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Editorial

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In Spring 2020 the Dutch Baptists celebrated their 175th anniversary as a free church, and marked the occasion with a compilation of written portraits of ten remarkable persons whose lives more or less highlight the story. Subsequently, Dr Erik de Boer, Professor of Church History at Kampen Theological University, was invited to write a first response on these portraits, and I think his reaction was both telling and compelling. Telling that he noticed how the Dutch Baptist Union, within the course of the second half of the twentieth century, took a turn to academic emancipation, and compelling that he used even more words to raise the issue of Dutch Baptist beginnings and its stance towards catholicity: how catholic were these beginnings in the year 1845?[1]

Both observations are accurate and somehow typify the frame of mind of the Dutch Baptists, represented by its seminary. Indeed, the seminary fosters a culture of inquisitiveness and academic integrity, which serves to bring students and scholars together in a vibrant and stimulating environment. Yet, the focus of this inquisitiveness is more concentrated on the particulars of Baptist identity than on the relations Baptist (should) have with other denominations, in particular with other Free Churches, and of course with its own natural settings, such as the societal-