose one another.’<sup>21</sup> The Roman North African church was split basically until the Arab conquest in the seventh century started to quench the once vibrant Christianity of any kind in North Africa.

But there was more to the Donatists’ dislike of Caecilian. In 304 CE, Roman soldiers had arrested and imprisoned a group of Christians for an unlawful assembly in Abitinia, a village near Carthage.<sup>22</sup> Faithful friends came to bring food and water for the confessors in jail. However, and for reasons which are not entirely clear, the bishop of Carthage, Mensurius, and his deacon Caecilian conspired with Roman guards to prevent this act of mercy and harassed the visitors. When the relatives of those imprisoned came, dishes were smashed, people were beaten and ‘struck down left and right’ (*Acta Abit.* 20).<sup>23</sup> *Acta Sermo de passione Donati et Advocati* 9 says, ‘We must hold Caecilian responsible for the blood of all, for we are sure that he arranged for the whole populace to be killed.’ It was a sad precedent indeed: Christians conspired with the Roman state against other (kinds of) Christians.

So, the Donatists petitioned,<sup>24</sup> through Proconsul Anullinus, the self-proclaimed ‘Christian’ emperor,<sup>25</sup> to look into the case of Caecilian. Indeed, in the classical tradition of *parrhēsia*, bishops could voice their concerns directly to the emperor. ‘The general accessibility of the emperor was one of the characteristic features of late Roman government [...] There was no limit

<sup>21</sup> F. Decret, *Early Christianity in North Africa*, trans. by E. L. Smither (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2009), p. 103.

<sup>22</sup> A version of these events is recorded in the Donatist *Passio Ss. Dativi, Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum*.

<sup>23</sup> While usually considered to be an early fourth-century text, Dearn has argued that the *Passio Ss. Dativi, Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum* is an early fifth-century text. Namely, after the Council of Carthage (411 CE), the defeated Donatists authored a *passio* which reconstructed the events of the fourth century according to the polemical needs of the later time (A. C. M. Dearn, ‘The Abitinian Martyrs and the Outbreak of the Donatist Schism’, *JEH* 55/1 (2004): 1-18). For comparison, martyr stories were also used for identity-formation in *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* (1563) and the Mennonite *Historie der Martelaren* (1615).

<sup>24</sup> The document is found in Optatus, *c. Parm.* 1.22, and a mention of the two additional *libelli* in Augustine, *ep.* 88.2. ‘The fog of forensic litigation’ surrounded the Donatist controversy from the start and thus, its history can be documented by ‘court proceedings, conciliar *acta*, and imperial correspondence’ (R. Miles, ‘Textual Communities and the Donatist Controversy’, in *The Donatist Schism*, ed. by R. Miles, pp. 249-83 (p. 264)). For the various types of documents and legislative action, see J.-L. Maier, *Le dossier du donatisme*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 134 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1989), vol. 1, pp. 137-254; N. Lenski, ‘Imperial Legislation and the Donatist Controversy: From Constantine to Honorius’, in *The Donatist Schism*, ed. by R. Miles, pp. 166-219 (pp. 167-70), and for an exhaustive list of imperial communications, pages 197-219; S. Corcoran, *The Empire of the Tetrarchs: Imperial Pronouncements and Government, AD 284-324*, Oxford Classical Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), p. 2, pp. 58-62, 153-60; and P. Marone, ‘Some Observations on the Anti-Donatist Legislation’, in *The Uniquely African Controversy*, ed. by A. Dupont and others, pp. 71-84.

<sup>25</sup> My understanding of Constantine’s ‘conversion’ and his deeply complex, lifelong growth into Christianity, culminating at his baptism in 337 CE, is explicated in T. Toom, ‘Constantine’s *Summus Deus* and the Nicene *Unus Deus*: Imperial Agenda and Ecclesiastical Conviction’, *Vox patrum* 34 (2014): 103-22.

to the content of these petitions.<sup>26</sup> Because of the enthusiastic optimism after the so-called ‘Edict of Milan’, neither Donatists nor Caecilianists were initially opposed to the state that favoured Christianity. There seemed nothing wrong with petitioning the emperor. Both parties effectively ignored 1 Corinthians 6:1, ‘If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgement instead of before the Lord’s people?’ — unless they did not regard Constantine and his officials ‘ungodly’.

In the beginning, it was not clear how Constantine would react to the church-splitting events in his North African domain and behind whom he would throw his support. Donatists asked Emperor Constantine for a ‘fair’ verdict (read: a verdict favourable to them). Three bishops from Gaul were summoned to Rome (313 CE) to assess the situation together with the bishop of Rome, Miltiades, who in turn invited another fifteen Italian bishops on his own initiative (Eusebius, *eccl. hist.* 10.5; Optatus, *c. Parm.* 1.23).<sup>27</sup> They were supposed to ‘leave no room for schism or division’ (Eusebius, *eccl. hist.* 10.5). Mostly because the Donatist practice of rebaptism and laying hands on ‘every head’ was untraditional (Optatus, *c. Parm.* 1.2, 24), the Roman Council decided in favour of Caecilian(ists). The council’s decision was backed up by Constantine’s letter,<sup>28</sup> which is no longer fully extant (Optatus, *c. Parm.* 1.23–24). However, the Donatists just could not let the matter rest. Perhaps the dichotomy found in Acts 5:29 was ready at hand: ‘We must obey God rather than any human authority.’<sup>29</sup> So, ‘Donatus thought it proper to appeal’ (Optatus, *c. Parm.* 1.25; cf. Augustine, *ep.* 43.7.20) — only to receive a stern rebuke from the Emperor, with a possible allusion to 1 Corinthians 6:1–6 (Optatus, *c. Parm.* 1.25).

Nevertheless, Donatists managed to make Constantine write a letter to *vicarius* Aelius Paulinus, which commanded an investigation of the case of Caecilian’s consecrator Felix (Optatus, *c. Parm.* 1.26–27). Although Constantine realised that ‘the number and magnitude of these claims [i.e. Donatist claims] was prolonging the disputes with excessive stubbornness’ (Constantine’s letter to *vicarius* Aelafius in Optatus, *c. Parm.*, App. 3), he summoned a larger council in Arles in 314 CE (excluding the bishop of

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<sup>26</sup> C. Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition*, *The Transformation of the Classical Heritage* 17 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 260, cf. pp. 267–69.

<sup>27</sup> H. A. Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), pp. 218–19.

<sup>28</sup> Lenski contends, ‘The letter had thus become a general purpose legal instrument that acted as the most versatile workhorse in the stable of imperial legal communications’ (‘Imperial Legislation and the Donatist Controversy’, p. 170).

<sup>29</sup> Referring to the decisions of Rome and Arles, Augustine assessed, ‘But these judgements [were] regarded as human’ (*ep.* 89.4).

Rome), because ‘those very persons who ought to exhibit a brotherly and peaceful unanimity, rather disgracefully and detestably are at variance with one another’ (Constantine’s letter in Eusebius, *eccl. hist.* 10.5). To the great disappointment of the Donatists, their case against Felix was considered mere ‘pernicious injury to our religion and tradition [...] [by] men of unbridled mind’ (a letter from the bishops at Arles to Silvester of Rome in Optatus, *c. Parm.*, App. 4) and the *episcopus religiosus* Felix was vindicated (Optatus, *c. Parm.* 1.27 and App. 2).<sup>30</sup> Parmenian, of course, thought that the emperor and his council were ‘corrupted by favouritism’ (Augustine, *c. ep. Parm.* 1.6.11). In any case, it started to become clear to the Donatists that the state, as well as the worldwide ‘apostate’ church, was not on their side. The world hated them, as it was supposed to hate God’s elect (John 15:19; *s. Don. et Adv.* 7). ‘Constantine’s rejection of their position provided the opportunity to further strengthen their self-proclaimed credentials as the True Church, kept pure by the rod of imperial sanction.’<sup>31</sup>

After the Council of Arles, Emperor Constantine sent a letter to the ‘catholic brethren’ by whom he unambiguously meant Caecilianists (Optatus, *c. Parm.*, App. 5). The emperor’s use of language was significant. In Constantine’s mind, Caecilianists were ‘catholics’, for, as said, the letter was addressed to *episcopis catholicis carissimis fratribus*. Thus, the Council of Arles had made the schism official — it had named one group of Christians ‘Donatists’ and regarded them as distinct from the worldwide ‘catholic church’. The emperor was especially agitated by the fact that the ‘equitable judgement’ of the bishops in Rome and Arles was not taken by Donatists as ‘the judgement of Christ’/‘the judgement of heaven’.<sup>32</sup> Instead, the ‘officers of the devil’ had the audacity to protest against the decision of bishops<sup>33</sup> and to appeal the same case again (Optatus, *c. Parm.*, App. 5).<sup>34</sup> Evidently getting tired of the whole affair, Constantine sighed, ‘How often already have I myself suppressed their shameless approaches’ (Optatus, *c. Parm.*, App. 5). The emperor surely hoped that the legal wrangling between Donatists and Caecilianists would come to an end, but it did not.

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<sup>30</sup> It appeared that a Donatist, Ingentius, had falsified the documents accusing Felix (Optatus, *c. Parm.*, App. 2.9-10; Constantine’s letter in Augustine, *ep.* 88.4).

<sup>31</sup> Miles, ‘Textual Communities’, p. 254.

<sup>32</sup> At the Council of Nicaea, Emperor Constantine said, ‘All that is decided in the holy meetings of the bishops reflects the will of God’ (Eusebius, *VC* 3.20).

<sup>33</sup> It seems that after referring a case to a council of bishops, Constantine considered the matter closed and the bishops’ verdict binding. After all, the emperor used ‘the episcopal system as an instrument of imperial policy and control’ (A. Brent, *A Political History of Early Christianity* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), p. 286).

<sup>34</sup> Although Constantine carried the title *pontifex maximus*, the high priest of every religion and sect of his empire, his famous self-designation *ho episkopos tōn ektos* (Eusebius, *VC* 4.24) can be taken in the sense that the un-baptised emperor was ‘the bishop of those outside [the church]’, and as such, responsible for the religious affairs of the empire in general.

Constantine wrote to the Donatist bishops at Arles as well, but without calling their church ‘catholic’. Instead, he pointed out their ‘excessive obstinacy’ and again, ‘having little respect for equitable judgement [of bishops]’ (Optatus, *c. Parm.*, App. 6).<sup>35</sup> This was followed by an imperial plan to enforce unity, confiscate Donatist churches, and exile their bishops,<sup>36</sup> but all this did not come to much. Nevertheless, now it really started to dawn on the Donatists that their ‘true’<sup>37</sup> church of God was under threat again, although from unexpected agents — the state and the ‘Christian’ Emperor Constantine.

It seems that Donatists remained ‘pre-Constantine’ in their thinking, because they increasingly insisted on the radical dichotomy between church and state/world. Yet there had been a significant change in circumstances. In the fourth century, there was no longer a ‘pagan’ state which persecuted Christians. Now it was the ‘Christian’ state that enforced religious unity.<sup>38</sup> True, it was not yet the Theodosian *tempora Christiana* of the 380s, it was still the *tempora Constantiniana* of the 310s.<sup>39</sup> Yet, since martyrdom at the hands of ‘pagans’ was no longer viable, *separatism* became the new hallmark of the ‘true’ church. It almost always does.<sup>40</sup> After all, 2 Corinthians 6:17 insisted that Christians should keep their purity by separating from sinners. Once again, amid all the decisions that went against them, Donatists began to perceive themselves as the persecuted ‘faithful’ church, which was separate from and stood in opposition to both the state and the worldwide ‘apostate’ church of ‘semi-Christians’.

A few years later, in 321 CE, Constantine complained that the Donatists ‘continued to plead on their own behalf’ (Optatus, *c. Parm.*, App. 9) and about nine years later still, he basically seems to have given up, as he assures his official that they have acted ‘rightly and wisely [...] by abstaining from [...] the perverse quarrels’ (Optatus, *c. Parm.*, App. 10). That is, the best way seemed to have been just to ignore the Donatists. On this particular occasion, ‘the enemies of the church’ had refused to vacate a church in a city called Constantina and, instead of forcing them out, Emperor Constantine

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<sup>35</sup> Donatists tried to get Caecilian, who was summoned to Rome but did not show up, condemned by yet another appeal. But it was only in 316 CE, in Milan, that Emperor Constantine himself ruled on the *causa Caeciliani* — and yes, found him innocent (Augustine, *Cresc.* 3.71.82).

<sup>36</sup> ‘Then Constantine [...] issued a very severe law against the sect of Donatus’ (Augustine, *ep.* 105.2.9).

<sup>37</sup> I have used quotation marks here and below, because such expressions concern Donatists’ self-understanding, their claims and contentions, and not objective facts.

<sup>38</sup> In *c. Parm.* 3.3, Optatus invoked 1 Tim 2:2 against the Donatists who confronted the imperial agents of unification.

<sup>39</sup> For this distinction, see R. Markus, ‘“*Tempora Christiana*” Revisited’, in *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honor of Gerald Bonner*, ed. by R. Dodaro and G. Lawless (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 201-13.

<sup>40</sup> Consequently, separatist movements of various kinds (including Anabaptists and English Separatists) have almost always treasured the notion of the separation of church and state.

unexpectedly offered money for the Caecilianists to build a new church (Optatus, *c. Parm.*, App. 10).

In short, during the reign of Emperor Constantine, Donatists never really ceased sending their petitions and appeals to the imperial/secular courts. ‘They annoyed the emperor with daily appeals’ (Augustine, *ep.* 105.2.8; cf. *c. ep. Parm.* 1.9.15). Although they experienced mostly setbacks, the idea of the separation of church and state had not yet rooted itself deeply in Donatists’ minds. They did not start out as state haters, but they become just that within a few decades. Yet, the full conviction that church and state had to be separated had to wait for the Donatists’ more decisive confrontation with the secular powers.

## Under Emperor Constans

It got much tougher for Donatists under Constantine’s son Constans. Namely, in 347 CE, an initially peaceful imposition of unity turned violent as Donatists experienced deadly state aggression. For their own reasons, the Donatists would have concurred with Hilary of Poitiers’ words to (a homoean) Emperor Constans, ‘You lie when you say you are a Christian; you are a new enemy of Christ; you have become the Antichrist’ (*c. Const.* 1.7).

Donatists were in the majority in all provinces in North Africa, except Proconsularis. According to Jerome, Donatus, the successor of Majorinus, succeeded ‘in deceiving nearly all Africa’ (*vir. ill.* 93). At times, at least, the Donatists did indeed welcome the intimidating force of the militia-like *circumcelliones* to further their cause (Optatus, *c. Parm.* 3.4). Caecilianists, who in turn had already experienced the state’s favour and support, readily trusted themselves again into the mighty hands of the civil power. Optatus highlights the particular cases of Counts Taurinus and Silvester in the mid-340s,<sup>41</sup> who had to use police force against the armed *circumcelliones* in order to protect Caecilianist communities (Optatus, *c. Parm.* 3.4). However, this also meant that Caecilianists were increasingly perceived as the associates of the persecuting state, and that now there was a full-blown antagonism between the Donatist church and the state — just like it had been at the time of the Great Persecution. The conjunction ‘and’ in the phrase ‘church and state’ started to designate two opposing and incompatible realities. As one of the theological defence moves, the doctrine of separation

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<sup>41</sup> See J. Alexander, ‘Count Taurinus and the Persecutors of Donatism’, *ZAC* 2/2 (1998): 247-67, which argues that in placing Taurinus before Macarius and Paul (see the next paragraph), Optatus’s ‘polemical needs’ took ‘precedence over chronological precision’ (p. 260).

of church and state started to triumph. The on-and-off persecution gave Donatists the reason and justification for turning against the state. Their attitude was famously expressed by Donatus's questions, 'What have Christians to do with kings? Or what have bishops to do with the palace? (*Quid christianis cum regibus, aut quid episcopis cum palatio?*)' (Optatus, *c. Parm.* 1.22). Petilian echoed, 'What do you [Christians] have to do with the kings of this world? (*Quid nobis est cum regibus saeculi?*)' (Augustine, *c. litt. Pet.* 2.92.212). Lenski observes, 'The valorization of suffering at the hands of the imperial government provided the Donatists with the conceptual apparatus needed to create an identity separate from that of the Roman state.'<sup>42</sup>

As a consequence of the events of 347 CE,<sup>43</sup> Caecilianists had to defend themselves against an accusation of having requested military force against Donatists in Bagai (Optatus, *c. Parm.* 1.5, 7; 3.1). What happened earlier was that Emperor Constans had sent two imperial emissaries, Macarius and Paul,<sup>44</sup> to lead the Donatists back to the government-approved church. But during this 'bloody business' (*Pass. Marc.* 3), bishop Donatus of Bagai (not to be confused with Donatus of Carthage) defied any unification attempts and was killed together with several others. Evidently, in the Donatists' minds, Romans 13:2 ('Whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed') did not apply at all to this particular case of 'enforced Caecilisation'.<sup>45</sup> What did apply was Revelation 13:7a ('[The beast] was given power to wage war against God's holy people and to conquer them').

In a related incident, Maximianus and Isaac were among the most aggressive 'rebels' who were imprisoned and lost their lives. This occasion gave Donatists their first martyr stories, for example, *Passio Maximiani et Isaac*.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, the beating and killing of a Numidian, Marculus, was recorded in *Passio Marculi*. Such texts already presented a clear dichotomy between church and state<sup>47</sup> and fuelled the Donatist self-perception as the

<sup>42</sup> Lenski, 'Imperial Legislation and the Donatist Controversy', p. 187.

<sup>43</sup> The turning-point for the Donatists' attitude was indeed the Macarian persecution of them (A. Bass, 'Ecclesiological Controversies', in *Augustine in Context*, ed. by T. Toom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 145-52 (p. 149)).

<sup>44</sup> Optatus used a telling phrase to speak about Macarius and Paul — 'agents of unity [taking] many harsh measures' (*c. Parm.* 3.1). Donatists, however, compared them to the beast(s) in Rev 13 (*Pass. Marc.* 3) to whom Satan gave the power, the throne, and great authority.

<sup>45</sup> O'Donnell, *Augustine*, p. 211.

<sup>46</sup> For various *passiones*, see Maier, *Le dossier du donatisme*, vol. 1, pp. 40-122, 256-91.

<sup>47</sup> For example, see the juxtaposition of 'martyrs' and 'traitors', 'Christ' and 'Antichrist' in *Acta Abit.* 1 and 22. Furthermore, in *Acta Abit.* 6, 10, and 22, it is the devil who speaks through the persecuting representatives of the state. *Pass. Marc.* 1, in turn identifies Caecilianists as 'Gentiles' (i.e. not the new faithful Israel) and 'traitors', and the state officials whom they serve as 'the devil' and 'the Antichrist'. After all, in Christian memory, the devil had been linked with the 'world', for it was Satan who offered Christ 'all the kingdoms of the world and their glory' (Matt 4:8).



genuine church of martyrs (vis-à-vis the ‘renegade’ church of collaborators; cf. Rev 1:5; 20:4).<sup>48</sup> ‘Ground-level violence thus provoked imperial reaction and then overreaction, which eventually cemented the dissident side into an entrenched position from which it would not easily be extracted.’<sup>49</sup>

As one might expect, Optatus denied any collaboration charges and called these ‘an empty slander’ (*c. Parm.* 4.1). He attempted to distance Caecilianists from the actions of Macarius and Paul, by arguing that Caecilianists had not endorsed Macarius’s violent actions; they had not been behind the violence (although they evidently also did not mind). ‘And yet of all these measures none was taken at our wish, none in consultation with us, none with our cognisance, none with our collaboration’ (*c. Parm.* 3.2; cf. 7.6).<sup>50</sup> (Total denial is a very effective political device indeed.) Optatus rebutted that Donatists, because of their separatist, obstructionist spirit and their provocative acts (i.e. preventing the imperial distribution of alms to the poor, or perhaps rather bribe money, tearing down orders, and resisting any attempts of unification) brought the punishment upon themselves. They provoked the violent interferences of soldiers in the first place and were punished as regular criminals because of their unlawful actions (Augustine, *ep.* 105.2.7). After all, ‘For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad [...] It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer’ (Rom 13:3-4).

## Under Emperor Julian the ‘Apostate’

An interesting reversal took place during the short reign of Emperor Julian (361–63 CE), who tried to halt the Christianisation of the Roman Empire. Although he evidently had a Christian upbringing and a good, inside knowledge of Christianity (Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 42.52), Julian turned against the church and attempted to reinstate ‘paganism’. He called back the exiled clergy,<sup>51</sup> rehabilitated schismatics and heretics, as well as restored

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<sup>48</sup> Shaw has pointed out a close parallel between the anonymous martyrs of 303 CE (Eusebius, *eccl. hist.* 8.5) and a Donatist martyr Maximian (*Sacred Violence*, p. 176). Such continuity was crucial for Donatist self-understanding after 347 CE.

<sup>49</sup> Lenski, ‘Imperial Legislation and the Donatist Controversy’, pp. 177-78.

<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, Caecilianists were nick-named ‘Macarians’ (or ‘party of Macarius’) because of their alleged cooperation with Macarius (Augustine, *c. litt. Pet.* 2.39.94; *ep.* 49.3, 87.10).

<sup>51</sup> For the names of the recalled Donatist clergy, see Augustine, *c. litt. Pet.* 2.97.224.

their property. He hoped that all this would create alarm, discord, and bickering in the Christian church.<sup>52</sup> And it certainly did.<sup>53</sup>

Under Julian, one of the most outstanding leaders of Donatism, Parmenian, obtained permission to return to Africa. Optatus wrote, ‘You [Parmenian] brought a petition to him [the Emperor Julian], that you might be able to return’ (*c. Parm.* 2.16).<sup>54</sup> Naturally, the emperor gave permission, for ‘he knew that they [the returning Donatist clergy] were going to disturb the peace with their madness’ (*c. Parm.* 2.16). To add spice to his shocking disclosure, Optatus declaimed, ‘Blush, if you have any shame; freedom was restored to you by the same voice [i.e. that of Emperor Julian] that commanded the idols’ temples to be opened!’ (*c. Parm.* 2.16; cf. Augustine, *c. litt. Pet.* 2.83.184; 2.92.203, 205, 97.224 [which calls Julian ‘the son of Gehenna’]; *ep.* 105.2.9).<sup>55</sup> While Caecilianists co-operated with ‘Christian’ emperors, Donatists sent their requests to an anti-Christian emperor(!).

As a consequence, the time for an almost inevitable retaliation had arrived. A ‘massacre of catholics was carried out’ (Optatus, *c. Parm.* 2.18). For example, in a city called Tipasa, ‘by a partisan madness of some officials, Athenius the chief magistrate being present with soldiers, the large catholic community was expelled from its own homes amid panic and bloodshed’ (*c. Parm.* 2.18).<sup>56</sup>

Whether all this was entirely true or not, the point is that the opportunistic and pragmatic Donatists did not shy away from petitioning the emperor (whoever he was) whenever it promised to further their cause. Optatus wrote, ‘In many cases you [the Donatists] have thought it right to use secular tribunals and public laws to snatch away the instruments of divine law [e.g. melting down chalices, levelling altars] through the executive power of officials’ (Optatus, *c. Parm.* 6.5). It seems that the evolving

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<sup>52</sup> A fourth-century Roman historian Ammianus observed that ‘no wild beasts are such enemies to mankind as are most Christians in their deadly hatred of one another’ (*Res Gestae* 22.5.4). Indeed, Donatists were taught not to say ‘Hello!’ to Christians of other churches (Optatus, *c. Parm.* 4.5), not to bake bread for the Caecilianists (Augustine, *c. litt. Pet.* 2.83.184), and when they took over Caecilianist church buildings, Donatists allegedly sprinkled the altars, or cleaned the floors and walls with salt water in order to wash away ‘contamination’ (Optatus, *c. Parm.* 6.6; Augustine, *ep.* 108.6).

<sup>53</sup> After the Second World War, when Estonia was incorporated into the Soviet Union, the atheistic government gave an old, ruined gothic cathedral to seven different Christian denominations for worshipping there together. Knowing all too well how badly Christians got along, the government hoped that such an experiment would quickly end the existence of these seven groups of Christians. Yet, I am glad to report that it is still the largest Free Church in Tallinn, the capital of Estonia.

<sup>54</sup> For various documents from the time of Emperors Julian, Theodosius, and Honorius, see Maier, *Le dossier du donatisme*, vol. 2, pp. 42-206.

<sup>55</sup> A similar case was with Nichomachus Flavian, a *vicarius* of Africa (376–77 CE), a promoter of ‘paganism’, whose favour Donatists sought (Augustine, *ep.* 87.8).

<sup>56</sup> Augustine seconded that a rich Donatist bishop, Crispinus of Calama, had acquired a farm in the diocese of Hippo and forced approximately eighty catholic farmers to be rebaptised as Donatists (*ep.* 66). But the reverse case (i.e. Donatists becoming Caecilianists) was evidently just fine (Augustine, *ep.* 28\*.1).

principle of separation of church and state was applied rather selectively, opportunistically, and pragmatically, depending on whether ‘the powers that be’ were for or against the Donatist churches.

## Under Emperors Gratian, Theodosius, and Honorius

After this ‘small cloud’, as the Emperor Julian was named, passed away (Socrates, *eccl. hist.* 3.14), Emperor Gratian turned his attention — no doubt, partially because of Caecilianists’ petitions — to forbidding rebaptism and outlawing rebaptisers (*Codex Theodosianus (CTh)* 16.5.5, 6.2). However, perhaps the biggest change concerned Christianity itself. Having been an imperially preferred religion for almost seventy years (with a short break in the beginning of the 360s), in 380 CE, pro-Nicene Christianity became the only official religion of the Roman Empire under Emperor Theodosius (*CTh* 16.1.2).

While all this was happening, Donatists experienced a rather embarrassing development in their internal affairs. Namely, the African schismatic movement had its own divisions and, at a council in 394 CE, Primian, Parmenian’s successor, together with 310 bishops, condemned a ‘Donatist schismatic’ Maximian, who was fighting ‘for the truth of the gospel’<sup>57</sup> (Augustine, *Cresc.* 3.15.18-16.19, 4.4.5; *c. ep. Parm.* 1.10.16).<sup>58</sup> In order to get hold of the property of the expelled Maximianists, Primian and his colleagues submitted a formal petition to the Proconsul of Africa (Augustine, *Cresc.* 3.59.65; 4.47.57). This was a sweet piece of information for Caecilianists, for how can one insist on the separation of church and state, and drag, at the same time, its internal conflicts into the state courts (e.g. Augustine, *c. litt. Pet.* 1.27.29; *c. ep. Parm.* 1.4, 2.3; 297; *en. Ps.* 21[2].31)?

The revitalisation of the state repressions against Donatists took place at the beginning of the fifth century after a usurper Gildo had put his military might behind a Donatist bishop Optatus of Thamugadi (not to be confused with Optatus of Milevis) (Augustine, *c. ep. Parm.* 2.4.8). Caecilianist lobbying and sending of their petitions to the emperor intensified significantly and, as a result, in 405 CE, Aurelius, bishop of Carthage, and

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<sup>57</sup> These are the opening words of the Decree of the Council of Cebarsussa, condemning Primian (Augustine, *en. Ps.* 36[2].19-20). The claim of standing fast ‘for the truth of the gospel’ has been typical of separatist churches ever since. On 8 September 2019, Falls Church Anglican Church, Falls Church, VA, which had lost their place of worship because it belonged to the Episcopal Church (cf. the quarrel over church buildings between Primian and his ecclesiastical enemies in Carthage (Augustine, *en. Ps.* 36[2].20)), consecrated their new place of worship. The bulletin said, ‘[...] *commitment to biblical Christianity* and Anglican tradition necessitated separating from the national church’ (emphasis mine).

<sup>58</sup> Similarly, about twenty years earlier, the Donatists had achieved a condemnation of a breakaway Donatist bishop, Rogatus, by a state official, Firmus (Augustine, *c. litt. Pet.* 2.83.184; *c. ep. Parm.* 1.10.16).

Augustine, bishop of Hippo, ‘a dynamic duo capable of reviving Catholic [i.e. Caecilianist] fortunes’,<sup>59</sup> succeeded in persuading Emperor Honorius to issue an anti-Donatist ‘Edict of Unity’. Schismatic Donatists, who ‘[did] not cease their madness’ (*CTh* 16.5.38), had indeed become ‘heretics’,<sup>60</sup> and as such, they lost their right to congregate, own property, and make appeals in courts. ‘It [was] not in the king’s best interest to tolerate them’ (Esther 3:8). All this sealed the Donatists’ evolving conviction that the state was definitely against the ‘true’ church. Primian expressed his contempt of Caecilianists, ‘With the letters of emperors, they [the Caecilianists] come against us, who possess only the Gospel’ (Augustine, *c. Don.* 31.53).

One of the last major attempts by the Donatists to gain legitimacy, imperial justice, and state support was undertaken at the Conference of Carthage in 411 CE—‘an enormous effort, unparalleled in the history of state involvement in ecclesiastical business’.<sup>61</sup> This too, turned out to be a big disaster for Donatists. However, with the coming of the Vandals in 429 CE, much of the controversy was terminated.<sup>62</sup>

## Conclusion

Space does not allow a further elaboration on the later phase of the Donatist controversy and on Augustine’s anti-Donatist ventures. Yet, it should nevertheless be evident that the doctrine of the separation of church and state proved to be an expedient doctrine. It hardly ever functioned (or functions) as an absolute principle. Rather, it is dependent on the church’s *Realpolitik* in particular circumstances, and on whether anything is gained by holding it or not. In other words, there was a striking contradiction between the evolving Donatist conviction about the separation of church and state, and their actual behaviour/practice; between their progressively embracing this doctrine, and constantly pleading for a favourable intervention of the state. Yet, since the Donatists hardly ever succeeded, the state eventually just had

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<sup>59</sup> Whitehouse, ‘The Course of the Donatist Schism’, p. 28.

<sup>60</sup> M. Tilley, ‘When Schism Becomes Heresy in Late Antiquity: Developing Doctrinal Deviance in the Wounded Body of Christ’, *JECS* 15/1 (2007): 1-21; cf. *CTh* 16.5.41, 44. While Optatus carefully distinguished between schism and heresy (*c. Parm.* 1.10-12), it is striking that Emperor Constantine evidently did not care much about this distinction. In his letter, he at times uses the telling phrase ‘schismatics or (*sive*, line 100; *vel*, line 141) heretics’ (Optatus, *c. Parm.*, App. 10). Augustine famously argued that heresy is ‘a schism grown old (*schisma inueteratum*)’ (*Cresc.* 2.7).

<sup>61</sup> N. McLynn, ‘The Conference of Carthage Reconsidered’, in *The Donatist Schism*, pp. 220-48 (p. 222).

<sup>62</sup> But see S. Adamiak, ‘When Did Donatist Christianity End?’ in *The Uniquely African Controversy*, pp. 211-36.

to be dubbed as ‘antichrist’. After all, it ‘persecuted’ God’s eschatological ‘holy remnant’.<sup>63</sup>

In short, while the doctrine of the separation of church and state was pretty much affirmed after the events of 347 CE, its application varied due to the particular circumstances until Donatists lost the right to voice their concerns entirely (i.e. until they were suppressed as ‘heretics’). That is, the particular socio-religio-political situation largely dictated the use and acceptance of the doctrine of the separation of church and state.<sup>64</sup> After all, Christians inevitably lived and live as members of a certain state.<sup>65</sup> It also determined the sense in which the conjunction ‘and’ had to be taken in the phrase ‘church *and* state’.

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<sup>63</sup> Hoover, *The Donatist Church*, pp. 137-38, 149-55.

<sup>64</sup> For how the doctrine of the separation of church and state, which was originally intended to protect the church from the state, eventually turned into protecting an individual from religion in modern ‘secular’ societies, see A. Copson, *Secularism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>65</sup> Interestingly, a representative of the state, Pontius Pilate, is mentioned every time Christians confess their creed(s). It is as if a reminder that state is always a reality to be reckoned with. Yet, Donatists/separatists might also point out that Jesus ‘suffered/was crucified under Pontius Pilate’.

# **The Contribution of Norwegian Baptists towards Religious Freedom in Norway, 1877–1891**

Gabriel Stephen

Baptists have played an important role in the discourse on religious freedom from the time of their emergence in Britain in the seventeenth century. Since then, their advocacy for religious freedom has been climactic in other contexts beyond the shores of Great Britain. As a result, the arrival of Baptists to a conformist Lutheran state church context in nineteenth-century Norway posed a challenge to the prevalent religious homogeneity in the society and championed the debate on religious liberty for non-Lutherans. My article therefore draws attention to the journey of the Baptists in accomplishing the goal of extensive religious liberty in Norway and the processes involved within that. This article focuses particularly on the years 1877–1891, illustrating how controversies arose due to the disapproval of Baptists towards religious coercion and discrimination during that period, the legislative aftermath of this and the law which became a part of their witness for justice and religious equity in the late nineteenth century.

## **Keywords**

Norwegian Baptists; religious freedom; Baptist history

## **Introduction**

The aim of this article is to investigate the ways Norwegian Baptists expressed their convictions of religious liberty within the constraints of religious conformism in the period from 1877–1891. The analysis focuses on the dissatisfaction of Baptists with the supposition of the Dissenter Law that freedom of religion was a concession not an inherent right, and examines the efforts of Baptists to address legislative deterrence through their advocacy for reforms within this period. While the main objective of this account is to narrate ways through which Norwegian Baptists reflected their convictions of religious freedom amidst conflicts with the religious and political establishment, a subsidiary interest is to employ this account to remind Baptists of the power of their convictions in a secular and pluralistic society in the twenty-first century in which church and state relations and issues around religious freedom are ongoing. In order to better understand the nature and significance of this Baptist contribution to Norwegian religious liberty, we begin by setting the historical context in which the Dissenter Law arose.

## The Erastian Model in Protestant Norway

Reformation of the church was introduced to Norway by the decision of Christian III in 1536. Unlike Germany, where the Reformation reflected a crescendo of social, political and religious dissatisfaction, the Reformation in Norway was legislated into effect, imposed upon the people by royal decree. This ended the relative independence from the state that the church had enjoyed under the Roman Catholic church framework and initiated the state church system.<sup>1</sup> The emergence of a nation state in Norway (under the Danish crown) ensured that alongside the religious function of the state church, the church also served as a civic arm to the crown.<sup>2</sup> This blurred the lines between the political and religious establishments as both functioned as institutions under the disposition of the king. Gradually, the crown's authority extended into the piety of its subjects, using royal influence to compel religious uniformity as a tool for governance.

For the next 160 years, from the enactment of the Royal Absolutism Act until the introduction of the Dissenter Law in 1845, the national identity of Norway seems to have been inseparable from its Lutheran heritage. The amalgamation of church and state configured the character of the nation, forming the basis of its social coherence. For example, the baptism of infants in the Lutheran faith conferred upon them both membership in the state church and their citizenship. Also, civic rights were dependent on the confirmation status of young people.<sup>3</sup> Community was also formed around the church. Church services were essential and mandatory as the church was an arena the crown utilised to maintain social control over its citizens.<sup>4</sup> This merger was very visible in society through the church acting as an agent of the crown to ensure that citizens complied with royal decrees. The state-church framework and its civic function seemed to have replaced the evangelical mission of the church. In due course, the state church monopolised religion, making preaching of the gospel by non-clergy unlawful.<sup>5</sup> At this point, religion in Norway was homogeneous and political, making the realm strictly Lutheran.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anne-Louise Eriksson, Göran Gunner and Niclas Blåde, eds., *Exploring a Heritage: Evangelical Lutheran Churches in the North* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), p. 308.

<sup>2</sup> Øystein Rian, 'Historie i Tvangstrøye Kongemakt Og Historieformidling i Danmark-Norge 1536–1814', *Historisk Tidsskrift* 92 (2013): pp. 63-89 (p. 71); Andreas Aarflot, *Kirke Og Stat i Norge: Fra Reformasjonen til Våre Dager* (Oslo: Nomi Forlag, 1969), p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> Frederick Hale, 'The Norwegian Baptist Quest for Toleration', *Foundations* 22, no. 4 (October 1979): 293-305 (p. 294).

<sup>4</sup> Leslie Standard Hunter, ed., *Scandinavian churches: The Development and Life of the Churches of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1965), p. 40.

<sup>5</sup> Hunter, *Scandinavian churches*, p. 40.

<sup>6</sup> W. Cole Durham, Tore Sam Lindholm, and Bahia Tahziblie, eds., *Facilitating Freedom of Religion or Belief: A Deskbook* (Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 2004), p. 778.

The exclusivity of the church was not without its internal controversies. The eighteenth century ushered in an era of increasing fracturing within the wider reformation movement that saw various groupings, pietistic, and lay movements arise within the Lutheran establishment. The 1740s saw the arrival of the Moravians in Norway, a group from Herrnhut with a renewal vision for church and a missional drive,<sup>7</sup> who quickly positioned themselves within the religious establishment as a spiritual alternative to what the state church had to offer the populace. Andreas Aarflot comments that that a key objection of the Moravians was to the ‘calculated’ religion of the state and the oversight of the crown upon the religious piety of the nation.<sup>8</sup>

Moravian pietists considered the dependency of faith on the civil authorities to be a constraint to true piety. Consequently, they challenged the religious establishment by advocating for a religious experience that was convictional not legislative.<sup>9</sup> In doing so, Moravians aimed to affirm the free will of individuals to choose or reject God.<sup>10</sup> This was exemplified within the communities (*Brødresamfunn*) they formed within the state-church structure. Their actions were perceived as radical and illicit by the political and religious authorities, who regarded their activities a disruption to social and religious cohesion.<sup>11</sup> Despite their influence being limited by the Conventicle Article (*Konventikkelplakaten*, 1741), and their meetings having to be supervised by clergy of the state church, the Moravians left an impact on religion in Norway, paving the way for groups with separatist ideas who made religious freedom an important facet of their identity.<sup>12</sup>

The Moravian movement was succeeded by indigenous pietistic groups such as Haugeism, led by Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771–1824). His most significant contribution to Norway was probably his confrontation with the censorship and restrictions of the religious and political establishment. Hauge taught against the calculated religion of the state, calling church members to radical faith, which was characterised by conviction, regeneration and character.<sup>13</sup> These convictions translated into a quest for social and economic liberation. According to Inger Furseth, Hauge loathed

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<sup>7</sup> Ian Randall, ‘Early Moravian Spirituality and Missionary Vision’, *Wesley and Methodist Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2017): 123-140, (pp. 125-136).

<sup>8</sup> Aarflot, *Kirke Og Stat i Norge*, p. 100.

<sup>9</sup> Mark A. Granquist, *Scandinavian Pietists: Spiritual Writings from 19th Century Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland* (New York: Paulist Press, 2015), p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Peder Eidberg, *Det Folk som Kalles Baptister: En undersøkelse av Det Norske Baptistsamfunns bagrunn, tilblivelse, historie og egenart frem til jubiléet i 1902* (Stabekk: Norsk Litteraturselskap, 2003), p. 21.

<sup>11</sup> Gina Dahl, *Book Collections of Clerics in Norway, 1650-1750* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> Inger Furseth, *A Comparative Study of Social and Religious Movements in Norway, 1780s-1905*, vol. 7 (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), pp. 79-80.

<sup>13</sup> Clara Sariva, Peter Jan Margry, Lionel Obadia, Kinga Povedak and José Mapril, eds., *Experiencing Religion: New Approaches to Personal Religiosity* (Zurich: Lit Verlag, 2016), p. 224.



the monopolies of civil servants and the burghers, and both the church and its clergy fell within this category.<sup>14</sup>

The most significant contribution of Moravian and Haugean pietism was their plausible effort to challenge the influence of the crown on matters regarding freedom. Notwithstanding, religious freedom was still conceived to exist only within the boundaries of Lutheranism. For example, the followers of Hauge supported the existing church order, while advocating for extensive freedom for lay activities within its framework.<sup>15</sup> Taking into account this existing paradigm, it is no surprise that when Norway's constitution was written in 1814, it re-enforced these prevailing religious positions, as noted in paragraph 2 of the constitution:

The Evangelical-Lutheran religion remains the public religion of the State. Those inhabitants, who confess thereto, are bound to raise their children to the same. Jesuits and monastic orders are not permitted. Jews are still prohibited from entry to the Realm.<sup>16</sup>

Liselotte Malmgart underlines how an inversion transpired as a result of constitutional support for religious homogeneity. The constitution intended to secure the prerogative of freedom, equality, the people's interest and the rule of law to those it presided over. However, at the same time it endorsed religious tyranny by explicitly prohibiting its citizens from participating in all religious practices outside of that which it provided.<sup>17</sup> This preserved the Erastian approach to religion.<sup>18</sup>

## **The Dissenter Law and First Steps towards Religious Equality**

However, the return of Norwegian returnees from around Europe after the Napoleonic wars of the early to mid-1800s, brought new religious ideas to Norway, prompting a gradual process of change. This began with the instrumental involvement of these groupings in the revocation of the Conventicle Articles in 1842, which enabled lay groups within the state church to organise themselves without legal repercussions. In addition, Quakers demanded validation for marriages that they performed, exemption from compulsory baptism and rights to exercise their beliefs without harassment.<sup>19</sup> Lastly, there was a campaign for the right of Jews to be

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<sup>14</sup> Furseth, *A Comparative Study of Social and Religious Movements in Norway*, p. 81.

<sup>15</sup> Lars P. Qualben, *A History of the Christian Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008), p. 398.

<sup>16</sup> Keith Robbins, ed., *Political and Legal Perspectives: The Dynamics of Religious Reforms in Northern Europe, 1780-1920* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2010), p. 210.

<sup>17</sup> Karsten Alnæs, *Miraklenes år* (Oslo: Schibsted Forlag, 2013), pp. 266-274.

<sup>18</sup> Robbins, *Political and Legal Perspectives*, p. 210.

<sup>19</sup> Theodore C. Blegen, *Norwegian Migration to America 1825-1860* (New York: Haskell House, 1969), p. 35.

admitted into Norway, calling out the political establishment for religious discrimination against this group of people.<sup>20</sup>

Consequently, in 1845 the Norwegian Parliament passed the Dissenter Law which allowed Norwegians, for the first time, to belong to dissenter groups without legal and religious implications.<sup>21</sup> This did not relinquish the influence of the Lutheran state church. Birth registrations, marriages, deaths and burials continued to be functions of the state church, as well as religious education in schools. The Dissenter Law was a step in the direction of religious equality and freedom, but with limited resulting improvements. Full freedom to exercise religious convictions that differed from the Lutheran state church was still a distant reality. However, the Dissenter Law did play an important role in religious life outside of the Lutheran establishment. Initially, the legislation made it possible for Norwegian citizens to withdraw from the state church and adhere to free church. The law sought to protect members of dissenter communities from discrimination on the basis of religious affiliation, at the same time allowing the interests of the state to be maintained, as suggested in article 18 ‘no religious confession shall be exempted from conscription’.<sup>22</sup>

Peder Eidberg, a Norwegian Baptist historian, notes that from the time of their emergence in the late 1850s, Baptists and other free churches in Norway initially displayed a positive attitude towards the Dissenter Law.<sup>23</sup> However, starting from the 1870s, it became apparent that objection to the legislation was rising due to a discriminatory tendency which was disguised in the legislation.<sup>24</sup> This concern aimed to highlight the paradox of the law, which stated that the differences in religious affiliation shall ‘not justify any differences in expectations in regard to [citizenry] duties and rights’.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, as supported by records of harassment and oppression towards dissenters, an institutional attempt to restrain the progress of nonconformist activities was embedded in the application of this legislation. In practice, in relations with the state and as citizens of the Norwegian society they were expected to fulfil their duties, but often hindered in practising their rights.

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<sup>20</sup> Anthony Lerman, ed., *Jewish Communities of the World: A Contemporary Guide* (London: MacMillan, 1989), p. 115.

<sup>21</sup> Edith L. Blumhofer and Randall Balmer, *Modern Christian Revivals* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p. 105.

<sup>22</sup> Knut Rygnestad, *Dissentarspørsmålet i Noreg frå 1845-1891. Lovgjeving og administrativ praksis* (Oslo: Lutherstiftelsen, 1955), p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> Eidberg, *Det Folk som Kalles Baptister*, pp. 227-232.

<sup>24</sup> Hale, ‘The Norwegian Baptist Quest for Toleration’, pp. 228-231.

<sup>25</sup> Knut Rygnestad, *Dissentarspørsmålet i Noreg frå 1845-1891*, p. 6.

## A Closer Look: Baptists and the Dissenter Law

Amongst those who began to return to Europe during the mid-1800s were Scandinavians who had been living in the United States and now came with new religious affiliations, including the Baptist faith. Amongst these returnees was Fredrik Rymker (1819-1884), a Danish seaman who had been converted, baptised and commissioned by American Baptists. Following a short-lived missionary attempt by Enoch Svee (1816-1843) in 1842, Rymker moved to Norway in 1857 with the purpose of bringing the Baptist message to Norway.<sup>26</sup> At the heart of this message were the convictions that the Christian church should be comprised of regenerated souls (demonstrated in believer's baptism), who voluntarily choose to serve the Lord, and the independence of the church from the state.<sup>27</sup> By 1858 Rymker had gathered about eight followers, whom he baptised, and formed the first Baptist congregation in Norway. Among them was an eighteen-year-old boy by the name Carl Gundersen Kongerød whose baptism immediately brought the fledgling congregation into opposition with the Dissenter Law. Paragraph 15 of the Dissenter Law of 1845 stated that the age of religious consent was nineteen and so Kongerød's baptism was not recognised.

The restrictions on baptism and voluntary membership (regardless of age limit) which the Dissenter Law represented were brought up in 1877 during the inauguration of the Norwegian Baptist Union and subsequent gatherings. Baptists inquired within themselves about complying with the legislation considering the challenge it posed to aspects of their faith.<sup>28</sup> At first, opinion was broadly divided into two camps: one group for adhering to the law and its requirements in spite of the challenges it posed to baptism and church membership, while another recommended non-compliance.<sup>29</sup> Yet the differences in views as to how to respond to the law did not change their general consensus regarding the law's constraints upon their convictions.<sup>30</sup> This was evident in the editorial of the Union's periodical in 1881:

Freedom of religion is the mother of all other true freedom [...] when the spirit of persecution is embodied by the magistrate, it wraps the world in a *Seculum Obscurum* [...] Christianity without freedom of religion is like a giant prison, a society bound by the ropes of the Philistines. It can for a while be used by the world's political powers as a harp player, but the time comes when it will catch the "temple's pillars". Then the whole building will fall into ruins.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Hale, 'The Norwegian Baptist Quest for Toleration', p. 295.

<sup>27</sup> J. M. Sellevold, *Baptistene i Norge: Historisk Oversigt samt Jubilæumskonferensen i Skien 1902* (Kristiania: Norsk Litteraturselskabs Forlag, 1902), p. 12.

<sup>28</sup> Blumhofer and Balmer, *Modern Christian Revivals*, pp. 105-106.

<sup>29</sup> Forhandling fra De norske Baptisters første almindelige Konference i Bergen den 6te, 7de og 8de Juli 1877 (Bergen: N. Nilssens Bogtrykkeri, 1877), pp. 3-5.

<sup>30</sup> *Unions-Banneret*, Fredrikshald, May 1881, pp. 38-39.

<sup>31</sup> *Unions-Banneret*, March 1883.

Norwegian Baptists began finding ways to communicate their dissatisfaction that laid the grounds for what was to become an important campaign by the Baptist movement; a campaign that included both civil disobedience and direct engagement with the government and led to significant amendments to the Dissenter Law in 1890. The next section takes a deeper look at how this process unfolded and explores the nature of the Baptist contribution to the cause of religious freedom.

### **Baptist Response to the Dissenter Law**

Starting with civil disobedience,<sup>32</sup> Norwegian Baptists contended that the law and the authorities failed to protect their civil rights such as the freedom of expression. This was articulated by Fredrik Nilsen (1847–1931), who was caught in a controversy with the authorities concerning the baptism of two minors, which resulted in his incarceration. In a letter he wrote from his prison cell, Nilsen expressed the implications of his action for the Baptist Union, urging them not to relent. He explained that non-compliance exposed the lack of individual choice in relation to faith, illustrating the paradox of the Dissenter Law. Such disapproval towards religious coercion as Nilsen displayed affirmed an aspect of Baptist convictions, namely, the inherent freedom of each human.

In addition to civil disobedience, Norwegian Baptists employed another method in their disputation with the authorities. They began to engage the government in a direct campaign for religious freedom. This was evident in a number of correspondences within the period 1880–1891, particularly the communication between J. M. Sjødahl (1851–1939), on behalf of the Baptist Union, and Johan Sverdrup, Prime Minister and leader of the political left-wing in 1883. In his letter, Sjødahl carefully set out the essence of the hindrances that had stood in the way of dissenter communities. He brought to attention the implications of withdrawing one's membership from the state church and how it exposed the law's exploitation of certain aspects of their civil rights. He explained to Sverdrup that 'the question regarding withdrawal from the state church is without doubt primarily an issue of power. The current paragraph, which had the age of consent at 19 years, has caused many difficulties.'<sup>33</sup> To avoid such contention over this, Sjødahl suggested that both the age of consent and the process of withdrawal of church membership should be re-examined. He wrote:

Anyone who goes to the priest in their parish and notifies by writing in the ministerial book that he wishes to step out of the state church, is considered to be

<sup>32</sup> Furseth, *A Comparative Study of Social and Religious Movements in Norway*, p. 187.

<sup>33</sup> Forhandling fra De norske Baptisters første almindelige Konferenc i Bergen, pp. 3-5; and Forhandling fra De norske Baptisters sjette Konferanse i Fredrikshald, pp. 8-9.

out. Likewise, with any who has already become a member of a dissenter society. In this way having become a member of a dissenter church, the church should have the task to report to the parish priest within a month [...] No one should without permission from their parents or guardian withdraw their membership from the state church before they have reached the age of 15.<sup>34</sup>

The suggestions brought by Sjødahl also underline the obstacles of the law which, without finding a solution, would continue to create issues that would act as hindrances to achieving religious liberty. He outlined the legislative mandate to control religious convictions and the age of consent as represented in the functions assigned to the clergy of the Lutheran state church. Notwithstanding, Sjødahl accentuated that the resolve of Baptists in confronting the law, despite opposition, was to create a society that was free and fair. This he emphasised as being integral to the conviction of Baptists.<sup>35</sup> Sjødahl's correspondence with the Prime Minister in 1883, and to the parliament in 1886, highlighted the need for a legislative action on certain aspects of the Dissenter Law. Baptists brought attention to two issues in these correspondences. Firstly, the age of consent, which was put at nineteen years, which limited individual liberty, needed to be lowered to fifteen. Secondly, Baptists also made a resolution that a free society was dependent on the government's willingness to relinquish their control over religious matters in general, or in regulating religious participation in particular.<sup>36</sup> Without addressing these constituents, the religious restraint would not be addressed, which in turn would continue to perpetuate inequity.

The advocacy approach of Norwegian Baptists did not go unacknowledged. They were met with responses from Prime Minister Sverdrup and the Justice Department. The Prime Minister expressed empathy with Norwegian Baptists for their predicament, acknowledging that the Dissenter Law required amendment. However, Sverdrup felt unable to promise immediate concession to their demands, warning that although the changes suggested were vital, the process required time.<sup>37</sup> The Department of Justice, on the other hand, demonstrated more resistance to these recommendations based on 'lack of evidence' that the current legal arrangement was detrimental to Baptist convictions and practices.<sup>38</sup> A reply from the department in 1884 read as follows:

The department cannot recommend that such dispensation be granted to an undefined group of people who, without having any official relationship with the state, regard themselves as constituting a congregation, even though it has never

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<sup>34</sup> Forhandling fra De norske Baptisters sjette Konferanse i Fredrikshald, pp. 8-10.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-10.

<sup>36</sup> Norwegian Parliament Archive, Storthings Forhandlinger 1886, Dokument No. 11: Forslag Fra Baptistsamfundet til Lov angaaende forandring i Dissenterloven af 16de Juli 1845, pp. 2-3.

<sup>37</sup> Forhandling fra De norske Baptisters sjette Konferanse i Fredrikshald den 22de og 23de Juni 1883, p. 10.

<sup>38</sup> Forhandling fra De norske Baptisters sjette Konferanse i Fredrikshald den 22de og 23de Juni 1883, pp. 6-7.

been organised and recognised as such in accordance with Paragraph Two of the Dissenter Law.<sup>39</sup>

Frederick Hale suggests that rather than putting an end to the controversy, this response ensured that it continued throughout the 1880s. It also served to intensify the Baptist effort to find a way of making progress. The following section explores their contribution particularly with respect to this phase of the campaign for religious liberty.<sup>40</sup>

## **The Contributions of Norwegian Baptists to the Cause of Religious Freedom**

Norwegian Baptists of the nineteenth century held the conviction that freedom to preside over their own beliefs was an innate gift bestowed upon each individual. This opposed the religious conventionalities in Norway which conferred the fullness of this principle only to members of the state religion. Their disapproval of the establishment's application of the Dissenter Law was expressed in both written form and through non-compliance, both aimed at highlighting the biases it endorsed. In due course, after attempts by Baptists to bring to attention the prejudice of the law's prerogative, the political authorities responded with sympathy but not, however, with any tangible action to resolve its intolerance.<sup>41</sup>

This unresponsiveness did not deter Norwegian Baptists from re-appealing their case over and over again. In the second half of this decade, between 1886 and 1888, the Baptist Union intensified its actions to promote the awareness of the necessity of religious freedom for minorities. Most notable was the 'Proposal from the Baptist Union regarding the Legislative Reforms relating to the Dissenter Law of 16 July 1845' in 1886.<sup>42</sup> In this, the Baptist community pointed out to the authorities that 'freedom of faith and religion has the power over human kind, that it births in the heart love for other forms of freedom, and what is more, it makes humans fit to use their freedom in the right way'.<sup>43</sup> In consequence, Baptists were implying that a

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<sup>39</sup> Forhandling fra De norske Baptisters syvende almindelige Konferanse i Skien den 11te og 12te Juli 1884 (Fredrikshald: Halden Trykkeri, 1884), p. 9.

<sup>40</sup> Hale, 'The Norwegian Baptist Quest for Toleration', p. 300.

<sup>41</sup> The description of the engagement of Norwegian Baptists can already be found in the records of their first conference in 1877, the year the Norwegian Baptist Union was established. This was continued in the years that followed. See Forhandling fra De norske Baptisters første almindelige Konference i Bergen, pp. 3-5; Forhandling fra De norske Baptisters sjette Konferanse i Fredrikshald, pp. 8-10; and Eidberg, *Det Folk som Kalles Baptister*, pp. 222-244.

<sup>42</sup> Norwegian Parliament Archive, Storthings Forhandlinger 1886, Dokument No. 11: Forslag Fra Baptistsamfundet til Lov angaaende forandring i Dissenterloven af 16de Juli 1845, pp. 1-3; and Storthings Forhandlinger 1887, Dokument No. 22: fra Kirkekomiteen. Forslag til forandringer i Dissenterloven, pp., 1-6.

<sup>43</sup> Norwegian Parliament Archive, Forslag Fra Baptistsamfundet til Lov angaaende forandring i Dissenterloven af 16de Juli 1845, p. 1.

neglect or an intentional attempt to undermine religious liberty for dissenters jeopardised the indemnity of the law to those under its jurisdiction.

The inseparability between other civil rights and religious liberty formed much of the ground of reasoning of Norwegian Baptists, although its essence found its entity in their theological framework.<sup>44</sup> The conclusion at which they arrived was that a violation of one civil right is a violation of all civil rights, whether or not it is related to religious convictions. In terms of the Dissenter Law, the Baptists, along with other dissenter groups such as the Methodists, thus focused their argument around what they saw as its paradoxical nature — claiming to grant liberty to non-Lutherans, whilst failing to do exactly this.<sup>45</sup> Baptists for example, stated that ‘if the law then authorizes freedom of expression of faith, then it provides this without restriction which can then be expressed not only in freedom of religious expression but also in other civil rights’.<sup>46</sup> There should be no distinctions made as to what civil entitlements applied to whom when all were equally included within the remit of the law.<sup>47</sup>

To address this paradox, Baptists outlined three legislative reforms that the government could not ignore. Firstly, concerning the age of consent for leaving the Lutheran state church or joining a dissenter church, which was set at nineteen years. Baptists noted two particular issues with regard to this: the law’s infringement on the conscience of those who had an interest in joining dissenter communities and of those who assisted them,<sup>48</sup> with jail sentences, fines or both as consequences for ignoring the law; and the bias of the law toward members of the state church whose membership conditions did not correspond with the age-limit requirement.<sup>49</sup> Norwegian Baptists therefore strongly emphasised how this clause gave continued legal backing to prejudice towards dissenters. What ensued from this, they underlined, was inequality and legislative harassment to law-abiding citizens, which in turn weakened their confidence in the law for the protection of their inherent right to free thought.<sup>50</sup> The solution to their plight, they suggested, was a resolution to lower the age limit.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *Unions-Banneret*, Fredrikshald, May 1881, pp. 38-39 and *Unions-Banneret*, March 1883.

<sup>45</sup> Arne Hassing, *Religion and Power: The Case of Methodism in Norway* (North Carolina: The Mountaineer, 1980), p. 133.

<sup>46</sup> Norwegian Parliament Archive, Forslag Fra Baptistsamfundet til Lov angaaende forandring i Dissenterloven af 16de Juli 1845, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> Norwegian Parliament Archive, Forslag til forandringer i Dissenterloven, p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> Norwegian Parliament Archive, Forslag fra Baptistsumfundet til lov angaaende forandring i Dissenterloven, p.1; and Forhandling fra De norske Baptisters sjette Konferanse i Fredrikshald, p. 9.

<sup>49</sup> Norwegian Parliament Archive, Forslag Fra Baptistsamfundet til Lov angaaende forandring i Dissenterloven af 16de Juli 1845, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> Forhandling fra De norske Baptisters sjette Konferanse i Fredrikshald, pp. 8-10; and Norwegian Parliament Archive, Forslag til Forandringer i Dissenterloven, p. 1.

A second issue which the Baptist Union brought to attention was the role of the clergy of the state church with regard to dissenters. The Dissenter Law assigned local parish priests as those responsible for the process of cancelling membership from the Lutheran state church. But what this legislation did not take into consideration, argued the Norwegian Baptists, were a number of challenges linked to this procedure. At the outset was the problem of proximity, or rather inaccessibility, to a parish priest due to distance. Baptists noted the remoteness of some communities to the local parish. Accessing this service therefore also meant an additional financial expense related to travel which persons intending to withdraw their membership were expected to bear. Still on the issue of proximity, even if these parishes were reachable, Baptists argued that in some cases, physical factors such as age were a real restriction on being able to comply with this. The walking distance could, for example, stand in the way of the elderly in this process. In a nutshell, the Baptist Union sought to reiterate that no citizen should be hindered from expressing their religious belief for such auxiliary reasons.

Consequently, they called upon the nation's lawmakers to stand up for genuine liberty, which, in the first place, should be the intent of the law. They asserted that

it cannot be overlooked, that there is not freedom of religion as long as one's religious expression is tied to a condition of the civil law. Freedom of religion requires, it seems to us, that anyone can freely and without hindrance follow their convictions in action (of course as long as their actions do not contradict other entitlements of the law or co-citizens' interests).<sup>52</sup>

Rather than the prerogatives of the law being applicable to only a few who are in good health, financially buoyant or have access to the local parish priest, Norwegian Baptists suggested an amendment. They proposed that the role of the clergy of the Lutheran state church in this process should be re-considered, perhaps the law should rather make 'personal visitation' to the local parish priest, as required by the law in connection to membership withdrawal, a matter of choice.<sup>53</sup>

Third and lastly, the Baptist Union challenged the general notion that the political authorities had the power to preside over religious matters. They made reference to the coercion that emerged due to the role of the government as an accreditation agency for dissenter churches as stated in paragraph 2 of the Dissenter Law.<sup>54</sup> This position, they pointed out, gave the state tight control over the practices and organisation of all religious

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<sup>52</sup> Norwegian Parliament Archive, Forslag Fra Baptistsamfundet til Lov angaaende forandring i Dissenterloven af 16de Juli 1845, p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>54</sup> Knut Rygnestad, *Dissentarspørsmålet i Noreg frå 1845-1891*, p. 13.



activities. Concretely, this was illustrated in the government's attempt to control their choice of pastors and leaders,<sup>55</sup> galvanising mistrust among dissenters. The Baptists indicated their uncertainty over adhering to the criteria of the law without considering if and how it eroded their convictions. It is important to note that in their appeal they stressed that they recognised the principle behind the state's interest in maintaining control over religious matters, however they 'cannot for the sake of conscience for that reason fulfill the law of this paragraph'.<sup>56</sup> Their objection to the demand of the authorities did not translate to refraining from cooperation with the authorities. On the contrary, there was a willingness to collaborate with the government as long as the government was willing to give up its agenda to coerce non-Lutherans or relegate them to the status of being second-class citizens.<sup>57</sup>

This compromise by the Norwegian Baptists was reiterated, more or less, in subsequent appeals such as the 'Proposal for amendments in the Dissenter Law in 1887' and the 'Recommendation of the Church Committee in regard to different private Amendments to the Dissenter Law of 16<sup>th</sup> July 1845' among others. The nature of their proposal remained: the first step in resolving the violation of the rights of non-Lutherans to express their religious convictions was to amend the law. Paragraphs 2 and 15 of the Dissenter Law, which had been highlighted as the essence of the contention between Baptists and the authorities, particularly needed to be revised. Accordingly, the Baptists presented the authorities with some suggestions for reforms, starting with the following regarding paragraph 2 of the Dissenter Law: 'When priests or pastors, referred to in the preceding paragraph have demonstrated that they have been approved by the civil authorities [...] they have the right to lead protocols as section 2 of the Dissenter Law of 1845.'<sup>58</sup>

'Proposal for amendments in the Dissenter Law' in 1887 elaborated a number of ways to go about these revisions. First, they emphasised the importance of the government embracing without hesitation the choice of ministers made by dissenter churches. This was followed by the need not only to acknowledge their ministers but to confer upon them the function of notaries, giving them the dispensation to attend to matters regarding the withdrawal of membership from the Lutheran state church.<sup>59</sup> In addition to requesting recognition of their ministers, Norwegian Baptists urged the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>56</sup> Norwegian Parliament Archive, Forslag Fra Baptistsamfundet til Lov angaaende forandring i Dissenterloven af 16de Juli 1845, p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-3.

<sup>58</sup> Norwegian Parliament Archive, Forslag fra Baptistsumfundet til lov angaaende forandring i Dissenterloven, p. 3.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

authorities to lower the age restriction for any withdrawal of membership from that stated in paragraph 15. In encouraging this motion, they made the suggestion that ‘no one should be acknowledged as withdrawn from the state church until they have reached the age of 15. But individual cases of exceptions regarding age shall be decided by the king.’<sup>60</sup> Norwegian Baptists argued, supported by substantial evidence such as the account of the persecution they had suffered in their movement, that a good resolution would benefit both sides.<sup>61</sup> Which more specifically for them, would mean no more fines or incarcerations, as had been the experience for most of this decade.<sup>62</sup>

With these arguments and the presentation of such evidence, Baptists hoped to galvanise the political will to address discrimination against non-Lutherans and the infringement of their religious rights.<sup>63</sup> Their efforts were rewarded: 29 June 1888 marked a new dawn in this discourse with a positive reply from the government to Baptists. The sudden response from the state gave a glimpse of hope to Baptists and other dissenter groups that things were going their way. The authorities had come to a place of acceptance concerning the role of the law in upholding inequity towards religious minority groups, namely non-Lutherans. The authorities’ response stated that this affliction ‘cannot and should not be allowed to continue in a civilized society and amends must be made at once for such conditions’.<sup>64</sup> There was a political will to prioritise amendments relating to the age of consent and an official approval of dissenter ministers, along with interest from the political establishment to bestow upon dissenter ministers the powers of a public notary in order to validate their report or approval of births, baptisms, deaths, marriages and transfers of membership.<sup>65</sup> This news was welcomed with joy and applause by Norwegian Baptists.<sup>66</sup>

In the proceedings ‘Draft Regarding the Law on Dissenters’ in 1890, the authorities came to terms with some of the limits of the law on non-

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1

<sup>61</sup> Forhandling fra De norske Baptisters tiende almindelige Konference i Arendal den 5te-7de Juli, 33-34.

<sup>62</sup> Hale’s article provides a list of dissenters who faced fines and imprisonment for breaking the Dissenter Law as submitted by the Baptist Union in 1888. These examples included Abraham Grimstvedt, a clerk from Kristiansand, fined 60 crowns (including court costs) in 1883, 60 crowns in 1885, 150 crowns in 1886, and 150 crowns in 1887; Johannes Olsen, a stonemason from Fredrikstad, jailed for five days on bread and water in July 1887; and, Oluf Mikalsen, a preacher from Moss, jailed for three days on bread and water in April in Fredrikshald, four days in July in Moss, and seven days in Tønsberg, all in 1887. Their offences included baptisms or giving communion to members of the Lutheran state church. See Hale, ‘The Norwegian Baptist Quest for Toleration’, p. 301.

<sup>63</sup> Norwegian Parliament Archive, Forslag fra Baptistsumfundet til lov angaaende forandring i Dissenterloven, p. 3.

<sup>64</sup> Hale, ‘The Norwegian Baptist Quest for Toleration’, p. 301.

<sup>65</sup> Norwegian Parliament Archive, Storthings Forhandling 1886. Dokument No. 11: Om Udfærdigelse af en lov angaaende dissentere (1890), pp. 1-83 (pp. 6-7).

<sup>66</sup> Forhandling fra De norske Baptisters tiende almindelige Konference i Arendal den 5te-7de Juli 1888, pp. 33-34.

Lutheran citizens. This realisation confirmed the law's disingenuous propensity to claim to guarantee freedom for dissenters to exercise their faith while substantiating systematic oppression against them.<sup>67</sup> To correct this misdeed, in 1890 the parliamentary assembly laid out the following motion:<sup>68</sup>

- a. Apart from personal contributions to the State church and its clergy, the dissenters are exempted from personal municipality contributions to the public school when they have a commensurate school approved by the school commission.
- b. They are exempted from notifying the civil authorities before they use a building for service.
- c. Dissenters do not have to notify births and deaths to the parish priest, but only to their own church priest or pastor as long as they belong to approved congregations.
- d. Regarding the petition, the king can give an approved dissenter congregations' priest the right to marriage between two dissenters.
- e. The age limit for membership and for leaving the state church is set at the age of 18.
- f. While the present law only decides that legal representation (*Ombud*) or orders in the state church could not be transferred to dissenters, the proposal will be that dissenters, with the exception of certain subjects, also should not be able to be hired as teachers in the public school, and they should also be exempted from municipal proceedings and decisions concerning the state church and public school.

The council made it apparent in their suggestions that the current Dissenter Law was outdated and inept. Therefore, they expressed that

not only has the old Dissenter Law proved wanting, as there are doubts and uncertainties about the law's application in the different cases, but it could also not be said of it that in all parts it satisfies the demand of freedom of religion and gives those Christian communities the rights that belong to them.<sup>69</sup>

The council's determination did not mean that all of the discriminatory propensities of the law were to be rectified. There were still some deficiencies that maintained certain unequal treatments of dissenters such as the Baptists and Methodists. Yet, this was a step in the right direction. Their deliberation resulted in a revision of the Dissenter Law in 1891, replacing aspects of the original law of 1845.

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<sup>67</sup> Norwegian Parliament Archive, Om Udfærdigelse af en lov angaaende dissentere, pp. 3-4.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7

## **Conclusion**

This article set out to illustrate the ways Norwegian Baptists expressed their conviction on religious liberty within the limitations of religious conformism in the late nineteenth century. The investigation began with an encapsulation of the historical context, reviewing the evolution of religious epochs in Norway and a synopsis highlighting how social, political and religious conventions in Norway often strived to subdue convictions. The article went on to describe how Baptists challenged these conventionalities by accentuating the paradox of the legal framework, particularly the Dissenter Law, which granted freedom upon the condition of subjugation. The focus of the discussion centred on the remarkable role and contributions of Baptists to address the limitations they encountered through their emphasis on the integral nature of the principle of religious freedom and their tenacity to persuade legislators to see beyond social and religious conventionalities. Consequently, Norwegian Baptists, in their discussion with the state officials regarding amendments in the Dissenter Law, focused on three main areas. They argued for respect of the individual's ability to choose their religious adherence without government interference, the imperative of the law to show equity towards all religious groups, and a partial disruption to Erastianism. In this regard, as part of their witness, Norwegian Baptists established themselves as prophets for freedom.

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# Irish Baptists and the Second Home Rule Crisis

David Luke

Irish Baptists have historically adopted the view that religion and politics should not be mixed. The Home Rule Crisis of the late nineteenth century, and the Second Home Rule Bill in particular, put this view to the test. The prospect of Home Rule and the fear of domination by the Catholic majority under the influence of the papacy forced them to respond. Baptists, who had for so long been on the fringes of religious and political life in Ireland, now found themselves drawn into a broad Protestant front in an attempt to resist Home Rule. It also revealed that despite their attempts to maintain their distinctiveness from other Protestant denominations they shared exactly the same concerns.

## Keywords

Irish Baptists; Home Rule; Gladstone; Ireland

## Introduction

In September 1893, T.R. Warner gave his presidential address at the annual meeting of the Irish Baptist Association in Belfast. Referring to the erection of four new chapels, the opening of a nursing home for elderly ladies and the seventy to eighty young men being educated in the recently established Baptist Training Institute, he remarked: ‘We have much to be thankful for in what may be looked upon as an epoch-making year in the history of the Baptist cause in Ireland.’<sup>1</sup> The rest of his address was spent defending distinctive Baptist principles, such as baptism, and attacking other denominations. It was a typical mix of late Victorian evangelical confidence and the insecurities of a small denomination in the minority Protestant community in Ireland. Other reports of the year’s work at the annual meeting similarly celebrated the progress of the work in Ireland.

What is striking about Warner’s address, and the other reports, is the complete absence of any reference to the issue of Home Rule. The Government of Ireland Bill 1893, commonly referred to as the Second Home Rule Bill, had been defeated in the House of Lords less than two weeks prior to the start of the annual meeting. The passage of the bill had been the major issue in British and Irish political life throughout the year. It had caused deep consternation for Irish Baptists, prompting a denomination that usually

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<sup>1</sup> Irish Baptist Association, ‘Our Position and Practice’, *The Irish Baptist Magazine*, XVII (1893), p. 189.

sought to eschew politics, to become involved in the great matter of the day. When the crisis passed it seems that they immediately dropped their overt political interest.

This article will trace the background to the Second Home Rule Bill. It will examine the reasons why Irish Baptists were opposed to it, the tensions that it created, and how they responded to it.

## **The Background to the Second Home Rule Bill**

On 1 January 1801 the Acts of Union carried by the Irish and British Parliaments came into force. With the passing of these acts the Irish Parliament, which had been in existence since the thirteenth century, was dissolved and Ireland was now governed by the Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. The Acts were initially welcomed by Irish Catholics who hoped that the grievances they had suffered at the hands of the Protestant Ascendancy would now be addressed. Protestants<sup>2</sup> feared that their political influence would be greatly diminished. However, it became clear in the early years of the century that the hopes of Irish Catholics would not materialise and that Protestants had little to fear as their grip on Irish society remained firm. As a result, agitation by Catholics for the removal of the various disabilities that they still laboured under increased. Most notably the Catholic Emancipation movement, under the leadership of Daniel O'Connell, led to the 1829 Catholic Relief Act which changed the status of Irish Catholics in society. It did so by repealing the 1672 Test Act and the remaining penal laws, while it enfranchised a limited number of land-owning Catholics and allowed them to sit in Parliament.

Following the success of emancipation, O'Connell founded the Repeal Association to seek the reversal of the Acts of Union and give Ireland legislative independence once more. Enthusiasm for repeal tended to ebb and flow in Ireland and there was no appetite for it among British politicians in Parliament. When the repeal of the Union campaign collapsed in the 1840s many in both Britain and Ireland thought that the matter was finally settled. Indeed, in the coming years, despite the ravages of the famine, Ireland seemed to benefit from its union with Britain and some of its grievances were addressed. The Irish Church Act of 1869, introduced by the Liberal Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone, disestablished the Church of Ireland and removed the burden of the tithe rent charge from all non-Anglicans. Then in 1881 Gladstone introduced the Land Act which responded to some of the

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<sup>2</sup> The term Protestant in early nineteenth-century Ireland generally applied to members of the Church of Ireland and only later in the century came to be applied more commonly to include other denominations.

ongoing concerns of Irish tenants. Gladstone and the Liberals believed that these two acts in particular had dealt with the great issues in Ireland.

From the 1870s, however, there was a growing movement in support of Home Rule for Ireland which, despite the government's actions, continued to gain momentum. This impetus took a radical direction under the influence of Charles Stewart Parnell, who became leader of the newly formed Irish Parliamentary Party. The charismatic Parnell took an aggressive approach and became associated with a policy of obstructionism in the House of Commons, agrarian outrages in Ireland and, at best, a seemingly ambivalent relationship with the violent Fenian movement. While Home Rule was not a hugely popular idea in England there was, nonetheless, a growing sense among some Liberals that it was a necessary consequence of their commitment to democracy. In their view, as Eugenio Biagini writes,

the legitimacy of Parliament itself depended on popular support and if the latter were to be permanently withdrawn, the former would collapse and government degenerate into despotism. This was the case in Ireland: the Union had to be amended because the overwhelming majority of the people rejected it.<sup>3</sup>

In late 1885, as the minority Conservative government teetered on the brink of collapse, Gladstone saw the opportunity to regain power for the Liberal Party with the help of Parnell's followers. In December that year he gave his first intimation that he would support Home Rule with the 'Hawarden Kite'.<sup>4</sup> In February 1886 Gladstone once again became Prime Minister but with Parnell's party holding the balance of power in Parliament. The reason for Gladstone's seemingly sudden conversion to support Home Rule has been much discussed by historians, with some seeing it as a matter of pragmatism and others a matter of principle. Since, as Vincent Comerford notes, 'Gladstone was adept at infusing what was politically expedient with his gigantic sense of moral obligation'<sup>5</sup> it may in fact be difficult to separate principle from pragmatism in his reasoning. Whatever his precise motivations this abrupt shift to supporting Home Rule sent shockwaves throughout Britain and Ireland. Even Gladstone's own party had largely been kept in the dark over this matter, and his support for it spilt the Liberal Party and forced them from power.

In April 1886 Gladstone introduced the Government of Ireland Bill, commonly referred to as the First Home Rule Bill, to the House of Commons. It was debated for two months and voted upon in June. The bill was defeated as ninety-three Liberal MPs voted against it. Gladstone was

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<sup>3</sup> Eugenio F. Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism 1876–1906* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 51.

<sup>4</sup> Gladstone used his son Herbert to 'fly a kite', i.e. to brief the press about his father's conversion to Home Rule in order to test public reaction. Hawarden Castle was Gladstone's home at the time.

<sup>5</sup> R.V. Comerford, 'The Parnell Era, 1883–91', in *A New History of Ireland, Volume VI: Ireland Under the Union, II: 1870–1921*, ed. by W. E. Vaughan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 53–80 (p. 63).

forced to dissolve Parliament and call a general election. The election brought the Conservatives to power and kept the Liberals out of government for the next six years. With a Conservative government Home Rule was no longer on the political agenda, although agitation for it continued, especially amongst Irish MPs. The Liberal Party was re-elected in 1892 but, once again, it was reliant upon the Irish Parliamentary Party for support. In February 1893 Gladstone introduced the Second Home Rule Bill. Unlike the first bill, success in the Commons now seemed likely due to the support of Irish MPs.

## The Response of British and Irish Nonconformists to Home Rule

British Nonconformists had long venerated Gladstone and saw in him the champion for their cause. They shared in the great sense of shock at his sudden conversion to Home Rule for, as David Bebbington points out, they ‘regarded the maintenance of the Union with Ireland as a matter beyond discussion’.<sup>6</sup> Some responded to this conversion by urging caution. *The Baptist Magazine*, for example, warned of the dangers that Home Rule would pose to the Protestant minority in Ireland. It also had a warning about putting too much faith in Gladstone and ‘the folly of having political popes’.<sup>7</sup> On the whole, however, British Nonconformists were won over quickly to supporting Home Rule and ‘were clearly overwhelmingly in its favour’.<sup>8</sup> This was in part due to Gladstone’s moral rhetoric in supporting it. John Clifford, one of the leading English Baptists of the age who became a supporter of Home Rule, remarked after hearing Gladstone on the subject that he ‘felt he was witnessing a fight for righteousness, for humanity, for God’.<sup>9</sup> The Nonconformist response was also in part a reaction to the policy of coercion in Ireland adopted by the Conservative government, which led some of them to see in the Irish as ‘a [fellow] subject Race’<sup>10</sup> who shared their repression. Indeed, they were ‘puzzled’<sup>11</sup> by what they regarded as the sectarianism of the Irish Protestants in rejecting the measure.

Irish Nonconformists, who revered Gladstone, were also astonished by his sudden change of heart and that of their English counterparts. This sense of shock arose for a number of reasons. First of all, as noted above, Home Rule was a matter that previously was not mentioned among Nonconformists. As one Congregationalist wrote, it was ‘so distinctly

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<sup>6</sup> David Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), p. 84.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Biagini, *British Democracy*, p. 76.

<sup>8</sup> Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience*, p. 85.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Biagini, *British Democracy*, p. 81.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Biagini, *British Democracy*, p. 72.

<sup>11</sup> Biagini, *British Democracy*, p. 77.



tabooed [...] that Englishmen could not allow it even to be discussed'.<sup>12</sup> Secondly, it was a long-standing belief among English and Irish Protestants that Ireland's problems were due to the enslavement of the Irish people by the Roman Catholic Church. As Irene Whelan has pointed out there was 'a fully developed political doctrine rooted in the belief that the source of Ireland's social and political problems was the Catholic religion and that the country would never be prosperous and developed until Catholicism and all its influences were eradicated'.<sup>13</sup> One English Baptist visitor to Ireland in 1813 typically lamented with regard to Catholicism that 'a person must visit Ireland and witness in some sort the prevalence of this abomination, to know how completely the consciences and whole souls of the population are under the dominion of a bigoted priesthood'.<sup>14</sup> The idea that political power would be handed over to the Catholic majority in Ireland seemed to ignore the source of Ireland's problems and place the country in grave danger.

Thirdly, Gladstone had previously subscribed to the dangers of papal influence. In 1874 he had published a pamphlet called *The Vatican Decrees in their Bearing on Civil Allegiance*. This was a response to the declaration of papal infallibility in 1870 and it accused the Pope of 'tyranny' and 'despotism'. It showed both the widespread strength of feeling on this issue and Gladstone's popularity that the pamphlet was his bestselling work and went through 110 editions.<sup>15</sup> Now it seemed that Gladstone had turned his back upon this idea. Fourthly, the Home Rule movement had, since the 1870s, blurred 'the distinctions between the constitutional and physical force traditions'<sup>16</sup> in Irish politics. Gladstone's protégé Lord Frederick Cavendish, the newly appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland, had been murdered in Phoenix Park as recently as 1882. Now it seemed to Irish Protestants that Gladstone was turning his back on law and order and succumbing to the threat of violence.

Irish Baptists had traditionally taken the historical Baptist view of the separation of church and state, while affirming their loyalty to the Crown. They also viewed their chief aim as evangelism and therefore they did not engage in politics. The advent of Home Rule, however, tested this position. In June 1886, just three weeks after the failure of the First Home Rule Bill,

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Biagini, p. 76.

<sup>13</sup> Irene Whelan, 'The Stigma of Souperism' in *The Great Irish Famine*, ed. by Cathal Póirtéir (Cork: Mercier Press, 1995), pp. 135-154 (p. 136).

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Joseph Belcher, *The Baptist Irish Society; its origin, history, and prospects: with an outline of the ecclesiastical history of Ireland, and a lecture, enforcing its claims on the sympathy and efforts of Christians in England* (London: The Baptist Irish Society, 1845), p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> See David Bebbington, *William Ewart Gladstone: Faith and Politics in Victorian Britain* (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 228-230.

<sup>16</sup> Alvin Jackson, 'The Origins, Politics and Culture of Irish Unionism, C.1880-1916' in *The Cambridge History of Ireland*, Vol. 4, ed. by Thomas Bartlett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 86-116 (p. 104).

the newly installed president of the Irish Baptist Association, John Douglas, gave his inaugural address. He took the opportunity to express Irish Baptist concerns and reiterated what they considered to be the source of Ireland's troubles. He stated that '*to the influence of Rome* must be traced by far the greater proportion of those social disorders which have gained for this portion of the United Kingdom a unique and unenviable notoriety'. He continued, 'I maintain that any solution of the Irish Questions which ignores the disturbing influence of Rome, loses sight of the most important element of the problem and, is inevitably doomed to failure.'<sup>17</sup>

The previous month Douglas had also been appointed the editor of *The Irish Baptist Magazine* and, in a subsequent issue, he set out his vision for the magazine promising that it would offer 'notes on current events'<sup>18</sup> by which he meant Home Rule. His promise to comment on current events did not meet with universal approval among Baptists, many of whom still remained reluctant to mix religion and politics. As a result, he was forced to defend this approach in the magazine. He did so on the basis that there were great political questions where 'the religious and political elements are inseparably blended'.<sup>19</sup> This was the tension for Irish Baptists, whether they should maintain their historic policy of political silence or speak out on the great matter of the day.

Having been caught out by Gladstone's conversion to Home Rule and by the first bill in 1886, Unionist opposition became more organised. As Alvin Jackson notes, 'drawing upon a formidable range of social, financial and cultural resources [...] Irish unionism brought together different traditions of Protestantism, drawing in particular upon unifying evangelical and loyalist sub-cultures from the eighteenth century'.<sup>20</sup> Protestant churches played a key role in Unionist resistance. Andrew Holmes points out that throughout Ireland 'all Protestant churches were against Home Rule and only a very small minority of individual Protestants were in favour'.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, evangelicalism provided an 'internal binding agent within Irish Protestantism'<sup>22</sup> by helping to unite the movement across social and denominational boundaries, as well as providing a religious rationale for resisting Home Rule.

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<sup>17</sup> 'The Mission of the Irish Baptist Churches', *The Irish Baptist Magazine*, July 1886, pp. 101,102. Italics original. For a time, volume numbers disappear from the pages of the magazine before being reinstated.

<sup>18</sup> 'To Our Readers', *The Irish Baptist Magazine*, August 1886, p. 114.

<sup>19</sup> 'Our Relation to Politics', *The Irish Baptist Magazine*, XII, No.1, January 1888, p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> Jackson, 'The Origins, Politics and Culture', pp. 89, 90.

<sup>21</sup> Andrew R. Holmes, 'Protestantism in the Nineteenth Century: Revival and Crisis' in *The Cambridge History of Ireland*, Vol. 3, ed. by James Kelly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 331-352 (p.348).

<sup>22</sup> Jackson, 'Origins, Politics and Culture', p. 93.

In an address opposing Home Rule presented to the Conservative Prime Minister Lord Salisbury in 1888, it was noted that there were 990 Nonconformist ministers in Ireland of whom 864 had signed the address. Only eight had declared themselves to be Home Rulers. Those who declined to sign were reluctant to mix politics and religion.<sup>23</sup> Among those who presented the address was the Scot Archibald McCaig, pastor of Brannockstown Baptist Church, who represented Irish Baptists.<sup>24</sup> It was a sign that Irish Baptists were being increasingly drawn into a pan-Protestant front. Home Rule was forcing them to move beyond their traditional reticence to engage in politics. This is seen in their participation in the Ulster Convention.

The Ulster Convention met on 17 June 1892 and was an attempt by its organisers to show the unity, strength and breadth of Protestant opposition to Home Rule. It was attended by 12,000 delegates, with a crowd estimated at ten times that size outside the venue. The nature of the occasion was captured by the fact that there were speakers from all the Protestant denominations. As the *Belfast Newsletter* reported, ‘Strong Liberals and staunch Conservatives are side by side; Episcopalian and Presbyterian, Methodist and Unitarian, Baptist and Congregationalist, and not least in earnestness loyal Roman Catholics.’<sup>25</sup> The Dublin-based *Evening Herald* noted that the resolutions adopted by the Convention had been ‘signed by chief officers of the Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, and Congregational Churches in Ireland’.<sup>26</sup> Opponents of Home Rule argued in the press that this cross-denominational support was evidence that the Unionist movement was not possessed of any sectarian spirit.

Archibald McCaig, who had succeeded Douglas as editor of *The Irish Baptist Magazine*, continued his predecessor’s policy of commenting on ‘current events’ and noted that ‘we were glad to see that at the Ulster Convention our esteemed friend Dr. Usher worthily represented the Irish Baptists, and delivered a manly and impressive speech in opposition to Home Rule’.<sup>27</sup> Usher claimed in his speech, ‘I have the support of nearly all the Baptist ministers in Ireland, and even the practically unanimous voice of Baptist church members and congregations.’<sup>28</sup>

McCaig’s report also reflected other ways that Irish Baptists were trying to influence their British counterparts. He stated: ‘We also note with

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<sup>23</sup> The Irish Unionist Alliance, *Facts of Radical Misgovernment; And the Home Rule Question Down to Date* (Dublin: The Irish Unionist Alliance, 1909).

<sup>24</sup> *The Spectator*, 17 November 1888, p. 2. In 1886 McCaig had published *Reasons Why Nonconformists should Oppose Home Rule*, which was directed at a British audience.

<sup>25</sup> *Belfast Newsletter*, 18 June 1892, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> *Evening Herald*, 8 June 1892, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Irish Baptists and Home Rule’, *The Irish Baptist Magazine*, XVI, No.7, July 1892, p. 148.

<sup>28</sup> *Belfast Newsletter*, 18 June 1892, p. 7.

pleasure that Pastor R.H. Carson, as the oldest Baptist minister in Ireland, has written a powerful letter to *The Baptist*, on the same lines, which we trust will not be without effect.’<sup>29</sup> He went on to praise the editor of *The Baptist* ‘for his outspoken articles against Home Rule’. This was in clear opposition to John Clifford, who had become particularly associated with Baptist support for Home Rule and had, in the *Baptist Union Magazine*, clamoured for ‘Justice to Ireland’.

The Second Home Rule Bill was passed in the House of Commons in February 1893. Irish Baptists were stirred to respond still further as the prospect of Home Rule now seemed to move towards becoming a reality.

### The Irish Baptist Case

McCaig, who by 1893 had moved to London to become a tutor at Spurgeon’s College, now sought to further rally support and wrote to all the Irish Baptist churches asking them to express their opinions. He collated the responses in the April 1893 edition of *The Irish Baptist Magazine* and added his own editorial comment.<sup>30</sup> He published, at least in part, responses from the twenty-seven associated churches. Among the responses he included a large section of a letter written by Hugh D. Brown, pastor of the Harcourt Street Baptist Church in Dublin, to the *Irish Times*, written on St Patrick’s Day and published on 18 March 1893. Such was Brown’s standing amongst Irish Baptists and the wider evangelical community in Ireland and Britain that the newspaper took Brown’s letter as representing the position of the whole denomination and commented that ‘the Irish Baptists have now added their testimony to that of other Churches against the Bill’.<sup>31</sup> That McCaig chose to print such a lengthy section of Brown’s letter suggests that he also considered Brown as giving the most important and eloquent expression of Irish Baptist views.

The published comments representing the churches, along with those of McCaig and two retired pastors, offer an insight into Irish Baptist objections to the introduction to Home Rule. The fact that only two churches<sup>32</sup> refused to comment on the grounds that religion and politics

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<sup>29</sup> ‘Irish Baptists and Home Rule’, 1892, p. 148.

<sup>30</sup> ‘Irish Baptists and Home Rule’, *The Irish Baptist Magazine*, XVII, No.4, April 1893, pp 70-78.

<sup>31</sup> *Irish Times*, 18 March 1893, pp. 4, 5. Brown no doubt contributed to this assumption when he signed his letter ‘Pastor of Harcourt Street Baptist Church, Chairman Irish Baptist Home Mission, President Irish Baptist Training Institute, &c.’ Although, as Thompson notes, his own particular solution to the ‘Irish Question’ that suggested a greater degree of independence for Ireland in the future was out of step with the views of the majority of Baptists, especially in the north. McCaig omitted the more controversial sections of the letter from the magazine. See Joshua Thompson, ‘Baptists in Ireland 1792-1922: A Dimension of Protestant Dissent’ (Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1988), p. 268.

<sup>32</sup> These were the churches in Mountpottinger and Carrickfergus. Two other churches did not offer a reply. The pastor of the Grange Corner church noted that he was unable to offer a definite reply because he could

should not be mixed shows once more how Baptists now felt compelled to move beyond their historical stance. The responses show that there were two key objections. The first was that effectively, local government would be in the hands of Catholic priests who would be the instruments of a new Irish Ascendancy under the Ultramontane hierarchy of the Catholic Church.<sup>33</sup> Secondly, it was believed that the domination of the Irish government by the Catholic Church would crush civil and religious liberties, especially those of Protestants.

With regard to the first of these objections there had been a longstanding belief among Irish Protestants that the papacy had an undue influence in Ireland. The appointment of Paul Cullen as Archbishop of Armagh in 1849 had greatly intensified this. Cullen was an Ultramontane and had sought to bring the Irish Church into closer conformity to Rome. Under his leadership the Irish Church grew more confident and more powerful. That Cullen had been sent to Ireland as an Apostolic Delegate confirmed the worst fears of many about the efforts on the part of Rome to influence the country's political affairs. The declaration of papal infallibility as a dogma of the Church in 1870, in a statement drafted by Cullen, further alarmed Protestants in both Ireland and England. Indeed, as McCaig pointed out, they had 'Mr. Gladstone's authority for dreading the political usurpation of Rome'.<sup>34</sup> The Irish Protestant shibboleth of the time was that 'Home Rule means Rome Rule'.

This fear of 'Rome Rule' led to the second great concern that civil and religious liberties would be crushed. McCaig made the point that 'civil and religious Liberty is already enjoyed to the full in Ireland'.<sup>35</sup> Such liberties were now threatened and a portent of what was to come had been seen 'in Roman Catholic districts [where] Protestants are denied the liberty of preaching the Gospel in the open air'.<sup>36</sup> In the 1890s, Catholic opposition to street preaching in Ireland had become a matter of public discussion with crowds of several thousand sometimes gathering to harangue preachers. As Matthew Kelly points out, this public, popular opposition 'justified unionist fears that home rule would mean Rome rule' where even leaders of nationalist opinion warned the protesters of the damage they were doing home rule.<sup>37</sup>

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not gather the collective opinion of the church. The pastor of the Limerick church could not express an opinion as the church was divided on the matter.

<sup>33</sup> Ultramontanism is a movement within the Catholic Church which advocates placing supreme authority in the hands of the Pope.

<sup>34</sup> 'Irish Baptists and Home Rule', 1893, p. 71. A reference to *The Vatican Decrees in their Bearing on Civil Allegiance*.

<sup>35</sup> 'Irish Baptists and Home Rule', 1893, p. 71.

<sup>36</sup> 'Irish Baptists and Home Rule', 1893, p. 75.

<sup>37</sup> Matthew Kelly, 'The Politics of Protestant Street Preaching in 1890s Ireland', *The Historical Journal*, 48 (2005): 101-125 (pp. 102, 103).

As McCaig and others expressed their fears they used the language of the loss of 'Civil and Religious Liberty'. In Protestant mythology, William III had secured 'Civil and Religious Liberty' during the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688. The struggle to maintain these freedoms provided a rationale for the newly re-energised Orange Order. That Irish Baptists were using this language and were quite conscious of its provenance is reflected in the words of Pastor Simpson of Dungannon, who warned of the danger of 'dragging us back to the sad and servile time of James II'.<sup>38</sup> It was ironic that Baptists employed this language, since in Ireland such liberties had historically been the preserve of the Church of Ireland while Dissenters, along with the Catholic majority in Ireland, had only gained legal parity as a result of disestablishment in 1869. It demonstrates that while Baptists might have considered themselves to be distinctive in their views regarding the relationship between religion and politics, they were simply another part of a broad cultural Protestant movement. Furthermore, while they had benefited from disestablishment, they were at the same time looking to the wider Protestant civil establishment to protect them.

That Irish Baptists simply shared the concerns of other Protestants is seen in the other common objections to the Bill found on the pages of the magazine. These were that the Bill would threaten the religious interests of Ireland, both Protestant and Catholic; that the current proposal would lead to civil unrest and financial ruin; that political power in Ireland would be ceded to a militant minority; and that the measure would damage the unity of the British Empire. David Hempton and Myrtle Hill list the most common arguments employed by Protestant churches against Home Rule and they are almost identical to those listed by Irish Baptists in the pages of the magazine.<sup>39</sup> Despite repeated statements amongst the contributors that they did not wish to make political comments, these concerns show that their anxieties were not all religious, rather they reflected the common political and economic concerns of all Protestants.

When the Second Home Rule Bill was defeated in the House of Lords in September 1893 the crisis passed once more and Home Rule was not revived for almost another twenty years. For Irish Baptists, at least publicly, it was almost as if it had never happened. There was little political comment in print or from the platform in subsequent years on this, or on other political matters.

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<sup>38</sup> 'Irish Baptists and Home Rule', 1893, p. 75.

<sup>39</sup> David Hempton and Myrtle Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism in Ulster Society 1740-1890* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 180.

## Irish Baptists, Home Rule and Baptist Principles

The experience of Irish Baptists during the Home Rule crisis points to the complexity of living out Baptist principles in the midst of real-life politics. This final section will explore some of these issues.

First, Irish Baptists had suffered as a small, under-resourced, politically disadvantaged community in Ireland who were almost at the point of extinction by the end of the eighteenth century. By the end of the nineteenth century their fortunes had greatly revived. Although not a large denomination, they had experienced growth to the point where they could break free from English Baptist control and, ironically, exercise ‘home rule’.<sup>40</sup> They were part of the vibrant late Victorian evangelical scene in Ireland and had obtained a large degree of respectability. Also, they had now found a degree of acceptance in a Protestant establishment that once excluded them. As such they shared with other Irish Protestant churches a form of opposition to Home Rule that ‘rested on a cultural bedrock of Protestant assumptions and values’.<sup>41</sup>

The reality was that Baptists, whilst historically teaching the separation of church and state, believed in a Christian nation, by which they meant Protestant. This led them to seek to take shelter under the very religio-political structures to which, in theory, they were opposed. Indeed, they had become embedded in those structures.

Secondly, like other British and Irish Nonconformists in the nineteenth century, Irish Baptists had largely wedded their fortunes to those of the Liberal Party. The Liberal Party seemed to represent their political interests and offer the best hope of redressing their grievances. This had been demonstrated chiefly in the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland which ‘tied Nonconformists to the Liberal Party’.<sup>42</sup> Gladstone also exuded moral authority and thereby Nonconformists ‘gave Gladstone that popular worship which was so peculiarly essential to him’.<sup>43</sup> As one journalist at the time noted, there was amongst Nonconformists ‘a fascination, amounting to fetishism, of the great name and personality of Mr. Gladstone’.<sup>44</sup> Yet, with Gladstone’s sudden embrace of Home Rule they discovered that even the most seemingly entrenched political opinions can shift. Most English Nonconformists still followed him, now seeing Home Rule as a moral issue.

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<sup>40</sup> In 1888 control of the ‘Irish Mission’ had been passed from the Baptist Union to its affiliate the Irish Baptist Association. The Baptist Union of Ireland was formed in 1895.

<sup>41</sup> Hempton and Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism*, p. 180.

<sup>42</sup> Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience*, p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> John F. Glaser, ‘Parnell’s Fall and the Nonconformist Conscience’, *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. 12 (1960), pp. 119-138 (p. 120).

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience*, p. 101.

Irish Baptists, along with other Irish Nonconformists, were dismayed and Gladstone's moral authority evaporated.

Irish Baptists regularly commented that they did not preach politics and that their work was carried on by spiritual means. Yet, in reality, their hopes had become more aligned to the Liberal Party than they had perhaps realised. Gladstone's sudden change of heart exposed this and they subsequently felt obliged to enter the political arena. The truth, of course, was that as a skilled political operator Gladstone had been manipulating the 'Nonconformist Conscience' for political ends for decades. Irish Baptists had been too tied to the Liberal Party to see this. English Nonconformists continued to be blinded to this, which allowed the future Liberal Prime Minister Lloyd George (1916–1922) 'still to play the Nonconformist card when it suited him'<sup>45</sup> on into the 1920s.

Thirdly, by the end of the nineteenth century Britain had adopted parliamentary democracy as its form of government, although universal suffrage remained some way off. With a Liberal majority duly elected in 1893, Home Rule became, in parliamentary terms, a legitimate government policy. The Irish Act of Union which the Irish Baptists were seeking to maintain was, on the other hand, widely recognised as a byword for political corruption. As Thomas Bartlett has noted, it was only made possible through the 'unprecedented disbursement of the "loaves and fishes" of place, pension, title, promotion, and even cash'.<sup>46</sup> Irish Baptists, who with other Nonconformists championed a fairer system of democratic government, now found themselves facing up to the realities of living with that system when it did not favour them.

One of the reasons that they had argued for resisting Home Rule was that it played into the hands of the movement's militant supporters. Yet, when they expressed the concern that implementing it would lead to unrest or even rebellion in Ulster, the most densely Protestant part of Ireland, there was no equal expression of the dangers of this militant reaction. It again reveals how blinkered they had become by their own political aspirations. Democracy meant accepting the governance of the elected government which, in this case, was promoting a policy to which they were opposed. This raised some uncomfortable questions for Irish Baptists.

Finally, one of the great concerns of Irish Baptists was that Home Rule would crush civil and religious liberties. Baptists, of course, prided themselves in standing for religious liberty. In their rejection of Home Rule they saw themselves as standing in that tradition. Their defence of liberties

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<sup>45</sup> Edward Royle, *Modern Britain: A Social History 1750-2011*, 3d edn (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), p. 374.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Bartlett, *Ireland: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 232.



was not expressed, however, in the language of the Baptist tradition, which historically was the language of toleration. Rather, as noted above, it was expressed in the language of the Williamite tradition where the defence of ‘civil and religious liberties’ echoed the sentiments of the Protestant establishment and the newly revived Orange Order.

The Home Rule crisis raised important questions for Irish Baptists about what the protection of liberties meant. They saw the prospect of Rome rule as a serious threat to their liberties. This fear was borne, however, not only from their theological differences with Catholicism but an historical interpretation of the Catholic Church and its aspirations to ecclesiastical and political dominance. This was part of a widespread Protestant narrative that with Roman domination would come violent retribution in the manner of the 1641 Rebellion. That this was likely had been further reinforced by the more recent outrages associated with the 1798 Rebellion. Such anxieties were further exacerbated by the promulgation of the infallibility of a reactionary pope only two decades before the Home Rule proposals.

On the other hand, Irish Baptists expressed their fears that Home Rule would lead to the breakup of the British Empire, which displayed their beneficent view of the Empire as a force for good. This was despite the warnings of C.H. Spurgeon, their great hero, about the dangers of imperialism.<sup>47</sup> Their willingness to support the Empire leaves the impression that their view of liberties was very narrowly defined as the protection of their own historical rights, rather than expressing a concern for the liberties of all. This is in spite of their protests to the contrary.

## Conclusion

With the passing of the Home Rule crisis the open espousal of politics largely disappeared from the Irish Baptist agenda. Once again, their focus returned to the proclamation of the gospel in Ireland. The issue of Home Rule, however, did not disappear but remained on the horizon before coming into full view again in 1912, when the Liberal Prime Minister Herbert Asquith introduced the Third Home Rule Bill. This did not, it seems, provide the same flurry of activity amongst Irish Baptists, at least at an organisational level. When Colonel Robert Waters attempted to introduce a resolution on Home Rule at the annual Baptist Union of Ireland assembly, he was dissuaded as the Union sought to maintain ‘a neutral stance’.<sup>48</sup> Some

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<sup>47</sup> For example, see Spurgeon’s sermon ‘Independence of Christianity’, 31 August 1857, in *The New Park Street Pulpit: Volume 3, 1857* (London: Alabaster and Passmore, 1858), pp. 333-340. Spurgeon was one of the most vocal English Baptist critics of Home Rule which further enhanced his standing amongst Irish Baptists.

<sup>48</sup> Thompson, ‘Baptists in Ireland 1792-1922’, p. 272.

Baptists, such as Pastor Alexander Jardine of Mountpottinger Church in Belfast, again stated their uneasiness about becoming involved in politics.<sup>49</sup> Other Baptists, including several pastors, did act however, and reflecting the militant spirit of the time signed the Ulster Covenant which promised to use ‘all means which may be found necessary’ to resist Home Rule.<sup>50</sup> Yet, perhaps the mood amongst Irish Baptists was best captured in the words of Dr S.J. Reid in *The Irish Baptist Magazine* as he anticipated that nothing, it seemed, could now stop Home Rule. He wrote that ‘a long and painful road must be travelled. Many an hour of bitter and heart-breaking defeat await the Protestants.’<sup>51</sup>

Reid could not have known the prescience of his words. A decade later Irish Protestants, including Irish Baptists, had lived through the Great War, the Easter Rising, the War of Independence, the division of Ireland into two jurisdictions and a civil war. For many, a long and painful road still lay ahead.

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<sup>49</sup> David Fitzpatrick, *Descendancy: Irish Protestant Histories since 1795* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 118.

<sup>50</sup> Those pastors who signed the Ulster Covenant included Isaac P. Bell (Ballymacarrett, Belfast); James W. Brown (Tobermore); R.J. Murphy (Tandragee); William James Thomson (Clough); Thomas Warwick (Dungannon) and George Rock (without charge). Those who signed the covenant can be traced at <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/search-ulster-covenant>.

<sup>51</sup> ‘The Irish Protestant Churches and Home Rule’, *The Irish Baptist Magazine*, XXXVI, No.10, October 1912, p. 129.

## **Obedience Ends Where Evil Begins: Church-State Relations in the Former Soviet Union from a baptistic Perspective**

Joshua T. Searle

After some preliminary remarks about the ongoing legacy of the Soviet system, this article opens with a sketch of church-state relations from a biblical and theological perspective. The article concludes with some observations about how a ‘baptist vision’<sup>1</sup> (McClendon) of a free church in a free state could provoke new thinking about the renewal of church and society in the post-Soviet era. My argument is that a baptistic<sup>2</sup> vision of peace, justice and freedom in Christ, could help the church in Eastern Europe to drive a wooden stake through the heart of the Soviet system and help the people of the former USSR to emerge from the difficult travails of the post-Soviet transition.

### **Keywords**

Church; state; baptistic; civil society; Russia; Ukraine

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<sup>1</sup> This article, following the lead of James Wm. McClendon Jr, uses an intentionally lower-case ‘b’ in the descriptive term, ‘baptist’. McClendon claimed that baptistic communities constitute a worldwide Christian grouping with a distinctive theological heritage, which is neither Protestant nor Catholic. McClendon sought to emphasise that the ‘baptist vision’ which he advocates is not confined to a specific ‘Baptist’ denomination, but encompasses a whole range of ‘baptistic’ expressions of Christianity. This strand of Christian tradition is associated with the Radical Reformation, and includes Baptists, Mennonites, Brethren, some expressions of Pentecostalism, and believers’ churches among others — see McClendon, *Systematic Theology: Volume 1: Ethics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2002), pp. 26-34. This approach, admittedly, is not without its critics, even among those who are sympathetic towards those who favour the ‘baptistic’ rather than ‘Baptist’ label. Paul Fiddes notes the danger that this label could be used to create ‘a highly personalized view of what it means to be baptist’ (Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003), p.14).

<sup>2</sup> The theological use of the adjective, ‘baptistic’, is a coinage of the IBTS (Centre) community. The term was introduced in Lina Andronovienė and Parush R. Parushev, ‘Church, State, and Culture: On the Complexities of Post-soviet Evangelical Social Involvement’, *Theological Reflections: EAAA Journal of Theology* 3 (2004): 174-227. It was thoroughly defined in the Editorial Introduction to Rollin G. Grams and Parush R. Parushev, eds., *Towards an Understanding of European Baptist Identity: Listening to the Churches in Armenia, Bulgaria, Central Asia, Moldova, North Caucasus, Omsk, and Poland* (Prague: IBTS, 2006). As defined there, ‘By “baptistic” [communities] is meant those of the Free Church and believers’ baptism tradition. This term is used as an umbrella term for a variety of believing communities (“gathering” churches) practising believers’ baptism, and demanding radical moral living, such as Baptists or Pentecostals. It can also include a number of other groups in the regions, such as Adventists and [Mennonite] Brethren. It excludes churches in which members think in terms of ethnicity or geographical and political boundaries and in which people typically baptise their children into these ethno-geo-religio-identities. That is, “baptistic” excludes traditionally state sponsored ecclesial bodies.’ (Ibid., 10).

## Introduction

Europe today is experiencing a resurgence of nationalism, xenophobia and nativist populism. This has led to such phenomena as Brexit and massive electoral gains for extremist parties from France<sup>3</sup> to Hungary.<sup>4</sup> Europe seems to be on the brink of a radical, revolutionary change. Discourse which one used to associate with Bavarian beerhalls in the 1920s and 30s has become normalised and is gaining broad coverage and acceptance.<sup>5</sup> It seems that a new world is coming into being. This is a world that is moved not by the Christian values of love, compassion and solidarity, truth and justice, but by power, by the racial politics of blood and soil, and the demonic power of collective national identity and the media-fabricated will of the people. In light of these formidable challenges, followers of Christ today need to formulate a robust, biblical and theologically-informed theology of nationhood, identity and the relationship between the church, the state, and civil society. It is my conviction that the recent history of post-Soviet Ukraine affords many lessons about how to strengthen the bonds of solidarity and compassion and promote peace, justice and reconciliation in these uncertain times.

It is often assumed that the Soviet Union ceased to exist in December 1991 when the Soviet hammer and sickle flag was lowered from the Kremlin and replaced by the white-blue-red horizontal striped flag of the Russian Federation. However, flags are merely decorative embellishments, whose meaning is outward and symbolic.<sup>6</sup> The changing of the flags and the redrawing of the political maps could not conceal the fact that the Soviet Union, as a subjective reality, far outlived the political demise of the Soviet Communism.<sup>7</sup> In many respects, the Soviet Union is alive and well in 2020 — obviously not the political entity, but the Soviet mentality lives on in countless mundane acts and attitudes of millions of people who live today in the countries of the former USSR. The anthropological prototype, *homo sovieticus*,<sup>8</sup> lives on in the mentality and culture of the post-Soviet nations.

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<sup>3</sup> Brigitte Beuzamy, 'Explaining the Rise of the Front National to Electoral Prominence: Multi-Faceted or Contradictory Models?' in *Right-Wing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse*, ed. by Ruth Wodak, Majid KhosraviNik, and Brigitte Mrai (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), pp. 177-90.

<sup>4</sup> András Kovács, 'The Post-Communist Extreme-Right: The Jobbik Party in Hungary', in *Right-Wing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse*, ed. by Ruth Wodak and others, pp. 223-34.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Hainsworth, ed., *The Politics of the Extreme Right: From the Margins to the Mainstream* (London: Pinter, 2000); Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (London: Sage, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Tim Marshall Elliott, *Worth Dying for: The Power and Politics of Flags* (London: Elliott and Thompson, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Krzysztof Tyszka, 'Homo Sovieticus Two Decades Later', *Polish Sociological Review* 4 (2009): 507-22.

<sup>8</sup> This term was used by the prominent social critic Aleksandr Zinoviev in his book of the same title. See Zinoviev, *Homo Sovieticus* (London: Paladin, 1986). The term is based on the notion of the 'new Soviet man' (*новый советский человек*) developed by Soviet propagandists to promulgate the idea of a new

The spirit of Soviet communism and the servile, degrading and dehumanising ideology associated with it lives on to this day and it continues to affect every aspect of public life, including church-state relations in the so-called former USSR.

Taking this into account, this article opens with a sketch of church-state relations from a biblical and theological perspective. I will then conclude with some observations about how a ‘baptist vision’ (McClendon)<sup>9</sup> of a ‘free church in a free state’<sup>10</sup> could provoke new thinking about the renewal of church and society in the post-Soviet era. My argument is that a baptist vision of peace, justice and freedom in Christ, could help the church in Eastern Europe to drive a wooden stake through the heart of the Soviet system and help the people of the former USSR to emerge from the difficult travails of the post-Soviet transition.

## **Church and State under Soviet Communism and Post-Soviet Authoritarianism**

For many Protestants in Russia and Ukraine, Soviet history is the history of a marginal existence, or rather, a constant struggle for survival.<sup>11</sup> The projection of this experience into the present time tends to engender the idealisation of marginality and withdrawal from the world as the most faithful mode of Christian existence. Therefore, among the Russian Protestant community the custom has been to suffer in silence, to make any compromises that are necessary to safeguard their interests. Unfortunately, Russian and Ukrainian Protestant spirituality, especially during the Soviet and post-Soviet eras, has tended to be shaped by fear. Fear causes people to avoid dangerous topics, to bury their heads in the sand and to focus on the most prosaic personal interests. If Christians remain in a state of fear, they tend not to talk about social responsibility, justice, truth, freedom, solidarity,

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generation of people who would be endowed with Soviet virtues of discipline, selflessness, hard work and intelligence as a result of being nurtured in and by a Soviet culture.

<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere I have expounded at length on the meaning and application of the ‘baptist vision’, as formulated by McClendon. See Joshua T. Searle, ‘The Ecumenical Imperative and the Kingdom of God: Towards a baptistic perspective on church unity’, *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 14:1 (2013): 7-13. As well as encompassing the characteristics of biblicism, liberty, discipleship, community and mission, the baptist vision constitutes a ‘hermeneutical principle’, which posits a ‘shared awareness of the present Christian community as the primitive community and the eschatological community’. See McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 28.

<sup>10</sup> This terminology is derived from Nigel Wright’s important work, *Free Church, Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005). Wright maintains that the baptist vision of a ‘free church in a free state’ expresses more than negative resistance to injustice or legal prohibitions, but constitutes ‘positive understandings of God’s will for church and world which have been overlooked, neglected or suppressed in the church they [Baptists] inherited’ (ibid., xvi).

<sup>11</sup> Joshua T. Searle and Mykhailo N. Cherenkov, *A Future and a Hope: Mission, Theological education and the Transformation of Post-Soviet Society* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014), p. 123. See also, Parush Parushev and Toivo Pilli, ‘Protestantism in Eastern Europe to the Present Day’, in *The Blackwell Companion to Protestantism*, ed. by Alister E. McGrath and Darren C. Marks (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

or the transformation of society. They turn, instead, to discussions about distant and abstract categories, such as the soul and eternity. The information deficit provides a pseudo-theological justification for passivity and conformity. As the Russian proverb puts it: ‘The less you know, the sounder you sleep.’<sup>12</sup> In an environment where knowledge is dangerous, people prefer not to know, and if they do know, then they would rather not talk about it.

Sectarian withdrawal and passive marginality and inertia were therefore essentially the default modes of evangelical communities during the Soviet era, and this attitude continued well into the post-Soviet period.<sup>13</sup> Yet in 2013/14, a major tectonic shift occurred in the ways that post-Soviet evangelicals related to the state and to civil society. The Revolution of Dignity and Freedom in Ukraine in 2013/14, otherwise known as the Maidan protests, prompted new thinking among post-Soviet churches concerning the meaning and significance of basic terms, such as ‘power’, ‘the world’, ‘culture’, and ‘freedom’ in the light of the gospel witness.<sup>14</sup> There has been a radical re-evaluation of the demarcation between the spheres of legitimate influence of the church, the state, and society.<sup>15</sup> The maps of the sacred and profane, religious and social have been redrawn. Church leaders from across the denominations now acknowledge that the role of the church is to discern between good and evil, and to illuminate the front line in the spiritual battle against the powers and principalities that manifest themselves in social structures and political institutions, and to make the Kingdom of God a visible reality in the public sphere.<sup>16</sup>

The Revolution of Dignity and its aftermath have led to the conviction that the church is called to engage with society, rather than withdraw from it. Political neutrality, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer realised long ago, is no longer an option for the church.<sup>17</sup> The more persistently the church stays silent about politics, the more numerous are the questions it faces: What is it protecting or justifying with its silence? What is its real position? Whose side is it on? Does it have anything to say about current concerns? Is the church ready to move beyond the eternal, abstract, and distant and weigh in on the tangible,

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<sup>12</sup> David Satter, *The Less You Know, The Better You Sleep: Russia's Road to Terror and Dictatorship Under Yeltsin and Putin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

<sup>13</sup> Mykhailo N. Cherenkov, *Baptizm bez kavychek. Ocherki i materialy k diskussii obudushchem yevangel'skikh tserkvey* (Cherkassy: Kollokvium, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Mykhailo Cherenkov, ‘The Evangelical Church in Soviet Society: Dialectics of Adaptation and Reform’, *Keston Newsletter* 21 (2015), pp. 26-41; Catherine Wanner, ‘Religion and Political Crisis in Ukraine’, *Euxeinos* 17 (2015): 4-7.

<sup>15</sup> Alexander Sagan, ‘Church-State Relations After Maidan’, *Euxeinos* 17 (2015): 67-71.

<sup>16</sup> Arkhymandryt Kyrylo (Hovorun), *Ukrayins'ka Publychnaya Teolohyya* (Kyiv: Dukh i Litera, 2017), pp. 5-6.

<sup>17</sup> Larry L. Rasmussen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), p. 33.

burning issues of the present? By not protecting the victims of state violence, the church is complicit in the crimes of the governing regime; by not calling evil that which is evil, the church colludes with the criminals.<sup>18</sup>

## **Baptist/Anabaptist Obligations towards the State**

In common with every citizen, ‘baptist’ Christians have a clear responsibility towards the state. This responsibility consists in maintaining order and staying within the law. Those who follow Christ are obedient to the authorities, on condition that these authorities carry out their activities in compliance with the laws of the land and in accordance with the higher, moral law of truth and justice. However, obedience ends where evil begins. For followers of the Way of Christ, it is not the government, but moral conscience informed by the teachings of the Scriptures, which determines what is good and what is evil. If a contradiction arises between one’s duty of obedience towards the state and one’s biblically-informed convictions concerning good and evil, then the disciple is under a gospel obligation to ‘obey God rather than any human authority’ (Acts 5:29).

Standing in the tradition of the Radical Reformation, the political vocation of baptist communities is to distinguish between good and evil, and thus to legitimise the power that protects from evil, and to delegitimise the power that serves evil. When those in power violate their legal and moral boundaries, they should not only be denied obedience, but should be actively resisted, as the great anabaptist forebears from Felix Mantz to Balthasar Hubmaier once did.<sup>19</sup> Thus, in distinguishing between good and evil, the early anabaptists taught that the church has a sacred duty to resist the lawless authority of the state, when such a state rewrites laws for itself and turns the legal system into a tool for the misappropriation of power and wealth by the state authorities.

Unfortunately, among many post-Soviet Protestants we hear about obedience much more often than resistance. Usually biblical proof-texts, such as Romans 13, are cited out of context to build a case for passive toleration of evil and corrupt regimes. This occurred, infamously, in Germany under the Nazi regime when church leaders cited from Romans 13:1 in order to make a pseudo-biblical case for supporting Adolf Hitler.<sup>20</sup> Yet, a careful reading of the Bible reveals many examples of resistance to

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Rufus Burrow, Jr., *Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Theology of Resistance* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> James M. Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1976), pp. 102-13.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, John Henry Queripel, *Bonhoeffer: Prophet and Martyr* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), p. 7; See also, Stanley Hauerwas, ‘Dietrich Bonhoeffer’, in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. by Peter Scott and William Cavanaugh (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 139-40.

oppressive power. For instance, in 1 Samuel we read about God's stern disapproval of the establishment of political power in Israel. In Ecclesiastes the Preacher decries all political authority as vanity and hollow conceit. In the New Testament, the condemnation of political authority is even more explicit. Jesus declares that control of political power is in the hand of Satan (Matthew 4:9).<sup>21</sup> Paul asserts that all political powers are destined for annihilation and judgement (1 Corinthians 15:24), and in the Book of Revelation all political powers and institutions are condemned and destroyed together with the great Babylon in the final apocalyptic conflagration that precedes the coming of a new heavens and a new earth.

Baptists have learned from their painful history that servile obedience to godless and lawless authorities is not only contradictory to the teachings of the Scriptures, it is also inherently shameful, immoral and demeaning, and even criminal. Such obedience constitutes a grievous violation of the natural order of good and evil and calls light that which is darkness (Isaiah 5:20). Baptists view the state from a healthy hermeneutic of suspicion. They are wary of the sacralisation of state power, which is what has tended to happen in both the Soviet and post-Soviet eras in Eastern Europe. For anabaptists the 'harmony' between church and state which is regarded by the Orthodox Church as a sacred archetype, is merely a pragmatic political construct and something human, even all too human. In some cases, baptistic believers were more inclined to view the Church-State not as the Kingdom of God, but as the realm of the Antichrist.<sup>22</sup> For post-Soviet baptists today, the archetypes of a 'Holy Russia', and 'Orthodox people' are devoid of their customary magical hold.

Throughout their history, baptists have learned that the alliance of church and state is without biblical justification and is morally bankrupt. Commenting on the anabaptists' suspicions about the state, Franklin H. Littell remarks that

the nation-state [in the twentieth century] has developed into the most acts of totalitarian governments, but also the illegal acts of legitimate governments have become a grievous burden to men and women of conscience.<sup>23</sup>

The recent history of Russia demonstrates that the hegemony of the (Russian) Orthodox Church in post-Soviet society does not lead to spiritual revival, but merely creates a thin veneer of Christianity among a people who live in fear of the all-powerful church-state. Neither Orthodox monarchism

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<sup>21</sup> J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013).

<sup>22</sup> Robert Friedmann, 'The Doctrine of the Two Worlds', in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision: A Sixtieth Anniversary Tribute to Harold S. Bender*, ed. by Guy F. Hershberger (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1957), pp. 105-106.

<sup>23</sup> Franklin H. Littell, 'A Fresh and Radical Break', in *Amish Roots: A Treasury of History, Wisdom and Lore*, ed. by John A. Hostetler (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 15.



nor atheistic communism, along with their prevailing authoritarianism, is compatible with the freedom of the gospel.<sup>24</sup>

Russian history affords numerous examples of the fatal consequences that can ensue when political and religious institutions are united into the totality of a single authority.<sup>25</sup> Under such conditions, Christianity can become conscripted by imperialistic ideologies, resulting in a demonic hybrid of pseudo-Christian dogma and xenophobic nationalism.<sup>26</sup> This kind of fake patriotic religion leads to the blasphemous deification of the state. The church-state under these conditions becomes, as Friedrich Nietzsche might have put it, ‘the coldest of cold monsters’.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, ‘national churches’ can invoke the name of ‘God’ as an idol who has bestowed a special blessing and favour on a particular nation, which then allegedly gives this ‘special’ nation the right to invade and conquer neighbouring territories and subdue their peoples — as can be currently witnessed in Ukraine. Søren Kierkegaard stated that to speak of a ‘Christian state’ makes as much sense as to speak of a ‘square circle’.<sup>28</sup> This fake Christianity will always refuse to accept any higher power and will ruthlessly destroy any forms of genuine Christian faith that go beyond cultural or national identity.

### **A Natural Asymmetry: Church, Civil Society and the State**

The political system of a nation includes both the state and civil society.<sup>29</sup> According to anabaptist ecclesiology, a free church should be part of a free civil society, rather than an appendage or servant of the state. In reality however, the post-Soviet church, especially in Russia, has become in effect, co-ruler with the state.<sup>30</sup> By contrast, baptists hold that the church is directly subordinate only to God. In terms of the responsibility of the church to the state and society, a natural asymmetry can be postulated, which maintains that one’s responsibility towards society (i.e. towards one’s ‘neighbour’ in the broadest sense of Luke 10:25–37) precedes one’s loyalty to the state. Furthermore, the church has a duty of obedience to the state only insofar as the state protects the welfare of one’s neighbours and the general well-being

<sup>24</sup> Searle and Cherenkov, *Future and a Hope*, pp. 126-27.

<sup>25</sup> Vitaliy Petrenko, *Vlast v tserkvy: Razvytye kontseptsyy vlasty v Russkoy pravoslavnoy tserkvy* (Cherkassy: Kollokvyum, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> Mark Woods, ‘How the Russian Orthodox Church is backing Vladimir Putin’s new world order’, *Christian Today*, <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/how-the-russian-orthodox-church-is-backing-vladimir-putins-new-world-order/81108.htm> [accessed 17 September 2019].

<sup>27</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, trans. by T. Common (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1999), p. 57.

<sup>28</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Attack upon Christendom, 1854–1855*, trans. by W. Lowrie. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 42.

<sup>29</sup> Matt Killingsworth, *Civil Society in Communist Eastern Europe: Opposition and Dissent in Totalitarian Regimes* (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2012), p. 11.

<sup>30</sup> Searle and Cherenkov, *Future and a Hope*, p. 61.

of the people. If one maintains that the responsibility of the church is primarily to God, then the order of responsibility is as follows: firstly, to God, then to society (the people), and, lastly, to the state. The problem for post-Soviet evangelicals has been the neglect of society. The church has either fawned on the state or has attempted to avoid politics altogether. What is needed is a more nuanced and balanced approach, such as that argued by Nigel G. Wright. This leading British Baptist theologian, commenting on anabaptist approaches to church-state relations, remarks that the early anabaptists ‘recognised the necessity of government while rejecting its violent excesses and its consequent discontinuity with divine or ecclesial action’.<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, such judicious approaches have largely been neglected by post-Soviet Baptists. Church relations towards civil society in both the Soviet and the post-Soviet periods have tended to oscillate between hostile opposition and careless indifference. Neither posture has a proper biblical-theological basis and each has contributed towards the lack of a robust and well-informed approach to public issues in the post-Soviet space.<sup>32</sup>

There are recent signs, however, that this neglect of public issues is beginning to be addressed. In Ukraine the Revolution of Dignity has forced post-Soviet evangelicals to address a question they long avoided: in what way is the gospel not only the source of personal salvation, but also the source of social transformation? After the Revolution in 2013/14, both the evangelical and the historical churches have been faced with the unsettling truth that personal faith and evangelism alone are no longer sufficient. Effective gospel witness requires active engagement at the level of the state and civil society. Lina Andronovienė and Parush Parushev put the point well in a 2004 article which made an important contribution to formulating a self-critical social theology for post-Soviet Baptists. They warned that ‘if the church avoids social involvement because it values holiness more than compassion, it is on a straight road to legalism and formalism’.<sup>33</sup>

In light of this new reality, baptists (not only in Ukraine and Russia, but also in the West) need to ask themselves some searching questions: Why is it that evangelical Christians seem to take an unseemly relish in exposing the sins of ordinary people in our churches, but maintain a pusillanimous silence concerning the sins of those in power? Why do they seem to lack the

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<sup>31</sup> Nigel G. Wright, *Free Church, Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), p. 231.

<sup>32</sup> These problems are addressed in Mykhailo Cherenkov’s insightful article, ‘Global’noye (post-)sekulyarnoye obshchestvo kak kontekst i predmet missiologii’, in *Novyye Gorizonty Missii*, ed. by P. Penner, Vladimir Ubeyvolk, Ivan Rusin and Ruslan Zagidulin (Cherkassy: Colloquium, 2015), pp. 282–297.

<sup>33</sup> Andronovienė and Parushev, ‘Church, State, and Culture: On the Complexities of Post-Soviet Evangelical Social Involvement’, p. 210.

moral imagination to envision the possibility of living in a country without bribes and without lies? Is it even possible to live a life of obedience to the Way of Christ if the entire structure of society requires them to compromise basic Christian principles of honesty, openness, integrity and compassion? If the state and society are corrupt, should they simply endure it and take no steps to address this social evil? If they lack the moral courage to take upon themselves the legal responsibility for the government and the situation in our country, then why do they wonder at the immorality of society and the nihilism of ordinary people? If the church is not in solidarity with the people, then why should the people be in solidarity with the church?

These questions indicate that for post-Soviet baptists the time for strict distinctions between ‘pure politics’ and ‘pure religion’ has passed; now politics is intertwined with economics, public morality, and religion. To assert that the church prefers to stay out of politics is to admit that the church shies away from public life and is afraid to get involved in the complex issues of our time. Yet commitment to Christ’s Great Commission obliges one to go out into the world and to transform the nations in the power of God’s truth. This means that baptists cannot remain silent on the pressing public issues of the present. Arcane reflection on esoteric ideas and principles will not suffice and narcissistic self-congratulatory nostalgia for the ‘heroic witness’ of persecuted Christians during the Soviet era is a road to nowhere. Baptists must engage with what is taking place now, in the current concerns of the public sphere.<sup>34</sup>

However, the difficulties at the present time to achieve effective dialogue between the state, society and the church in the post-Soviet space must be admitted. The problem lies not solely in the authoritarian nature of post-Soviet states, but also in the fact that post-Soviet society is not ready for freedom and the state assigns to the church a role that is not free. In this environment, churches fight for influence and survival, for proximity to power and concessions from the authorities, and they regard each other not as partners in dialogue, but rather as competitors. That is the short answer to how and why the church, the state, and society in the post-Soviet space have failed to develop a dialogue and mutual respect for the freedom of the other.

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<sup>34</sup> Indeed, there seems to be a trend among a new generation of Russian-speaking baptistic theologians to engage in a nuanced way with the complex issues of church–state relations in the post-Soviet space. For example, Lina Toth (Andronovienè) and Mykhailo N. Cherenkov have offered helpful contributions to these discussions, as already noted in this article.

## **Conclusion: Looking to the Future with Hope**

The response of the church to the Maidan protests in Ukraine signals a seismic shift in the church's public engagement in post-Soviet society.<sup>35</sup> The implications and significance of Maidan extend beyond the national boundaries of Ukraine. Maidan may become a symbol of hope for church and society throughout the nations of the former USSR. Maidan has served as a powerful social impetus for the church's participation in public affairs.

What is needed now are words of love and peace, of hope and the future. What is needed is the intermediation of the church, a participation that is critical and prophetic, but at the same time promotes non-violent resistance to evil, as well as active initiatives to promote peace and reconciliation. The baptist vision of non-violent confrontation and faith in the victory of the lamb of God over all the powers and principalities of the world offers a unique perspective on recent events in the post-Soviet space.

Yet rather than shunning the world and adopting a sectarian posture of withdrawal and retreat, the baptist vision posits a free church and a free state in order to reveal the social potential of the church and the universal, reconciling nature of the gospel. The baptist vision thus provides a unique perspective to explain how peace is attained through sacrifice, through a 'politics of forgiveness'<sup>36</sup> that facilitates love toward one's enemies, and the unity of those at enmity with each other through the reconciling power of Christ. All of this is needed not only for the sake of the state and the society, but also for the church itself as it fashions a responsible and transformative social theology.

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<sup>35</sup> Oksana Horkusha and Liudmyla Fylypovych, 'Ukrainianian Dignity Revolution as a Civil Church Locus of Action', in *Religion, State, Society and Identity in Transition: Ukraine*, ed. Rob van der Laarse, Mykhailo N. Cherenkov, Vitaliy V. Proshak and Tetiana Mykhalchuk (Oisterwijk: Wolf Legal Publishers, 2015), pp. 345-56.

<sup>36</sup> McClendon, *Ethics*, pp. 222-231.

# **Porous Borders and Textual Ambiguity: Why Old Testament Israel is No Model for Modern Nationalism**

Helen Paynter

The phenomenon of ethnic nationalism might appear to be endorsed by the Bible. How are local churches to counter narratives of hate and othering if they feel that their own sacred text might be lending support to the ideology? This paper will identify elements of nationalistic ideology which may appear to have some consonance with the Bible. These focus around the particular theme of the ethnic purity and exceptionalism of Israel. It then offers a biblical-theological reading of this theme. The study concludes that the potentially nationalistic themes of Israel's bloodline, land, and vocation all operate in highly ambiguous ways in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament are revealed to be symbols and shadows of the great work that is begun in Christ. There is nothing in these themes which offers genuine support for ethnic nationalism.

## **Keywords**

Nationalism; biblical theology; Old Testament; New Testament; Baptist ecclesiology

## **Introduction**

Across Europe and the Americas we are currently seeing a rising tide of hard right-wing movements; some achieving political power, others operating at the fringes of society. The concern of this paper is the use that some of them are making of biblical imagery and language.<sup>1</sup>

There is significant heterogeneity among these movements. Some are anti-Christian, while others seek to find common cause with Christianity.<sup>2</sup> Chillingly, one alt-right blogger recently wrote,

The Alt-Right shouldn't get hung up on being anti-Christian because Christianity is infinitely malleable [...] Christian conservatives will embrace our racial views again when we have the power to determine respectability.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A case study of the use of the Bible in far-right extremism can be found in the analysis of Anders Breivik's 'Manifesto' in Hannah Strømmen, 'Christian Terror in Europe? The Bible in Anders Behring Breivik's Manifesto', *The Journal of the Bible and its Reception*, 4 (2017): 147.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Odin Shaw, 'Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed: The Alt-Right on Building Christendom Without Christ', *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 18 (2019): 79-92.

<sup>3</sup> Hunter Wallace, 'First Things: The Anti-Christian Alt-Right', *Occidental Dissent* February 9, 2018. <<http://www.occidentaldissent.com/2018/02/09/first-things-the-anti-christian-alt-right/>> [accessed 31 December 2019].

Olivier Roy describes how religious themes tend to be used by right wing populist parties:

Religion matters first and foremost as a marker of identity, enabling them to distinguish between the good ‘us’ and the bad ‘them’. Most populists tend to be secular themselves, and do not consider Christianity as a faith, but rather as an identity. They place Christendom above Christianity. We have also seen that, when evoking the Christian identities of their nations, populist leaders tend to refer to symbols such as the cross, rather than to theological dogma.<sup>4</sup>

Notwithstanding this emphasis on the form rather than the beliefs of religions, there are elements of right-wing ideology which might appear to be endorsed by the Bible, and this can prove problematic within the Church. How are local churches to oppose narratives of hate and othering if they feel that their own sacred text might be lending support to the ideology?

This paper will identify some elements of nationalistic ideology which may appear to have consonance with parts of the Bible. It will then take a closer look at some of the relevant biblical themes, in order to test the question of whether the Bible — and in particular, the Old Testament — does indeed support such ideology.

Because of the heterogeneity of nationalistic far-right movements, it is somewhat risky to attempt sweeping statements about their ideology or organisation. Therefore, the following discussion is offered with the caveat that counter-examples can always be found.

We will begin by considering the question of definitions.

## Definitions

Right wing movements are categorised with a cluster of overlapping but non-identical terms: nationalism, populism, the far right, the radical right, the extreme right, ethnocracy, racism, nativism, ethnopluralism, identitarianism, fascism, and so on. The reader is referred to standard texts on far-right nationalism for the definition of most of these terms.<sup>5</sup>

It is, however, important to define nationalism. Nationalism can be defined as an ideology that ‘focuses on the congruence of the cultural and the political community; that is, the nation and the state’.<sup>6</sup> This is generally understood to fall into two categories: civic nationalism and ethnic nationalism. *Civic* nationalism is inclusive, and focuses on the autonomy,

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<sup>4</sup> Olivier Roy, ‘Beyond populism: the conservative right, the courts, the churches and the concept of a Christian Europe’, in *Saving the people: How populists hijack religion*, ed. by Nadia Marzouki, Duncan McDonnell, and Olivier Roy (London: Hurst, 2016), pp. 185-201 (p. 186).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Cas Mudde, *The Far Right Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Eric Kaufman, in Bart Bonikowski, and others, ‘Populism and nationalism in a comparative perspective: a scholarly exchange’, *Nations and Nationalism* 25 (2019): 58-81 (p. 72).

unity and identity of the legal population of a nation. *Ethnic* nationalism, on the other hand, is exclusive; focused upon a particular group within a nation state, which is deemed to constitute the true population, and whose culture is deemed to constitute the national culture. It is the autonomy, unity and identity of this ethno-cultural group which is the preoccupation of ethnic nationalists, and it is this form of nationalism which will be under discussion here. From here on, it will simply be referred to as ‘nationalism’.

## Far-right Ideology: Mapping the Terrain

The ideology of far-right groups is heterogeneous, complex, and sometimes mutually contradictory.<sup>7</sup> Several interrelated elements which might appear to find support from the Bible can be teased out.<sup>8</sup>

The rise of the far-right has often mirrored the rise of immigration, particularly from non-white countries. The ideologies that drive the far right here include white supremacy and other forms of racism; nativism, which holds that ‘states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group’;<sup>9</sup> and ethnopluralism, which argues that ‘people are divided into ethnic groups, which are equal, but should remain segregated’.<sup>10</sup> This form of nationalism expresses itself in *othering* and *abjection*;<sup>11</sup> in its most extreme form, it may be expressed as a re-emergence of fascism, supported by so-called ‘race science’.

Support for such beliefs might be sought in the biblical themes of the ethnic purity of Israel; the rules against intermarriage; the conquest of

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<sup>7</sup> For example, some far-right groups are very pro-Israel, and others are overtly anti-Semitic.

<sup>8</sup> There are two further elements of far-right rhetoric which might appear to find biblical support. First, appeal is often made for moral reform, for law and order, for an ethical ‘clean-up’. For example, on 11 August 2019, Nick Griffin of the British Nationalist Party wrote of ‘the sheer decadence of terminal liberalism’, and speculated that psychologists might ‘succeed in brainwashing the population that devouring the neighbours is normal’. Source: APF website, <https://apfeurope.com/2019/08/11/terminal-liberalism-sinks-to-new-lows/> [accessed 31 December 2019]. Second, much nationalist and far-right political expression is based around a strong, authoritarian masculine leader, often accompanied by an appeal to ‘traditional’ roles for women, sometimes cast as ‘benevolent sexism’ where women are viewed as morally pure and physically weak, in need of strong male protection. See, for example, the leaflet produced by Italy’s Lega Nord party, on the occasion of International Women’s Day in March 2019. This described the role of women in highly traditional terms. Source: Alessia Rotta, <<https://www.facebook.com/AlessiaRottaPd/posts/2092914607440723>> [accessed 31 December 2019].

<sup>9</sup> Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, p. 27. For example, the pan-European far-right group the NPF states, ‘We cherish the rich diversity which forms a tapestry of human belonging both within Europe and beyond and which is under threat from the homogenizing tendencies of a world shrunk by technology and globalism.’ Source: APF website, <https://apfeurope.com/> [accessed 31 December 2019].

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed discussion of these terms, see Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

Canaan and the *herem*<sup>12</sup> of the Canaanite tribes; and perhaps the concept of rigid geographic boundaries around the borders of the ancient land of Israel.

Further, the ‘traditional culture’ to which white nationalists appeal often refers to Christendom, especially in the face of what is perceived as a threat from Muslim immigrants.<sup>13</sup> An expressed objection to this can then be cast in terms of a rejection of Christianity.<sup>14</sup> This then operates like a bait and switch, where defence of the ‘culture’ becomes a defence of the Christian faith, with all the totalising claims which this entails. We have been seeing this in the UK in recent years in the activities of a movement called ‘Britain First’, who march through predominantly Muslim areas of our large cities carrying crosses and shouting inflammatory rhetoric.<sup>15</sup>

Some far-right movements are associated with a particular type of nationalism, sometimes expressed as exceptionalism; a form of national self-identity wherein the nation views itself as *sui generis*. This may express itself as a moral superiority over other nations and as a sense of self-congratulation, accompanied with a blindness to the moral defects of the home nation. Additionally, it may express itself as an expectation of special treatment within the international community; the Brexit phenomenon within my own nation carries a strong element of British exceptionalism.<sup>16</sup>

The unique nature of the election of Old Testament Israel has sometimes been used as a model for more modern exceptionalism. The USA’s nineteenth-century myth of ‘manifest destiny’ was based upon the Founders’ understanding of America having a peculiar role in God’s

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<sup>12</sup> *Herem* is the Hebrew word often translated ‘devote to the Lord’ or ‘utterly destroy’. It is a technical term referring to the utter and irrevocable dedication of people or objects to the deity, which may or may not involve destruction. The nations closest to the people of Israel were designated for *herem* (e.g. Deut. 20:16–18). For a much more detailed discussion, see John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton, *The Lost World of the Israelite Conquest: Covenant, Retribution and the Fate of the Canaanites* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> For example, the website of the Alliance for Peace and Freedom says, ‘We stand for a Europe of sovereign nations in which the independent states work together on a confederated basis to address the great challenges of our time and to protect, celebrate and promote our common Christian values and European cultural heritage.’ (<<https://apfeurope.com/>> [accessed 31 December 2019]).

<sup>14</sup> An example of this was seen in the British National Party’s campaign poster for the 2009 European Elections. Following a refusal by the Church of England to endorse BNP policy, the party produced a poster quoting John 15:20 ‘If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you’, alongside the slogan, ‘What Would Jesus Do?’ (Timothy Peace, ‘Religion and Populism in Britain: An infertile breeding ground?’ in *Saving the people*, ed. by Nadia Marzouki and others, pp.95-108 (p.108)). A second example can be found in the use of the image of Martin Luther by the NPD during German elections in 2017 and 2019. Alongside the image were the words, ‘Ich würde NPD wählen. Ich könnte nicht anders.’ (I would vote NPD. I cannot do otherwise.) Source: Religion News <<https://religionnews.com/2019/10/09/campaign-posters-in-luther-country-raise-specter-of-anti-semitism/>> [accessed 31 December 2019].

<sup>15</sup> This is a matter of public record, although Britain First’s website now appears to have removed all such photographs. Some examples can be viewed at <<https://www.indy100.com/article/britain-firsts-christian-patrol-has-ended-very-badly-for-them--W1ntKsLpLW>> [accessed 31 December 2019].

<sup>16</sup> Source: Politico <<https://www.politico.eu/article/brexit-europe-british-exceptionalism-drove-vote-but-eu-media-arent-buying-it/>> [accessed 1 January 2019].



purposes.<sup>17</sup> In the time of the Puritans, Israel's vocation and destiny became mapped onto the New World through the language of the 'New Israel'.<sup>18</sup> In his lecture of 21 March 1630, delivered in Southampton to a group of travellers bound for Boston, the Puritan John Winthrop referred to these New World colonists as 'a city on a hill'.<sup>19</sup> Such language has since passed into the political mainstream in the USA. 'City on a hill' was used of the USA by John F Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, Barack Obama; and others have also asserted American exceptionalism in more general terms.<sup>20</sup> White American exceptionalism is today being echoed by the American alt-right.<sup>21</sup>

It will be apparent by now that the biblical themes we have identified which might appear to lend support to modern nationalism all centre on the Israel of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament — the (apparent) themes of ethnic purity, exceptional vocation, priority over ethnically 'other' nations, and possession of the land.

But is the use of scripture in these ways truly in line with its divine purpose and grand narrative? It has long been known that the Bible can be (ab)used to support many ideologies. How are we to detect when hermeneutical abuse is occurring? How are Christians to respond to these nationalistic movements in a biblically faithful way?

It is for others to offer a positive theology of political engagement, and many great thinkers have done so from across the ecclesial spectrum. What I am attempting here, as a biblical specialist rather than a political theologian, is something more modest — to offer a challenge to the abuse of the biblical trope of Israel (as land and as nation) in defence of ethnic nationalism.

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<sup>17</sup> Edward Bennett, 'Colonialism and Neocolonialism', in *Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy I*, ed. by Alexander DeConde and others (New York: Scribner, 2002), pp. 285-293.

<sup>18</sup> Roger Chapman, 'American Exceptionalism', in *Culture Wars in America: An Encyclopedia of Issues, Viewpoints, and Voices*, ed. by Roger Chapman and James Ciment, 2nd edn. (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 25.

<sup>19</sup> This, of course, is a quotation from Matthew 5:14, where Israel's vocation as light to the nations is applied to followers of Jesus.

<sup>20</sup> Trevor McCrisken, 'Exceptionalism', in *Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy II*, ed. by Alexander DeConde and others (New York: Scribner, 2002), pp. 63-80. Dick Cheney and his daughter have published a book entitled 'Exceptional: Why the World Needs a Powerful America'. On page 5 (in an introductory chapter entitled, 'Yes, we are exceptional') they write, 'Our children need to know that they are citizens of the most powerful, good and honorable nation in the history of mankind, *the exceptional nation*.' (Dick Cheney and Liz Cheney, *Exceptional: Why the World Needs a Powerful America* (New York: Threshold, 2015)).

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, the speech given by Richard Spence, president of the white supremacist think tank the National Policy Institute (NPI), given on 21 November 2016, following the election of Donald Trump. 'To be white is to be a striver, a crusader, an explorer and a conqueror. We build; we produce; we go upward [...] They [other racial groups] need us, and not the other way around [...] Within the very blood in our veins as children of the sun lies the potential for greatness. That is the great struggle we are called to. We are not meant to live in shame and weakness and disgrace [...] We were meant to overcome [...] [America] was, until this past generation, a white country, designed for ourselves and our posterity. It is our creation. It is our inheritance. And it belongs to us.' Source: The Atlantic <<https://youtu.be/1o6-bi3jlxk>> [accessed 31 December 2019].

The word ‘Israel’ refers to many historical loci within scripture (including, but not limited to, a person, a people, a land, and two different nation states). It also occupies a number of theological loci within the narrative. None of these is in direct continuity with any nation state or people group today. This is not to say that the histories of Israel have nothing to say to twenty-first century Christians, of course. But it is far too simplistic to try to map our own setting onto Israel’s history.<sup>22</sup>

What is needed is a close reading of the grand narrative of the themes we have identified: ethnic particularity, land ownership, and divine election.

## **Land, Bloodline and Vocation: towards an Old Testament Theology**

To that end, then, I would like to gesture towards a biblical-theological reading of these themes, which are closely linked. While they are no doubt present in the Old Testament, there is also a strong counter-theme of porous borders, good Canaanites and unexpected meetings. We will examine these within the Old Testament and then identify how they track into the New Testament.

While the story of Israel begins with Abraham, of course, the purpose of God for humanity is set out in Genesis 1. ‘Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion’ (Genesis 1:28).<sup>23</sup> This idea of filling the earth, addressed as it is to the man and the woman who have just been identified as image-bearers, is indicative of the human vocation to be representatives of God throughout every part of the world — taking his glory to the ends of the earth, as the prophets put it.<sup>24</sup> This vocation is reiterated to Noah in Genesis 9:1. It then starts to be fulfilled in the table of nations in

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<sup>22</sup> This has not stopped people from trying to do so. Willie Jennings provides a number of examples of such ‘mapping’ in the hymns of Isaac Watts, including these three verses from a hymn based upon Psalm 60:

“Lord has thou cast the nation off?/ Must we for ever mourn?/ Wilt thou indulge immortal wrath?/  
Shall mercy ne’er return?

Great Britain shakes beneath thy stroke/ And dreads they threat’ning hand;/ O heal the island thou  
hast broke,/ Confirm the wav’ring land.

Our troops shall gain a wide renown/ By thine assisting hand./ ‘Tis God that treads the mighty  
down,/ And makes the feeble stand.”

Quoted in Willie James Jennings, *The Christian imagination: Theology and the origins of race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 259.

Oliver O’Donovan writes, ‘There has been no lack of interest in the beckoning fruitfulness of Israel’s political categories.’ O’Donovan refers to WCC documents about shalom, the Protestant movement for jubilee, and the Catholic-centred theology of liberation, before continuing, ‘What was needed was an architectonic hermeneutic, which would locate political reflection on [the politically significant events under examination] within an undertaking that had its centre of gravity in the Gospels.’ (Oliver O’Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the roots of political theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 22).

<sup>23</sup> Biblical quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. Habakkuk 2:14 or Isaiah 24:16.

Genesis 10, and then again — admittedly with a firm shove from God — in Genesis 11 with the scattering of the nations after the tower of Babel.

All of this, we should note, takes place before the call of Abraham, and therefore is independent of the blood line of Israel, or of the Sinai covenant. It applies equally to all people. Moreover, the diversity and equal worth of the created peoples is clear from the Genesis accounts. As Doug Gay writes,

The primal *us* has sexual difference and [egalitarianism]<sup>25</sup> inscribed within it here [...] Genesis offers to the Jewish and Christian imagination the narrative basis for a rich celebration of sociality which is rooted and grounded in a single humanity, a single human race, all of whom are made in the divine image.<sup>26</sup>

We should regard the opening chapters of Genesis as having a particular privilege; something approaching an ethical normativity. They show us, in some way, how life is *intended* to be. The extent to which we can re-create this prelapsarian innocence is clearly limited (no one is seriously suggesting that we stop wearing clothes, and few vegetarians derive their ethic from the Genesis accounts). Nonetheless, this glimpse of divine intention for human vocation is very significant, and should provide a hermeneutical control for the narratives that follow.

In Genesis 12 we come to the call of Abraham, which right at the outset includes a reference to ‘all the nations’ being blessed — or counting themselves blessed<sup>27</sup> — through Abraham’s obedience. Here, alongside some ‘exceptionalist’ language, ‘I will bless those who bless you’, we see its purpose: the blessing of the nations.

This expression of the special, chosen, status of Israel as a responsibility to bless the other nations is equally apparent many generations later, when God makes the covenant with the people of Israel at Mount Sinai.

If you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. (Exodus 19:5–6)

Priests, we recall, operate for the benefit of the people, representing them before the deity. If Israel is to be a priestly nation, then their vocation is to operate for the benefit of non-Israelites.

Now we must interrogate the attitude of the text to the Canaanites and other pagan nations. Within the exodus account, the departing people group

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<sup>25</sup> Gay uses the word ‘complementarity’, but explains in a footnote that he means this in the sense of egalitarianism. I have here chosen to use the word which I believe will better express his intention in the current climate, where complementarianism has rather different connotations.

<sup>26</sup> Doug Gay, *Honey from the Lion: Christian Theology and the Ethics of Nationalism* (London: SCM Press, 2013), p. 40.

<sup>27</sup> The question hangs upon the translation of the *niphal* form of the Hebrew verb *bārach*.

includes many of non-Israelite origin (Exod. 12:38). And provision was made for them in the law: non-Israelites were entitled to observe the Sabbath,<sup>28</sup> to participate in the Passover once circumcised,<sup>29</sup> and were present at the covenant renewal.<sup>30</sup>

William Ford encourages us to draw a distinction between the attitudes to the Canaanites as a *category* — generally viewed as a warning — and the attitude in Genesis and Joshua to *individual* Canaanites, which is often quite positive.<sup>31</sup> So, although the Israelites are told not to marry the Canaanites (Deut. 7:3), there are many stories of women from pagan nations marrying into Israel. Rahab (the Canaanite) and Ruth (the Moabite) are two examples, each admitted to the nation on the basis of her statement of faith:

The LORD your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below (Josh 2:11).

Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. (Ruth 1:16)

It is striking how completely these women become integrated into the nation. It is well known that Ruth and Rahab both find themselves in the family tree of David, and consequently of Jesus (Matthew 1:5). Rahab's integration is further emphasised. She is brought into the *heart* of the nation (Josh 6:25: Hebrew *qereb*, meaning 'innards'). And the red cord hanging in her window, and the instruction that her whole family is to take shelter with her all night on pain of being destroyed, are strongly reminiscent of the Passover event that took place among the Israelites a generation earlier.

Emphasis on faith rather than ethnicity is found in many other places. In Isaiah 19:18–25, the prophet foretells a day when there will be altars to the Lord in Egypt, Assyria and Israel, with highways joining the three centres for the purpose of pilgrim travel. Assyria and Egypt, of course, were the two great nations which had oppressed Israel.

In the time of Joshua, the Gibeonites (also known as the Hivites) were one of the nations subject to the *herem*.<sup>32</sup> Yet they managed to trick Joshua into making a peace treaty with them, in a passage which is surely not intended to be any indictment on Joshua's foolishness so much as a commendation of their faith. They, like Rahab, live in the *qereb* (innards) of the nation; they also make a statement of faith, 'Your servants have come because of the name of the LORD your God' (9:9). Further, the word for covenant, *berit*, is used five times in a few verses; a *Leitwort* to draw the reader's attention to the way that the Gibeonites have manoeuvred their way

<sup>28</sup> Exod. 20:10.

<sup>29</sup> Exod. 12:48–9; Num. 15:15–16.

<sup>30</sup> Josh. 8:33,35; cf. Deut. 16:10–14, 26:10–11, 27:4–14; Exod. 12:43–49, 20:10.

<sup>31</sup> William Ford, 'The Challenge of the Canaanites', *Tyndale Bulletin* 68 (2017): 161–184.

<sup>32</sup> cf. Deut 20:17. See also Footnote 12.

into covenant blessings. Indeed, in 11:19, the other nations (designated for the *herem*, according to Deuteronomy 20) are censured for not having sued for peace as the Gibeonites did. The ethnic boundaries of Israel are far more porous than we might initially imagine.<sup>33</sup>

The geographical borders of Israel are ambiguous, too. Compare the vast territory claimed in Deuteronomy 11:24, or Joshua 1:4, with the more sober assessment in Numbers 3:1–12. Nor did Israel ever unambiguously own the land; it remained the property of God (Lev 25:23, cf. Ps 24:1).

Also ambiguous is the biblical testimony of how complete the conquest was. Compare the first half of Joshua 10:20, ‘When Joshua and the Israelites had finished inflicting a very great slaughter on them, until they were wiped out...’, with the second half of the same verse, ‘... and when the survivors had entered into the fortified towns’. Or compare Judges 1:8, ‘The people of Judah fought against Jerusalem and took it. They put it to the sword and set the city on fire,’ with verse 21 of the same chapter, ‘The Benjaminites did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem; so the Jebusites have lived in Jerusalem among the Benjaminites to this day.’<sup>34</sup>

Textual ambiguity of this sort is known as *polyphony*; it is as if there are two or more voices in debate with one another.<sup>35</sup> Polyphony is a way of testing truth, of approaching a rich, complex subject with nuance. Perhaps the ambiguity around the completeness of the conquest reflects a theological claim in dialogue with a more historical account. Indeed, this would be borne out by the angel of the Lord with the drawn sword whom Joshua meets (Joshua 5:13–6:5) who simultaneously gives Joshua instructions for the conquest of Jericho (historical strand) while asserting that he is not on Israel’s side (theological strand).

## Land, Bloodline, Vocation in the New Testament

Let me pull out the threads we have identified so far. God’s assertion of human vocation, cast in terms of royal dominion, long pre-dates the historical election of Israel. There is textual concurrence between the exceptionalism of Israel and its mission to bless the nations. There is an

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<sup>33</sup> This theme within the Deuteronomic writings has been ably set out by my colleague David Firth in: David Firth, *Including the Stranger: Foreigners in the Former Prophets* (Downers Grove: Apollos, 2019).

<sup>34</sup> These and other examples are set out in Paul Copan and Matthew Flannagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide? Coming to terms with the justice of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), p. 90.

<sup>35</sup> This is not a comment about the sources of the text, but reflects a decision to notice the intentional ambiguity which the final redactor has permitted to remain. It was Mikhail Bakhtin who highlighted the importance of polyphony to literary theorists (Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.)). Another good example of biblical polyphony concerns Nineveh. The astonishing story of Jonah, demonstrating God’s tenderness towards the pagan city, while the book of Nahum is a polemic against it.

ambiguity concerning attitudes to the Canaanites and other pagan nations; and membership of the covenant community can be claimed through faith as well as through blood. There is polyphony around the geographical boundaries of the land and the completeness of the conquest.

The New Testament shows that Jesus is instituting a new kinship, which is stronger than any pre-existing ties of family or nation. Thus, Jesus described his followers as having an allegiance to him that trumped allegiance to family (Luke 9:59; 14:26; Matt 19:29), and he was unequivocal that it is not possible to serve two masters (Matt 6:24). In response to Jesus' commission to take the gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8) — which reflects the creation mandate of Genesis 1:28 — Paul takes the gospel to Jew and to Gentile. For both these groups, allegiance to God is now of pre-eminent importance. The book of Revelation addresses groups of these Christians in time of persecution, showing them that faithfulness to God precludes faithfulness to an abusive state — Rome, in this instance.<sup>36</sup>

In order to consider how the physical realities of land and nationhood map from the Old Testament to the New, we need to understand that the entire mission and vocation of Israel has been funnelled into the life of Jesus Christ.<sup>37</sup> Then, after his ascension, this same mission and vocation is entrusted to the Church. But what is the Church, and how does it relate to Israel? One of the key passages to consider is Romans 11.<sup>38</sup>

If some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches.

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<sup>36</sup> A useful discussion of this matter may be found in Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire: reading Revelation then and now* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999).

<sup>37</sup> See, for example N. T. Wright, *Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul, 1978–2013* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013).

<sup>38</sup> This discussion assumes that both supercessionism and two-covenant theology/dispensationalism have been discarded as non-viable interpretive stances. (Two-covenant theology and dispensationalism are not identical but share sufficient features to be grouped together for our purposes here.) I do not consider that either of these approaches does justice to Paul's argument in Romans 11 or elsewhere, and they both have dangerous consequences when interpreted in the modern world. The issue is this: is there more than one 'people of God'? The overwhelming evidence of both Testaments is that the answer is 'no'. However, *supercessionism* allows only one people of God at a time; first Israel and then the Church. While this might be supported from certain readings of the book of Hebrews, Romans 9–11 clearly show that Israel is the root that sustains the church, and that Israel has not been utterly and permanently rejected — because God's gifts and his call are irrevocable — and that the hardening of Israel is only temporary. By contrast, *two-covenant theology/dispensationalism* consider there to be two peoples of God in the present age. Although this is very influential in parts of the worldwide church, it too is hard to sustain with a careful analysis of Paul's writing. For Paul the great mystery of the gospel is that it transcends former divisions, particularly those based on race or nationality (Eph. 3:1–6; Gal. 3:27–29). God has made one church out of the two. Dispensationalism has no adequate answer to this question. Moreover, it fuels a dangerous assumption that the nation state of Israel today is in direct theological continuity with the covenant people of God in the Hebrew Bible.

The theological perspective of in-grafting which I refer to here is also known as 'Enlargement theology'. See Alex Jacob, *The Case for Enlargement Theology*, 2nd edn (Baton Rouge: Glory to God Publications, 2010). The interested reader is referred to this book for a much more thorough analysis of replacement theology, two-covenant theology, and enlargement theology in the light of Romans 9–11.

If you do boast, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you. (Rom 11:17–18)

The Church is composed primarily of that directly continuous part of Israel which acknowledges Jesus as the Christ; and into this, Gentile believers are grafted.

Alongside this continuity, however, is the radical discontinuity achieved by the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. The Church is now the people of the age to come, and therefore the physical categories of land and blood-line have now become eschatological categories. The world is the Lord's, and membership of the 'nation' is now wholly by faith. What the Old Testament hinted, the New Testament has writ large.<sup>39</sup>

This is announced in the gospels. In Matthew, John the Baptist denounces the Pharisees, 'Do not presume to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our ancestor"; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham' (Matt 3:9). In similar vein in the fourth gospel, Pharisees tell Jesus, 'Abraham is our father,' and Jesus replies, 'If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did' (John 8:39).

This in-grafting is a key idea to help us to understand how the physical, tangible events of Israel relate to the Church today. The theological stories of 'land' or 'bloodline' have not become spiritualised — by which I mean that they have not weakened into ethereal other-worldly categories, which might suggest a latent Platonism or Gnosticism in our theology. Rather they have become *concretised* into an eschatological reality, which is none the less real for being at present intangible. What this means, however, is that the physical nature that they have occupied in the Old Testament is no longer in force, pending the eschaton. Therefore, they do not persist in categories which can serve modern nationalism. Israel's history has become our history, but not in a way that permits us to appropriate the 'land' or 'bloodline' narrative.

But more than this, there is a scandal to the Gentile in-grafting which Gentile Christians (of whom I am one) are liable to overlook. *We* are the ones who have been grafted in; *we* are the unexpected guests at the eschatological banquet. Too often we have assumed our place at the table as if entitled to be there. As Willie Jennings reminds us, urging us to 'take our positions as Gentile readers of the Jesus story':<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> I am grateful to my colleague Revd Dr Stephen Finamore for a conversation which helped me to sharpen my thinking for part of this section.

<sup>40</sup> Jennings, *Christian imagination*, p. 259.

We are in the story [despite]<sup>41</sup> a prohibiting word to his disciples, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans” (Matt 10:5b). We are in the story in the form of humble requests, for example, as the centurion who, recognising, even if through the lens of military hierarchy, the distance between himself and Jesus, asks for Jesus to heal his servant (Luke 7:1–10). We are also in the story as desperate pleas for help, as with the Canaanite woman (Matt 15:21–28), which releases for us the dynamic of Israel and the Gentiles, yet with a profound difference.<sup>42</sup>

This is not to say that we are permitted into the Church under sufferance, or that blessing of the Gentiles is ‘plan B’. (Remember Genesis 12.) But it does behove an attitude of humility rather than one of entitlement, as the apostle urges, ‘Do not boast over the branches [...] remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you’ (Romans 11:17–18).

## **The Bible and Modern Nationalism: An Unholy Alliance**

We have seen that the potentially nationalistic motifs of bloodline, land and vocation are all highly complex themes within the Old Testament. Then, when they move to the New Testament, we discover that they were, in any case, only symbols and shadows of the great work that is begun in Christ. Membership of the people of God is now by faith; the whole earth is the land of Christ; the vocation of the people of God is for the blessing of those who are still outside the covenant. Moreover, those of us who are Gentile Christians should recognise that we are in the family as a late arrival, a welcome guest. There is therefore nothing in these themes which offers genuine support for ethnic nationalism.

Why should biblical tropes be so fertile a breeding ground for nationalistic sentiment? Adrian Hastings, and building upon his work Willie Jennings, offers a disturbing explanation, which relates to the development of national identities in the wake of the availability of vernacular translations of the Bible. First, Hastings:

For the development of nationhood from one or more ethnicities, by far the most important and widely present factor is that of an extensively used vernacular literature [...] A nation may precede or follow a state of its own but it is certainly assisted by it to a greater self-consciousness. Most such developments are stimulated by the ideal of a nation-state and of the world as a society of nations originally ‘imagined’[...] through the mirror of the Bible, Europe’s primary textbook.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> sic ‘through’.

<sup>42</sup> Jennings, *Christian imagination*, p. 262.

<sup>43</sup> Adrian Hastings, *The construction of nationhood: Ethnicity, religion and nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 2-3.



Intensifying the effect of this is the fact that the Authorised Version of the English Bible became highly influential in shaping the English language — and along with the language — the thought-patterns of English-speaking people. And the ideology with which the Authorised Version was translated was to bolster the position of King James I of England by means of bolstering the episcopacy.<sup>44</sup> As Willie Jennings argues, this is directly oppositional to faithful scriptural interpretation. ‘Once biblical literacy began centrally to aid the building of a national consciousness, the Bible and its important pedagogical trajectory for forming faithful Christian identity became compromised.’<sup>45</sup>

## Reading as Baptists

The ethnic nationalism of the far right is a dangerous phenomenon which is threatening the peace, and perhaps the stability, of many parts of Europe and the Americas at present, including my own nation. It is deeply to be regretted that proponents of this ideology have sometimes imagined that they can find support for their views in Scripture. But this provides opportunity as well as threat. It gives the Church the chance to speak a counter-narrative of inclusion, welcome, generosity and peaceableness. The misapplication of biblical tropes and themes may — ironically — give us purchase to address a group which would otherwise be outside our orbit.

Our Baptist distinctive of the separation of church and state helps us here, because it reminds us that the goals, methods and divine vocation of these institutions are entirely different and irreconcilable. As Nigel Wright says, the Church is

a community called into being by the redemptive activity of God in the power of the Holy Spirit which is orientated towards a kingdom that is not of this world.<sup>46</sup>

In contrast, the State is

a limited, this-worldly reality with a constant tendency to self-exaltation. [... It is] a fallen power in possession of immense coercive potential [which] has the greatest difficulty in minding the things of God and seeking God’s kingdom in any shape or form.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The new translation would be ‘revised by the bishops, then given [...] to the Privy Council, in effect a central censorship committee with which the government could ensure that its stamp was on the text, no deviationism or subversion allowed; and finally to James himself, whose hostility to any whiff of radicalism [...] had been clear enough. And this ferociously episcopal and monarchist Bible was to be the only translation that could be read in church.’ (Adam Nicolson, *Power and glory: Jacobean England and the making of the King James Bible* (London: HarperCollins UK, 2004), p.60).

<sup>45</sup> Jennings, *Christian imagination*, p. 209.

<sup>46</sup> Nigel Wright, *Free Church, Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2011), p. 211.

<sup>47</sup> Wright, *Free Church, Free State*, pp. 211-2.

In other words, the Church has no business endorsing a political party, and what the party can offer the church — political power, influence, freedom — comes at too high a price. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world but lose their soul?

Unchecked, the threats presented by the far right are manifold. They may begin with attitudes of superiority and condescension, the victimisation or marginalisation of minority groups, othering and abjection. Unchecked, this may grow into violence: structural, criminal, or state-sponsored. We are surely not so far removed from the wars of the twentieth century that we have forgotten how this could end. And it is a real danger that we in the Church could become complicit with this. As Bernard Green argues, in his history of European Baptists during the rise of the Third Reich, ‘The propaganda machine was able to manipulate people not least by using religious code words that rang positively in the hearts and minds of people of faith.’<sup>48</sup>

It is a pressing task for the Baptist Church today to resist such an appropriation of the word of God.

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<sup>48</sup> Bernard Green, *European Baptists and the Third Reich* (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 2008), p. iii.

## Leaving the Gathered Community: Porous Borders and Dispersed Practices

Mark Ord

A Baptist ecclesiology of the gathered community coupled with a characteristic concern for mission has led to a dynamic of gathering and sending within British Baptist worship. This engenders a demarcation between the church and the world, and a sense of a substantial boundary between the two. In this article I explore the metaphor of the boundary between the church and the world. In doing so, I examine recent theological proposals that present formation as taking place within the worship of the gathered community for the purpose of mission. I propose a picture of the boundary as porous and its formation necessarily occurring, both within the church and the world, through worship and witness. I argue that church–world relations are complex and cannot be described as ‘one way’ — from worship to witness. The article concludes by pointing to the need for sacramental practices for the church in dispersed mode, for example hospitality, as well as for the church gathered, for example baptism and communion. This implies recognising that there are graced practices of the church and indwelt sacramentality which find their rightful place in the context of witness in the world, by leaving the gathered community.

### Keywords

Baptist ecclesiology; sacraments; mission; practices

### Baptist Ecclesiology: Local, Missional, Individualistic

Baptists have long been characterised by ecclesiological concerns for both the local congregation and mission. In his book, *Baptist Theology*, Stephen Holmes states: ‘There are two foci around which Baptist life is lived: the individual believer and the local church’.<sup>1</sup> These are classic concerns for the visible church, ‘gathered by covenant’,<sup>2</sup> or as Thomas Helwys expressed it at the start of the seventeenth century, ‘A company of faithful people, separated from the world by the word and Spirit of God [...] upon their own confession of faith and sins.’<sup>3</sup> Mission does not have quite the same pedigree. Yet Holmes observes that ‘it is difficult to think of another Christian tradition that has so uniformly seen mission as being so central to its vision of the life

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen R. Holmes, *Baptist Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Helwys, cited in Nigel G. Wright, *Free Church, Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2005), p. 56.

of the church [...] The missionary impulse runs deep in Baptist identity'.<sup>4</sup> While mission may have arrived on the Baptist scene a little later, it has proved a robust identity marker. From the earlier mobilisation of Baptists through, for example, William Carey and Johann Gerhard Oncken, mission has evolved from a colonial endeavour of the church to being redefined in post-colonial terms as *missio Dei*. Baptist thought, if not always practice, has kept pace with these changes viewing mission as an 'attribute of God'.<sup>5</sup> Holmes, following David Bosch, has argued, 'Mission is one of the perfections of God, as adequate a description of who he is as love, omnipotence or eternity.'<sup>6</sup> This terminology is prevalent in Baptist spirituality, theology and institutional life. 'For Baptists [...] everything is read through a lens of mission.'<sup>7</sup> Andy Goodliff has observed that the 'phrase "Missionary God" became embedded in Baptist God talk from the mid-1990s onwards [...] The underlying argument being [...] if we confess God as Missionary then the union and the churches must also be missionary'.<sup>8</sup>

Mission, like congregationalism, bore the marks of a 'classically Baptist individualism',<sup>9</sup> and shared in the voluntarism that has characterised all of Baptist life from the tradition's beginnings. Over the first century-and-a-half of Baptist history the emphasis on personal choice and responsibility led believers first to covenant together in local congregations. Then, in time, Baptists came to own a sense of responsibility for the world around them, which led them to seek the conversion of others. Baptists, from Thomas Helwys and John Smyth through to Andrew Fuller and William Carey, rooted their vision of church and mission in the biblical and theological soil of personal salvation and responsibility. At the same time, it is important in the developing argument of this article to recall that they were also steeped in the cultural and intellectual currents of their time. Early congregationalism was deeply influenced by John Locke's descriptions of voluntary societies.<sup>10</sup> Carey 'unashamedly created a theological rationale from the commercial sector', when he borrowed the model of the Joint Stock Company from early capitalism to enable Christians to 'use means' in the cause of evangelism.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Holmes, *Baptist Theology*, pp. 142-3.

<sup>5</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), p. 390.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen R. Holmes, 'Trinitarian Missiology: Towards a Theology of God as Missionary', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 8, no. 1 (2006): 89.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Goodliff, *Shaped for Service: Ministerial Formation and Virtue Ethics* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2017), p. 230.

<sup>8</sup> Andy Goodliff, "'Missionary God": The Place of Mission Among British Baptists', in *Gathering Disciples: Essays in Honour of Christopher J. Ellis*, ed. by M. Blythe and A. Goodliff (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2017), p. 234.

<sup>9</sup> Holmes, *Baptist Theology*, 142.

<sup>10</sup> See Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2003), pp. 40-45; and William H. Brackney, *Christian Voluntarism: Theology and Praxis* (Grand Rapids Michigan: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 33-36, 4-46.

<sup>11</sup> Brackney, *Christian Voluntarism*, p. 46.

Charles Taylor, in his book, *A Secular Age*, has charted the emergence of ‘the human agent of modernity’ as a major factor in the complex and convoluted process of disenchantment visible within Western culture. He notes that the individual who emerged in this period had a sense of having both the capacity and the task to ‘make over’ society. He also highlights the role played by those churches

where one was not simply a member in virtue of birth, but where one had to join by answering a personal call. This in turn helped to give force to a conception of society as founded on covenant, and hence as ultimately constituted by the decision of free individuals.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Church: Gathered and Sent**

The ecclesiological images of being gathered (ekklesia) and being sent (missio) have exercised a formative influence on Baptist self-consciousness. How this is experienced has evolved over the years as contexts have changed. Being gathered from a Christendom world is different to being gathered from, and sent to, a post-Christendom context. In both these contexts, the notion of being separate is a constant for Baptists and so, therefore, is the image of the boundary. However, the priority of gathering in the Baptist imagination is suggested by the fact that over time Baptists came to subsume their missional objectives within the act of gathering. Christopher Ellis has pointed out how Baptists shared the tendency of evangelicals in the nineteenth century to lean ‘towards a programmatic and evangelistic use of worship [...] as a means of encouraging a faith commitment on the part of the worshippers’.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Baptist practices of the Lord’s Supper and Baptism have been shaped with outreach in mind.<sup>14</sup>

Along with these historical characteristics of Baptist worship, a number of Baptist theologians have followed Keith Jones in registering a preference for the language of ‘gathering’, rather than the ‘gathered community’.<sup>15</sup> This is a promising development as it stresses that the local church is not ‘formed by the will and choice of those individuals who constitute it’. Rather, it is the ‘community through which the Spirit gathers them into [...] the communion of God’s own life’.<sup>16</sup> Such language is also an advance on the traditional terminology which ‘has a feel of the complete,

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<sup>12</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007), p. 155.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher J. Ellis, ‘Spirituality in Mission: Gathering and Grace’, in *Under the Rule of Christ: Dimensions of Baptist Spirituality*, ed. by Paul Fiddes (Oxford: Regents Park College, 2008), p. 181.

<sup>14</sup> Holmes, *Baptist Theology*, p. 146.

<sup>15</sup> Keith Jones, ‘Towards a Model of Mission for Gathering, Intentional, Convictional Koinonia’, *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, 4, no. 2 (January 2004): 5.

<sup>16</sup> Wright, *Free Church, Free State*, p. 57.

the settled, the static community about it'.<sup>17</sup> In distinction to this the gathering community has 'an open attitude to those who are seekers'.<sup>18</sup> In both the gathered and the gathering church models, however, the congregation persists in the Baptist imaginary as the place of God's activity, cast now in evangelistic terms. Dispersal, or *missio*, serves as preparation for the gospel, the occasion for bringing people into church to hear the gospel and be converted.

More recent theological developments have put the emphasis on what happens to believers, rather than seekers, in the time of gathering. The Virtue Ethics developed by Stanley Hauerwas has underscored the crucial role of the practices of the gathered community in shaping Christians to be authentic witnesses to the gospel. Hauerwas has been influenced by Alasdair McIntyre's rediscovery of the role of tradition, community, and narrative for producing character. Several prominent Baptist theologians, in the UK and the USA, have used this focus on liturgical practices to reverse the tendency to prioritise mission over worship in the gathered setting. They note that often worship is viewed 'instrumentally [...] to facilitate conversions, rather than to glorify God', but propose instead that it should be viewed as a suite of practices that shape distinctive disciples of Christ, who are able to live counter-culturally and be effective witnesses to Christ within secular societies.<sup>19</sup> John Colwell, consciously channelling Hauerwas, states: 'The Church must continue to relate its story, shape its worship [...] and allow that worship simultaneously to shape every aspect of its living within the world.'<sup>20</sup>

While Baptists do not have a set liturgy, the churches within the Baptist Union of Great Britain have been resourced and encouraged to view this model of 'gathering and sending' as a paradigm for Christian worship. 'In worship we are gathered to hear and receive the Word of God [...] and we are sent in mission to share him with others.'<sup>21</sup> The practices of worship 'enable us to prepare for mission'.<sup>22</sup> It is the difference of gathering, what happens in worship, that equips members for being sent. Alongside this, worship itself is viewed as being a counter-cultural witness to an onlooking world.

Our being the Church is simply a matter of identity through Baptism and the Lord's Supper as a worshipping people, as a people being formed and transformed

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<sup>17</sup> Keith Jones, 'Towards a Model of Mission', p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Ellis, 'Spirituality in Mission', p. 181.

<sup>20</sup> John E. Colwell, *Living the Christian Story* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), p. 168.

<sup>21</sup> Christopher J. Ellis and Myra Blyth, *Gathering for Worship: Patterns and Prayers for the Community of Disciples* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2005), p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

by the story we indwell, as a people whose very existence within the world is a witness to Christ.<sup>23</sup>

Attention to the formative impact of Christian worship shifts the focus towards the shaping of witnesses, rather than towards the conversion of those who have not explicitly confessed faith in Jesus. This focus on practices sets the task of mission outside the church, to a watching world or within the series of engagements where those formed in gathered worship witness to Christ. The church becomes characterised as a polis, or a public, with its own practices and social ethic, and Christians are imagined as ‘resident aliens’ in the broader culture. It is clear that the existence of the Church as a particular social entity implies some form of boundary: the church cannot be ‘an endless plain’.<sup>24</sup> Such a theology, however, can convey a pronounced sense of separation from, and dichotomy with, the world, and such talk ‘quickly slides towards speaking of the church-world divide as sharp, external and spatial’.<sup>25</sup>

The issue, though, is not so much that theologians like Hauerwas and Colwell articulate a strong sense of church as bounded from wider society, it is rather that the practices focused on within this ecclesial turn shape something closer to what Charles Taylor calls the ‘Social Imaginary’. By this he intends to conjure the ‘inarticulate understanding’ we have of the world. This ‘background understanding’, or perhaps this ‘feel for the world’, is largely carried in practices rather than ideas and ‘can never adequately be expressed in the form of explicit doctrines, because of its very unlimited and indefinite nature’.<sup>26</sup> My contention is that the sense, or feel, of the church as a reality bounded from the world, while not always explicit in its ‘espoused theology’, is carried within the practices, the ‘operant theology’, of a church that views itself as gathered from the world.

## Mission as Boundary Crossing

Once the world and the church are imaginatively and effectively bounded and separated, John Flett observes that historically ‘mission functions as the bridge between the two’.<sup>27</sup> It is here that we can start to discern the problems with ecclesial practices that develop a keen sense of the boundary between the church and the wider world. Firstly, this suggests another metaphor in relation to mission — that of the bridge. These two metaphors together,

<sup>23</sup> John E. Colwell, ‘Mission as Ontology’, *Baptist Ministers Journal*, 295 (2006): 11.

<sup>24</sup> R. Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 160.

<sup>25</sup> Ryan A. Newson, *Inhabiting the World: Identity, Politics, and Theology in Radical Baptist Perspective* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2018), p. 94.

<sup>26</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 173.

<sup>27</sup> John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), p. 3.

boundary and bridge, (in)form an understanding of mission as transmission from one region to another. The missionary posture is one of delivery or conveyance. Mission is delivering a message, servicing a need; it is responding to deficit out of fullness. In this model of, or feel for mission there is little room for receptivity, which has historically been the Christian stance in worship. Michael Stroope, the Baptist missiologist, has offered a critique of mission as a practice that was birthed in modernity and is decisively shackled to this paradigm. He states that it is characterised by an understanding of ‘mission as one-way deliverables’.<sup>28</sup> He urges a rediscovery of the Church’s ‘ancient language that will enable a more vibrant and appropriate encounter between the church and the world’.<sup>29</sup> Christian Scharen has brought a similar critique to proponents of virtue ethics, such as Hauerwas — and we may add Colwell — who view worship as forming participants for witness in the world. He cautions against accepting a ‘linear model’ of relating worship to mission, or ethics, according to which, ‘public worship forms one as a Christian, who then lives this out in public works of justice and mercy’.<sup>30</sup> Such a model does not account for the complex and multi-site dynamic of formation in pluralist societies, where Christians live much of their lives ‘with other configurations of people according to other institutionally patterned ideals, practices, rules and regulations’.<sup>31</sup> Both Stroope and Scharen are, in differing ways, looking for ‘an authentic faith exchange that converts and transforms in both directions’.<sup>32</sup>

John Flett offers a theological critique of the bridge metaphor for mission, which can legitimately be extended to that of the boundary. He notes that ‘missio’ finds its theological moorings in the doctrine of the trinity, rather than in ecclesiology. He engages with Karl Barth’s theology to underscore that God *is* on mission as God *is* in God’s inner relations. The sending of the Son and the proceeding of the Spirit correspond to how God is within the mystery, and event, of divine being. That is to say, there is no ‘second step’ of mission in the world for God. Equally the church does not have its being within its gathered reality or practices and then, in a secondary fashion, go out on mission to the world. ‘Mission is not a second step in addition to some other more proper being of the church.’<sup>33</sup> The church cannot be two different creatures: in worship receptive and in mission transmissive.

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<sup>28</sup> Michael Stroope, *Transcending Mission: The Eclipse of a Modern Tradition* (London: Apollos, 2017), p. 352.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 348.

<sup>30</sup> Christian Scharen, *Public Worship, Public Work: Character and Commitment in Congregational Life* (Collegeville, Minnesota, Liturgical Press, 2004), p. 30.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>32</sup> Stroope, *Transcending Mission*, p. 352.

<sup>33</sup> Flett, *The Witness of God*, p. 34.



Its witness to the world — its identity in dispersed mode — is, and must be, of a piece with its identity in worship, that is, in gathered mode.<sup>34</sup>

## God in the Gathering: Revisiting Sacraments

The benefit of increased attentiveness to the formative practices of worship among Baptists has been to focus on how God acts in worship, and to rearticulate the relationship between worship and mission. This reflection has been useful and productive, because Baptists have customarily answered questions about what happens in worship in a reductive fashion. That is to say, Baptists have often fought battles on what does not happen in worship and ended up with an unsettling, but settled, conviction that not much happens through the liturgical practices of the gathered community.

This can be illustrated with reference to the sacraments. Stephen Holmes notes that Baptists have historically preferred the term ‘ordinance’ to sacraments, as it is held to be ‘safer, as pointing simply to the origin of baptism and the Lord’s Supper in the command of Christ’.<sup>35</sup> He goes on to point out that ‘perhaps bizarrely, Baptists have been remarkably poor at developing a theology of baptism over their history [...] [offering] no theological account of why this biblical practice is important, or what it achieves’.<sup>36</sup> Curtis Freeman concurs, noting similarly in the case of Communion that ‘the belief that the risen Lord is not really present through the Holy Spirit at the table but that the Lord’s Supper is merely of symbolic significance has become a new kind of popular consensus among Baptists’.<sup>37</sup> Preference for the language of ordinance over sacrament means that the question of divine and human agency can be handled in a straightforward fashion. The act of God is always prior to the obedience entailed in the ordinance, and encounter with God is not tied to any particular embodied practice or element of creation. Faith is imparted before baptism and ‘nothing happens’ in the water. Except for testimony.

Alexander Maclaren made a similar point about the Lord’s Supper in the nineteenth century: ‘The purpose of the Lord’s Supper is simply the commemoration, and therein the proclamation of His death. There is no magic, no mystery, no “sacrament” about it.’<sup>38</sup> Maclaren’s sentiment still holds among many Baptists and could be expanded to comment on Baptist

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<sup>34</sup> This point may seem to be in agreement with the view of Colwell, already stated. The difference, though, is that for Colwell this heightens the significance and status of worship, whereas for Flett it means that the activities of mission gain an ontological status.

<sup>35</sup> Holmes, *Baptist Theology*, p. 165.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>37</sup> Curtis W. Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2014), p. 330.

<sup>38</sup> Cited in Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, p. 166.

perceptions of worship in general. This is not to say that God is not invoked or believed to be encountered in worship. Rather Baptist piety views this happening, as Colwell has pointed out, in terms of immediacy. Meeting with God is always Damascene for Baptists, a direct in-breaking of God. In more recent years, charismatic renewal has heightened expectation that something happens in Baptist worship, but has continued to view this within the vocabulary of immediacy. There is an occasionalism to divine encounter within Baptist worship, with scant reference to how God is active in and through the practices of the church.

Over the last two decades there has been an effort to move beyond what Steven Harmon has termed, the ‘symbolic reductionism typical of Baptist theologies of the ordinances’, and towards ‘an understanding of baptism and eucharist as paradigmatic of the relation of God to the material order that is disclosed in the incarnation’. Harmon contends that it is the ‘sacramental narration of the world that forms the Christian self’.<sup>39</sup> Several Baptist theologians have featured in this effort to rehabilitate the sacraments. This has moved the emphasis from immediacy, to mediation — or ‘mediated immediacy’ — with regard to God’s presence in and through the materiality and embodied engagement of worship and witness. Material mediation of the divine is God’s way of being in the world, as aptly summed up by Colwell: ‘In the defining core of the Christian story there is no unmediated divine presence; all that God is and does here is done by the mediation of the Spirit through the flesh assumed by the Son.’<sup>40</sup> In the sacraments God, through the Spirit, indwells believers and enables them to indwell the gospel story, to which the sacraments themselves point.

John Colwell and Paul Fiddes are examples of how Baptist reappraisals of sacramentality have followed on from the growing awareness of the inadequacies of Enlightenment epistemology and ontology. The picture of the human being as analytical observer, a thinking thing, has strained to cover human experience of embodied participation in the world. Other images that are more attentive to embodiment and relationality have become increasingly compelling. Both Colwell and Fiddes propose epistemologies that view knowledge in terms of indwelling stories and participating in God.<sup>41</sup> This is connected to an ontology that ‘defines us as dependent, rather than independent’, and engages with reality as ‘a “being-giveness” rather than a “givenness” – since it is mediated by the living

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<sup>39</sup> Steven R. Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity: Essays on Tradition and the Baptist Vision* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2006), pp. 13-14.

<sup>40</sup> John E. Colwell, *Promise and Presence: An Exploration of Sacramental Theology* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2011), p. 56.

<sup>41</sup> Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), and John E. Colwell, *Living the Christian Story* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001).

Spirit'.<sup>42</sup> Receptivity is a core human capacity in such an ontology. These developments are both promising and difficult for Baptists, on account of the ingrained individualism and the focus on autonomy that characterise Baptist ecclesiological concerns for both the gathered community and evangelism.

The engagement with theologians who focus on ecclesial practices, and their formative effect, enable Baptists to give a more positive answer to questions regarding what happens in worship. It is an answer that resonates well with a tradition that extols the gathered community of believers: God forms a people, a polis or a public, through the embodied practices of the sacraments. This leads to an appreciation of receptivity, rather than characteristic Baptist activism, as the normative stance of the believer in worship. Reinhard Hütter urges that concentration on ecclesial practices need not, and should not, lead reductively, 'to an anthropological theory of action'. Following Martin Luther, he describes engagement in the core practices of the church as a form of pathos. By this he intends to describe a practice, or activity, that has the stance of receptivity: it aims at the practitioner being acted upon, rather than acting. Referring to ecclesial practices such as the sacraments, he comments, 'Although they do indeed refer to human activities, through them the human being undergoes, or it subject to, the actions of the Holy Spirit [...] The human being is always the recipient, that is, always remains in the mode of pathos.'<sup>43</sup> Colwell concurs: 'Sacramental reality of the Church's identity is [...] both an authentically human and an authentically divine occurrence.'<sup>44</sup> For Hütter it is through its core practices that the church is constituted as 'the public of the Holy Spirit'.<sup>45</sup> For Colwell, through the sacraments, 'the Church itself is formed into a living narration of the gospel story through the living Spirit'.<sup>46</sup>

Baptist re-evaluation of the sacraments has led to a new appreciation of worship as a means of formation of virtue or character. It should also lead to a recognition of human embeddedness in creation and, in turn, to a deeper awareness God's engagement with creation. God's presence in the world is always mediated through creation, or materiality. Following Luther and Calvin, Colwell identifies the sacraments as a particular instance of materiality, such as bread, wine or water, which is 'established as a sign by a divine promise'.<sup>47</sup> Paul Fiddes instead concentrates on how the particularity of the sacraments reveal a universal sacramentality within the world. He follows Teilhard de Chardin in speaking of 'extensions' or 'prolongations' of the sacraments into the world:

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<sup>42</sup> Colwell, *Living the Christian Story*, p. 40.

<sup>43</sup> Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, pp. 131-32.

<sup>44</sup> Colwell, *Living the Christian Story*, p. 162.

<sup>45</sup> Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, p. 164.

<sup>46</sup> Colwell, *Living the Christian Story*, p. 163.

<sup>47</sup> Colwell, *Promise and Presence*, p. 58.

From the focus on baptism we can find God in the many occasions in the world where water is involved; in the experience of the breaking of waters in birth, in moments of refreshment, when passing over a boundary river, in the washing away of what is unclean, and in facing the hostile force of great floods.<sup>48</sup>

At stake here is not so much the slippery slope to magical or mechanical thinking to which Baptists have traditionally objected. God's presence is not caught in the sacraments, but the Spirit mediates divine encounter through materiality and, through this mediation, draws people into communion with God. At stake is the re-enchantment of creation.

## Formation and Porous Borders

These developments are welcome. They draw together worship and formation for the sake of witness, and enable a perception of God at work through the normal practices of the church. They do not, though, help us blur the boundaries between the church and the world which inform notions of mission as 'one-way deliverables'. Nor do they unsettle the linear logic of formation that sees God as active in and through the church and its practices for the sake of the world. Even within these sacramental theologies, and their Baptist engagements, the metaphor of the boundary continues to grip the imagination such that there is a pronounced sense that all the good stuff — the sacramental, the enchanted — happens on the ecclesial side of the border. Christians, on this understanding, are formed within the community for witness in the world. The world, then, continues to be perceived as a context of privation. An important issue here is that formation does not happen in such a linear fashion. Formation works both ways. As Scharen observes, 'Other institutional ideals and practices [...] already shape a community of faith through its members' participation in the world.'<sup>49</sup>

In his book, *The Christian Imagination*, Willie James Jennings has charted how the sacraments buckled before the practices of early capitalism and the slave trade. Jennings notes that the crisis of Christian engagement in the slave trade and the conquest of the New World was, and is, that it was not discerned to be a crisis. It was lived instead as mission. The liturgical tradition and practice of the late medieval period transitioned effortlessly into 'traditioned imperialist modernity'.<sup>50</sup> Jennings argues, compellingly and disturbingly, that far from the church having the formative resources to resist the broader injustices and cruelty of the slave trade, its practices meshed with colonial practices to form a 'Christian-colonial way of imagining the world'. Katie Grimes, in addressing the now entrenched phenomenon of white

<sup>48</sup> Fiddes, *Participating in God*, p. 283.

<sup>49</sup> Scharen, *Public Worship*, p. 29.

<sup>50</sup> Willie J. Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 71.

supremacy in the USA, has similarly critiqued ‘sacramental optimism’ which asserts that ‘the church resists the violence of the modern nation-state simply by being itself’. She argues:

The vice of white supremacy pervades the church’s corporate body and thereby permeates all of its practices, including those of baptism and the eucharist. Rather than turning to the church’s sacraments as an antidote to the vices of a presumed external culture [...] these very practices have been corrupted by it.<sup>51</sup>

These examples argue against the linear impact of Christian formation travelling from worship to witness. The relationships of worship and witness, the church and the world, are much more complex. This can be supplemented by examples from within the Baptist tradition. Curtis Freeman has charted the shift from the Baptist conviction of freedom of conscience to the articulation of soul competency as a ‘central tenant’ of Baptist identity in the Southern states of America. The former is a protest against coercion by the state, or the king, in the area of faith. Such a conviction is rooted in the conviction that ‘spiritual and religious acts are meaningful only if they come out of sincere hearts and are the product of freely chosen obedience to God’.<sup>52</sup> Soul competency, on the other hand, is the claim to ‘the competency of the individual to deal with God’.<sup>53</sup> Freeman observes that Baptists ended up enshrining in their core principles ‘a scaled down version of the unencumbered self of American democratic liberalism’.<sup>54</sup> Newson sums up the development of the notion of soul competency: ‘The use to which the phrase came to be put was a rugged individualism that made community secondary, if not inimical to authentic faith.’<sup>55</sup>

Similarly, Paul Fiddes has argued that though Baptists originally gave priority to the practice of covenanting, the term covenant has become a ‘dead metaphor’ whose theological depth should be rediscovered. As he explores the history of the Baptist practice of forming congregations by ‘voluntary consent and covenant’, he points out that Baptist ecclesiology was ‘modelled thoroughly on a secular contract of mutual human obligations’.<sup>56</sup> As noted above, this notion of church was well articulated by John Locke, who portrayed England, and indeed the Commonwealth, as being made up of an interconnection of voluntary societies, each seeking the interest of its members. ‘Locke’s principle of market-place choice’ also had a provenance in early capitalism, in Joint Stock Companies, in which people came together to achieve common aims and to maximise profit. This model was enthusiastically taken up in the cause of mission by, among others, William

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<sup>51</sup> Katie Grimes, ‘Breaking the Body of Christ’, *Political Theology*, 18, no. 1 (February 2017): 22–43.

<sup>52</sup> Wright, *Free Church, Free State*, p. 56.

<sup>53</sup> Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, p. 193.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.

<sup>55</sup> Newson, *Inhabiting the World*, pp. 95–96.

<sup>56</sup> Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, pp. 34–35.

Carey as he founded the Baptist Missionary Society. In developing an ecclesiology, and later an apparatus for mission, that was ‘comprehensively voluntaristic’,<sup>57</sup> Baptists acted from theological and biblical convictions. At the same time, their convictions were expressed in a series of practices that were rooted in the emergence of early capitalism. Through engagement in these practices Baptists gradually became deaf to the theological resonances of their way of being church, such that today Fiddes urges a Baptist rediscovery of the resources of covenantal theology. It can be argued that Baptists were conditioned by their participation in the wider practices of voluntary associations to the point that many could describe the constitution of the church without reference to God’s ordaining. John Gill, for example, writing in the eighteenth century, could describe the church’s voluntary membership as being ‘like all civic societies founded [...] by consent and covenant’.<sup>58</sup> A century later, Joseph Angus advocated the analogy of free trade and described church as a ‘voluntary religious society for the double purpose of obtaining mutual instruction and comfort and of propagating their faith’.<sup>59</sup> Over two hundred years of ecclesial and civic practice had taught many Baptists to discuss the essence of the local church in pragmatic terms. This calls to mind David Bosch’s observation that when ‘the voluntary principle’ predominated within evangelicalism, ‘the operative presuppositions were those of Western democracy and the free-enterprise system’.<sup>60</sup>

These historical examples draw attention to the fact that the borders between the church and the wider world are porous and that the direction of influence flows, on the most optimistic reading, both ways. The interlocking of these examples focuses attention on the disciplines of modernity that shaped, and still shape, Western identities, and in which the Baptist tradition was birthed and developed. That the boundary between the gathered community is porous is underlined by the sober observation that Baptist churches, and other evangelicals, in their individualism and activism bear a distinctly modern imprint. Proponents of the ecclesial turn, or of virtue ethics, claim that character is developed through the embodied practices of a traditioned community, through liturgical practices. Yet worship is not the only practice through which Christians are shaped, and the direction of formative travel between the church and the wider world is demonstrably two-way.

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<sup>57</sup> Brackney, *Christian Voluntarism*, p. 33.

<sup>58</sup> Cited in Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, p. 41.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>60</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 334.

## Conclusion: Practices for the Dispersed Church

The porous boundary of the gathered community points to the need for increased attentiveness to the dynamics and multiple contexts of formation. This porosity also suggests the world as an unavoidable and perhaps appropriate site of Christian formation. The turn to ecclesial practices and sacramental theology has reminded Baptists of the need to engage with mediation and materiality in worship. Such an understanding of God's, always mediated, way of being in the world should also inform the church's practices of mission. Fiddes' proposal to 'extend' sacramentality and participation in God into the world, from the particular to the universal, may be pertinent here. It encourages a stance of receptivity which may be an antidote to imagining and practising mission as transmission. Particularly if we are able to extend Colwell's insight that 'we are shaped by one another and, accordingly, we are shaped by the Spirit'<sup>61</sup> into the context of the wider world and to mission engagements with those who, as yet, have no professed faith in Jesus. Stefan Paas rightly comments that

Christians should accept that through mission they are not only teaching others how to be disciples, but they are learning as well. More precisely, there is a theological order here, in which receptivity precedes purpose, power and action. "What do you have that you did not receive."<sup>62</sup>

Keith Jones's proposal of 'porous worship' provides a means of overcoming the strong sense of boundary between the church and the wider world. He notes that the Early Church met in a variety of domestic settings, and that continental Anabaptists 'did not inherit the great cathedrals and town churches that existed, but rather utilised homes, bakeries, warehouses and the open fields to gather for worship'.<sup>63</sup> He urges Baptists to appropriate the domestic setting for worship, with a meal as the focus, as a means of enabling those he terms seekers to 'taste and see' something of the life of faith and worship of 'a core of covenanted believers'.

These are positive proposals for overcoming the sense of the gathered community as bounded, and for discerning God as active in the wider world. They still, however, grant a primacy to worship in relation to both formation and witness that this article is calling into question. Fiddes and Jones extend and displace worship respectively into the wider world. Mission, though, where it is not understood as coterminous with worship, is still viewed as a second step. It may be necessary to go further and to note that, as often occurs in the book of Acts, Christians are formed by encounter with the Holy Spirit through witness in the wider world, and bring back insights and virtues that

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<sup>61</sup> Colwell, *Living the Christian Story*, p. 162.

<sup>62</sup> Stefan Paas, *Pilgrims and Priests: Christian Mission in a Post-Christian Society* (London: SCM Press, 2019), p. 16.

<sup>63</sup> Jones, 'Mission Models', p. 8.

transform worship. If this is so, it is surely legitimate and necessary to enquire whether there are practices of the dispersed church that find their natural setting in the context of witness or mission, and which participate in a sacramental dynamic. Christopher Ellis is right to call Baptists to move beyond preoccupation with the gathered community and to develop ‘a missional understanding of dispersal’ that ‘places sufficient importance on the dispersed mode of ecclesial being and activity’.<sup>64</sup>

The practice of hospitality may fit the bill. Hospitality is clearly central to the gospel story, would qualify as an ordinance and, in terms of being a practice rooted in gospel promises, may well be theologically considered as sacramental. In the episodes of Jesus and Zacchaeus, the Emmaus Road, and Cornelius and Peter, there is evidence of hospitality mediating the presence of the kingdom and of Christ through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The practice of hospitality may well be presented in a dynamic similar to Colwell’s sacramental understanding of a double indwelling of the gospel story. That is, a practice through which Christians indwell the formative narrative of the gospel, while also being indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Amos Yong, the American-Malaysian Pentecostal theologian, views Luke’s portrayal of the hospitality of Jesus and the church in this light.

The presentation of the life of Christ and the lives of the earliest Christians is not only descriptive but also normative: his readers are informed about the Holy Spirit’s empowering Jesus and the early Christians so as to be invited also to extend the story of the hospitality of God to the ends of the earth and to the end of the ages.<sup>65</sup>

Like worship, hospitality has receptivity as its essential stance, as there is always slippage between the roles and functions of hosts, guests, and strangers. There is always a ‘two-way’ form to hospitality. Yong recalls that, from the annunciation onwards, it is often ‘precisely in his role as guest that Jesus announces and enacts, through the Holy Spirit, the hospitality of God’.<sup>66</sup> Unlike worship, hospitality as a gospel practice requires the presence of the stranger, and views witness as a form of pathos in which each participant may ‘suffer divine things’. This moves mission away from transmission to genuine reciprocity where, as in the episode of Cornelius and Peter, all those involved receive the Spirit and are instrumental agents of each other’s transformation. Also, unlike worship, hospitality requires believers to obey Christ and to disperse as well as gather; to go as guests into the world trusting in Christ’s promise to go ahead of them and be with them.

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<sup>64</sup> Ellis, *Spirituality in Mission*, p. 179.

<sup>65</sup> Amos Yong, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices and the Neighbour* (New York: Orbis Books, 2008), p. 106.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.



Practices such as hospitality enable us to imagine witness as enacting the gospel story and being drawn into it, along with others, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. There are other practices to explore, such as peacebuilding, that also may be rooted in divine promises and constitute forms of indwelling the gospel with people who do not, as yet, attend church. Such practices may form a feel for the world as accessible to God's grace and the Spirit's ministry. This embodied engagement in the gospel would also be an advance on, or a supplement to, presenting a message and seeking assent from others. Such an understanding of mission would go beyond the individualism of the autonomous subject and towards a missional appropriation of an ontology of participation.

The turn to ecclesial practices has led Baptists to a re-evaluation of how God works through worship and given oxygen to a conversation about the relationship between liturgy, sacraments and mission. A next step will be to recognise that there are graced practices of the church which find their rightful place in the context of witness in the world, the church dispersed, and there is a sacramentality that can only be indwelt, through the activity of the Spirit, by leaving the gathered community.

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## Book Reviews

Al Staggs, *What Would Bonhoeffer Say?* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2018), 129 pages. ISBN: 978-1532671302.

This is a compelling book that deserves a wide audience, although I remain uncertain as to who might be its primary readership. As the title suggests, it explores what Dietrich Bonhoeffer might say in response to some contemporary religious and ethical challenges. The book then ought to appeal to Bonhoeffer scholars, although there may be little to surprise those already familiar with this literature. The selected discussions arise primarily out of the author's American context of Southern Baptist life and might attract those within that tradition, although Staggs is often critical of the denomination. Despite (or because of) this, the book also may interest the wider Baptist constituency. Finally, it contains much autobiographical detail that might be appreciated by those who attend the author's one-man play on Bonhoeffer. Indeed, Staggs affirms that the book is written as an accompaniment to the play, with the content arising out of recurring post-performance conversations.

An autobiographical preface situates Staggs's journey from theological conservatism to one influenced by Social Gospel advocates, Latin American liberationists as well as Bonhoeffer. It also heralds his critical alterity from Southern Baptists.

The book begins in earnest with a question often posed in his post-performance dialogues: 'How could the holocaust occur in a Christian nation like Germany?'. He quickly points the reader to parallel evils of slavery and segregation in the Bible Belt of the Southern States. He detects no ecclesial remorse for their complicity in these evils and this critique becomes his general thesis for the remainder of the book: contemporary American piety is a compromised witness in the face of pervasive injustice and Bonhoeffer shows the church how to mend her ways.

The following chapters address well-worn Bonhoeffer themes, such as the wealth of churches amidst economic injustice, the conflation of loyalty to nation and Church/Christ, and persistent racial prejudice. Perhaps there is not as much engagement with the wealth of Bonhoeffer scholarship as might have been expected, nor does the book reach far beyond its American context. But each chapter compellingly connects Bonhoeffer's works to the author's experiences of injustice and illustrates their challenge through some original poetic reflections. A particularly moving chapter grapples with theodicy and suffering – not only through Bonhoeffer's life and work, but

also by examining some deeply personal experiences of distress. Unsurprisingly, the book ends with a chapter on radical discipleship, which weaves together Bonhoeffer, Moltmann and Liberation theologians to challenge Western understandings of salvation and rethink the content of Christian witness in a world wounded and broken from injustice.

Staggs's book is a helpful Bonhoeffer primer for those who have attended the author's play, but it is more than an addendum to his performance and deserves to be read widely beyond that arena. It is a compelling application of Bonhoeffer's wisdom to contemporary issues and offers an inspirational guide to those seeking a discipleship that allows Christ to transform themselves, their church and the wider world.

**Reviewed by Dr Craig Gardiner – tutor in Christian Doctrine at South Wales Baptist College in the UK.**

Ian M. Randall, *A Christian Peace Experiment: The Bruderhof Community in Britain, 1933-1942* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2018), 241 pages. ISBN: 978-1532639982.

The Bruderhof, a movement in the Anabaptist tradition modelling communal life after the Hutterite example, emerged in Germany in the 1920s. Ian Randall's book observes the story of this 'peace experiment' as it unfolds at the time of the political upheaval of Nazi ideology, and leads the adherents of the movement to find their new 'home' in the Cotswold area of England, in 1936–1942. The community comprised different nationalities and grew to 316 inhabitants by 1940.

Literature on the Bruderhof usually tends to be written from a sociological angle. *A Christian Peace Experiment* explores the movement, with focus on the Cotswold phase, predominantly from an historical point of view, describing the theological and spiritual connections, which were surprisingly international and ecumenical. The Salvation Army, Pentecostal, Lutheran—and on a wider scale, Evangelical Alliance—influences, including those on the founder of the community, Eberhard Arnold, are discussed, along with inspiration derived from Hutterite tradition.

Based on a careful use of primary sources, the volume highlights two main areas of witness of the Cotswold community: the validity of a communal way of living, and the area of peace witness, together with social engagement. Both main topics were reflected in the publication *The Plough*,

established in 1937, which helped to fulfil the missional and connexional aims of the movement. It is illuminating to read that the movement's pacifist positions were rooted in wider cultural background, though Quaker and Anabaptist teachings of non-violence and sincere commitment to follow the example of Jesus Christ played a crucial role. Besides this, Randall's research offers the reader a glimpse into the everyday life of the community: the practice of hospitality; giving education to children; keeping 'rhythms of life', such as work, meals, conversations, celebrations, music and dancing.

The volume provides an analytical and honest account of the Cotswold community's relations with American Hutterites, which were far from straightforward. However, both external and internal struggles were part of the journey of discipleship. Seeking for 'peace' had two sides: choosing a way of non-violence in society and practising unity in the believers' community. When Britain entered the war against Nazi-Germany, the Bruderhof members met new challenges: they were suspected of being German spies and criticised for registration as conscientious objectors. Facing the dire prospect that their German members would have to leave the country, the whole community decided to move to Paraguay in 1940–1941. Although the 'Cotswold chapter' reached its end by 1942, it constituted a seminal stage in the Bruderhof history and self-identification, both in Britain and beyond.

Ian Randall has given a fascinating and thorough account of the Cotswold community, its commitment to following Christ and living together—in and despite difficulties. It is an eye-opening read not only for scholars, but for everyone interested in Christian discipleship, formation of religious identity and church and society relations in critical times.

**Reviewed by Dr Toivo Pilli – Director of Baptist Studies at IBTS Centre  
Amsterdam.**

Dominic Erdozain (ed.), *The Dangerous God: Christianity and the Soviet Experiment* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2017), 277 pages. ISBN: 978-0875807706.

*The Dangerous God*, edited by Dominic Erdozain, consists of eleven essays which focus on the multifaceted relations between Soviet atheistic powers and Russian Orthodox dissent. It is inspiring reading for everyone who wants to go beyond the widely known basic narrative of Russian religious resilience. Personal memoirs, combined with scholarly analysis, play their

part in the essays. Indeed, there are subjective aspects which are essential for the reader to approach the story with empathy. Dissident movement is not only a narrative of documents and court cases; it is also a narrative of human suffering, weaknesses and strengths, creative and costly efforts to renew vision for the church and society. The volume also demonstrates that poetry, during the Communist years, functioned as a form of resistance, being a treasury of values, and guiding society in its search for moral direction. A chapter on ‘samizdat’ poems, ‘which are important not for their discursive content, but for their symbolic power’, creatively expands usual patterns of historical method. Poetry provided a bridge to the transcendent and eternal.

The essays draw attention to a continuous emphasis by Soviet dissenting voices on religious freedom, freedom of conscience and human rights. Both religious dissidents and human rights activists used common language, and they inspired each other, even if many human rights champions were atheists. The book highlights that implementing human rights without religious freedoms is impossible: freedom of conscience and religious liberty are universal values—they should be granted for everyone, including those who might have views deviating from the established tradition. Many Orthodox dissidents argued for this, strengthening ecumenical links.

*The Dangerous God* embraces the complexity of church-state relations, including the slippery path of church leaders collaborating with existing powers and the government’s attempts to use religion for political goals. The volume is suitably completed with the final chapter, which deals with the interplay of religion and politics under the Putin and Medvedev administrations. In concluding this review, it seems relevant to ask: If religious dissent in the Soviet context was a prophetic voice within the church and in society, in what forms, if at all, is this heritage still present in Russia?

**Reviewed by Dr Toivo Pilli – Director of Baptist Studies at IBTS Centre  
Amsterdam.**

Victor Lee Austin and Joel C. Daniel (eds.), *The Emerging Christian Minority*, Pro Ecclesia Series, vol. 8 (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2019), 120 pages. ISBN: 978-1532631023.

The purpose of the Pro Ecclesia Series is to provide critical and ecumenical theological reflection on current ecclesial affairs. The present volume

discusses the changing role of the church in society. William Cavanaugh offers a critical reading of Candida Moss's (in)famous book *The Myth of Persecution* (2013) that caused some major turmoil when it was published. Cavanaugh, rather than merely re-doing a fair amount of criticism, discusses the book in light of the question of persecution: is it a good thing if the church is persecuted? He shows that Moss and the religious Catholic 'right' in the US actually share the same presumption about the relationship between church and state, namely that they go (and should go!) well together. Cavanaugh contests these claims, arguing that sometimes opposition and persecution are unavoidable consequences of having 'to choose between being Christian and being American' (p. 19). Paige Hochschild then continues with a reflection on Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* and the unifying role of the eucharist within the church as 'universal sacrifice' (p. 32). Being part of this community demands a way of living that extends divine justice to the world and corrects the idolatrous presumptions of secular states. A different angle on the issue is brought by David Novak, who explores the similarities and differences between Jews and Christians. He contests the Christian conquering attitude by stipulating the Jewish non-proselytising way of being a minority: studying Torah and keeping Torah. In a more sermon-like contribution, Kathryn Schifferdecker meditates on the meaning of hope in an enjoyable cross-reading of Psalm 1, Elijah at Mount Horeb, Job and her own experience at Mekane Yesus Seminary in Ethiopia. Though on its own a captivating read, one wonders what its particular contribution is to this volume. More on topic is Joseph Small's reissuing of the ninth chapter of his book *Flawed Church, Faithful God*, published in 2017. He reflects on Taylor's *Secular Age* and compares the condition of churches in North America with the witness of the church of the first centuries. Though making some apt observations, it would have benefitted from some ways of 'treatment' other than only diagnosis. In the last essay, Anton Vrame considers the minority status of the Orthodox Church in the context of the United States of America, and its desire to be great in order to be noted in Washington. Regrettably it only offers an historical overview, with hardly any reflection on the question at hand.

What seemed like a promising volume became a bit of a disappointment. The contributions contain overly extensive elaborations that, certainly with regard to the size of the book—only 120 pages—seem disproportionate, as it leaves little space to reflect on contemporary society. In the end, one cannot but conclude that, regardless of its clear focus, the disparity of the contributions does not keep the promise of the title. Moreover, it lacks a sufficient closing consideration by the editors. Here, the sparing lines of thought could be brought together and highlighted from the original question that inspired the book. This is once more regrettable, since

the theme of the book is timely, both with regard to the United States and to Europe.

**Reviewed by Revd Dr Jan Martijn Abrahamse – tutor in Systematic Theology and Ethics at Ede Christian University of Applied Sciences and Baptist Seminary, Amsterdam.**

Curtis W. Freeman, *Undomesticated Dissent: Democracy and the Public Virtue of Religious Nonconformity* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2017), 288 pages. ISBN: 978-1481306881.

This book is an exercise in remembering that engages three classic texts of dissent: John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and William Blake's *Jerusalem*. The author, Curtis Freeman, seeks to inspire his readers to engage in dissent that will bring transformation to the church and society. The book is divided into five sections: *Domesticating Dissent*, *Slumbering Dissent*, *Prosperous Dissent*, *Apocalyptic Dissent* and *Postapocalyptic Dissent*.

Under *Domesticating Dissent*, Freeman discusses the Dissenter Tradition and he argues that, though dissenters differed widely in theological outlook, they all shared a common bond as minorities who were first persecuted and later tolerated by the dominant majority in the established church.

Writing about *Slumbering Dissent*, Freeman uses the *Pilgrim's Progress* and other writings of John Bunyan to describe the dissent that cannot be domesticated. Like Christian and Faithful, dissenters are not presented as militant revolutionaries leading an army to inaugurate the reign of the saints, but their presence is dangerous to the social and economic order.

In the *Prosperous Dissent* section, Freeman walks his readers through the various Acts that were passed from 1661 to 1670 in order to silence dissenters after the execution of John James for calling Jesus Christ the King of England. Freeman uses Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* to press home the basic principle that animated the desires and a familiar political-religious coalition that dissenters like Defoe negotiated in England.

Addressing *Apocalyptic Dissent*, Freeman uses William Blake's *Jerusalem* to describe a dissenting theology that did not need a community to sustain it, but an apocalyptic transformation of the mind. To Blake, 'the

church and state were no longer instruments of God's justice but servants of the beast, [...] and Jerusalem would have to be built anew' (p. 136).

In the final section, *Postapocalyptic Dissent*, Freeman mentions people like Thomas Weld and John Cotton, whose social vision of a new earth, unlike Blake's, had little room for dissent. He discusses the activities of Roger Williams, whose undomesticated dissent led the people of Rhode Island to obtain The Royal Charter of Rhode Island and Providence Plantation in 1663, which ensured religious liberty for all its residents.

Freeman, in this book, brings to the fore the fact that dissent is crucial to establishing democracy and essential in nurturing it. Buried deep in their full narrative of religion and resistance, Bunyan, Defoe and Blake together declare that dissent is not disloyalty, and that democracy depends on dissent.

I find the book important to me, as a Baptist who believes in religious freedom. It presents history, theology and polity together in a way that makes understanding of the subject easier. The presentation makes reading the book interesting and inspiring. I recommend it to anyone who wants to see the scripture interpreted in the contemporary situation to bring the realisation of the kingdom of God on earth.

**Reviewed by Michael Sebastian Aidoo – Acting Dean for the School of Theology and Ministry at Ghana Baptist University College.**

Andrew C. Thompson (ed.), *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions Volume II – The Long Eighteenth Century, c.1689-c.1828* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 496 pages. ISBN: 978-0198702245.

This book is part two of a five-volume series with Timothy Larsen and Mark A. Noll as the general editors. They have been commissioned to complement the five-volume *Oxford History of Anglicanism* and they argue that there is something distinct about how Christianity developed in England after the Reformation. They claim that, according to a varied group of dissenters, this 'half-reformed' Church of England needed to be purified. This is the reason why dissenters distanced themselves from a state church, and several (dissenter) movements started, and grew rapidly in this period.

The book is an anthology with twenty contributors, each writing one chapter. The first part of the book deals with five main dissenter groups in England in the eighteenth century: Presbyterians, Congregationalists,



Baptists, Quakers and Methodists. The second part examines the dissenter traditions outside England: Ireland, Scotland, Wales and the American colonies. Part three focuses on revival and missionary societies, while the fourth section explores the context and political situation. In the last part of the book, the authors elaborate on the daily life of the congregations, highlighting theology, sermons, hymnody, education, the material culture and the emergent field of printing.

The chief advantage of organising the book in this way is that it gives the reader ample opportunity to select and read the parts that are most interesting and relevant for their specific context. In my view, the structure works well. However, in reading the book chronologically, as I did, I found some of the discussions to be a bit repetitive.

I read this book from the perspective of someone who is partly an outsider. I live in Scandinavia and my field of research is within the sociology of religion. That said, I value highly the important role held by history, and especially the dissenter traditions in England from which I, as a Baptist in Norway, have a strong heritage. Being part of a local Baptist church today, with state support and a harmonious relationship with both the state and the social majority, it is challenging to read how the first dissenters stood in opposition to both the state and majority church. In concluding this review, I am prompted to reflect on the sociological questions that emerge for me from reading this book, such as whether we have won or lost the battle they started.

**Reviewed by Roald Zeiffert – PhD candidate, Norwegian School of Leadership and Theology, and Training Coordinator, European Baptist Federation Youth and Children Committee.**

Stefan Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West: Learning from the European Experience* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 304 pages. ISBN: 978-0802873484.

This book is authored by a Dutch missiologist who expounds the biblical foundation for church planting, its historical perspective and current relevance in Western culture. He points to agricultural-organic images in the New Testament and laments that the Church has been excessively institutionalised over the centuries. Christendom in Europe created a territorial church for more than a thousand years (from the fourth century until the Reformation) by a symbiosis of church leaders with secular powers

and Christian mission began to mean an expansion of the European ecclesiastical system to new territories overseas. In reaction, some sectarian movements emerged (such as the Waldensians or the Hussites) that attempted to liberate Christianity from the chains of Christendom. The later Reformers—Luther, Calvin and the Anabaptists—shared this goal and were also viewed as heretics. The Anabaptists believed that Christendom was perverted, and they propagated the church of choice versus the traditional church of masses. The Baptists emerged in the seventeenth century in England with core beliefs of adult baptism, congregational governance, clear separation of church from state and a worldwide missionary drive. The Evangelicals—later heirs of the Reformation—tried to turn attention to multiplication of local congregations; as a result, church planting became a competition. These movements embodied the vigorous missionary zeal but were accused of ‘offensive activity’.

Twentieth-century projects such as DAWN or Fresh Expressions—attempts to develop a new kind of churches that fit the contemporary, secularised society—have not quite been successful. Paas strongly believes that the Church is God’s agent for the transformation of the world and can be most effective only when being a minority in a society; this idea becomes a leitmotif of the book. Moreover, he recognises the serious crisis of the inherited church and expresses hope that newly planted congregations will become a challenge to the existing churches as they are innovative, more energetic and grow faster than traditional churches. A better cooperation between traditional and fresh expressions would be desired. At the same time, Paas echoes the British scholar Stuart Murray that ‘church planting is not a panacea for a declining church’. The author is particularly critical of the Church Growth Theory developed in the twentieth century by McGavran for being too pragmatic and too rational, as it overemphasises numerical growth. Statistics also indicate that a majority of newcomers in growing churches consist of transfers and fewer non-churched people are becoming members of religious organisations than ever.

Western Europe is in a deep crisis of faith and, reflecting upon this, the author of this book finally poses the question: What kind of new churches should be planted? Paas answers this question himself: the Church for today must be informal and as simple as possible. He also notes that thousands of immigrant churches have been started in Western Europe, however they do not reach out to all Europeans. Paas praises the Anabaptists and Evangelicals for providing the moral conscience of European societies, whilst being a minority. Today a similar role is attempted by some sectarian groups that abruptly contest Christendom. However, this is a challenge for Western man who seeks an orientation in life by way of individualism and subjectivism

rather than external authority. The author aptly grasps this complex issue and is rather careful in offering solutions.

**Reviewed by Daniel Trusiewicz – Mission Partnerships Coordinator, European Baptist Federation.**

John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology*, 2nd edn (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Academic, 2019), 398 pages. ISBN: 978-0825445118.

This work is an updated account, from a Southern Baptist ecclesiological perspective, by a theologian embedded in the practices and perspectives of this pre-eminent, North American denomination. Hammett offers a strong yet not uncritical understanding of inherited perspectives that he presents as indicative of baptist ecclesiology.

The strength of Hammett's work lies in his familiarity with the cultural and social mores that are expressed across the large and diverse, Southern Baptist constituency. Hammett is aware of weaknesses and patterns of decline that can be found in his constituency, in a church that may have lost both something of its depth of spirituality and in its level of social influence. In chapter five, for example, he issues a call for the church to return to a testimony of faithfulness, not least through applying meaningful church discipline within the congregations.

Hammett has a clear, theoretical perspective of what it means to own a baptist ecclesiology. This clarity reflects a methodology that builds on his understanding of Scriptural principles, leading to the formulation of the catholic, ecclesial model that he advocates. Of special value are Hammett's analysis of the challenges and pathologies that have come to affect the Southern Baptist constituency, within a North American context, and the recommendations he makes in confronting and dealing with these, pertinent to that context.

Hammett does not look to engage with other parts of the worldwide, baptist family which have formed differing or divergent emphases: his focus is upon the North American, Southern Baptist tradition. In this sense, this work should not be looked to for a study of comparative, baptist ecclesiology, or even as a universalising set of principles in constructing such an ecclesiology. The study is, rather, a self-critical reflection on Southern

Baptist perspectives on what it means to be both baptist and biblical. As such, it is a valuable work.

Is this a study in contemporary ecclesiology? An absence of engagement and conversation with alternative interpretations of biblical and baptist convictions would suggest that it is not. It is, however, a thorough advocacy of a perspective that looks to predicate, from a reading of Scripture, a model of church that spans across cultures and contexts, as illustrated in Hammett's advocacy of the writings of Mark Dever and 9Marks Ministries. Whether the model of church advocated has relevance beyond the North American context should not, however, be assumed or taken for granted.

**Reviewed by Revd Dr Jim Purves – Mission and Ministry Advisor, Baptist Union of Scotland.**

Michael W. Stroope, *Transcending Mission: The Eclipse of a Modern Tradition* (London: Apollos, IVP, 2017), 457 pages. ISBN: 978-1783595525.

In *Transcending Mission*, Michael Stroope—Professor in Christian Mission at Baylor University, USA and a practitioner with more than two decades of experience—gives a surprising and important assessment of mission. Mission is not, as we often suppose, a biblical and theological term that is still useful to the church as it faces the challenges of decline in the West or the opportunities of growth in the Global South. Stroope argues, instead, that mission is critically associated with modernity, with its proclivity for conquest and control. He claims, convincingly, that the affinities between mission and modernity are seen in the methods and idioms on which mission practice tends to draw, ‘most clearly seen in the tendency to couple mission efforts with the language of business [...] and warfare’ (p. 378).

In making this argument, the author observes that mission is a vague term, with a usage and pedigree that goes beyond the church into other enterprises, such as military, political, diplomatic and business. Stroope offers a timely critique of missional hermeneutics, insisting that using mission as a template to clarify and focus the diversity of the biblical message, ends up as a strategy that ‘improperly controls interpretation’ (p. 81). Stroope argues in detail that mission is not simply a dynamic translation for apostle, as it has its own content which distorts our views of Jesus, Paul, Church Fathers, Celtic Saints and Anabaptist leaders, if we read the term mission back onto them.

Stroope then traces in detail the development of the practice and terminology of mission, starting with Ignatius and the Jesuits, for whom mission was ‘particular activity of sending ecclesial agents to foreign lands’. He goes on to describe at length how, though Protestants were initially suspicious of this Catholic term, they embraced it and were decisive in shaping the Modern Missionary Movement, which grew up interacting with modernity and its practices of colonialism and capitalism.

After offering a detailed and compelling critique of mission as a modern tradition, Stroope proposes we recover the Church’s ‘ancient language that will enable a more vibrant and appropriate encounter between the church and the world’ (p. 348). He argues for a shift ‘away from mission as one-way deliverables to an authentic faith exchange that converts and transforms in both directions’ (p. 352). In the conclusion of the book, Stroope offers an all too brief sketch of a ‘Pilgrim Witness’, that he proposes could take the place of the Modern Missionary. This is an excellent book, proposing a radical thesis in a measured and detailed fashion.

**Reviewed by Revd Mark Ord – Director of BMS World Mission, Birmingham, UK.**

David W. Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries: A History of a Global People*, 2nd edn (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2018), 315 pages. ISBN: 978-1602582040.

This book by David W. Bebbington is an even-handed and concise overview of Baptist history. Neither overwhelmingly encyclopaedic nor narrowly detailed, it covers early Baptist history as well as the more recent spread of Baptists around the globe. In this volume, the author discusses social changes, ideological movements, theological controversies, and other factors that have shaped Baptist identity.

The result of Bebbington’s arrangement of content into topical chapters such as *Anabaptists and Baptists*, *Baptists and Revival in the Eighteenth century*, *Women in Baptist Life*, *Baptists and Religious Liberty* and *The Global Spread of the Baptists* is a textbook-like synthesis of the research of others, organising the complex puzzle of Baptist history into an intelligible framework. *Baptists Through the Centuries* will be especially suitable as a textbook for a course on Baptist history. Professors may also find the self-contained chapters useful for assigning readings on specific

topics in Baptist history. Additionally, readers will appreciate how Bebbington concludes each chapter with a restatement of its main themes.

Bebbington is a member of the Royal Historical Society, a past president of the Ecclesiastical History Society, and the author of more than a dozen books. I have heard Bebbington speak and can confirm that his writing and speaking are similarly judicious and erudite. Bebbington's erudition does not, however, equal neutrality. For example, his fondness for Spurgeon's moderate Fullerite form of Calvinism and his disparagement of the Keswick movement as being influenced by Romanticism are present, though not off-putting. However, in chapter nine (*The Gospel and Race Among Baptists*), it seemed to me that Bebbington worked too hard to present Baptists as secondary achievers in the civil rights campaign, and not as oppressors. By contrast, in chapter twelve he was quite capable of criticising Baptists for their supposedly principled, but often self-serving, upholding of religious liberty.

I appreciated Bebbington's boldness in venturing into controversial territory, in chapter fifteen, concerning the contested question of Baptist identity today. His proposal of seven different streams feeding into Baptist identity (Liberal, Classical Evangelical, Premillennialist, Charismatic, Calvinist, Anabaptist, and High Church) will be especially relevant to those interested in how Baptist history continues to factor into questions of Baptist identity.

Overall, *Baptists Through the Centuries: A History of a Global People* is an outstanding and organised presentation of the broad sweep of Baptist history. This second edition includes three new chapters on Baptist developments in Latin America, Nigeria and Nagaland, making this already excellent resource even more up-to-date and useful to a wide readership.

**Reviewed by Thomas Bergen – PhD researcher at IBTS Centre Amsterdam and sessional lecturer in theology at King's University in Edmonton, Alberta.**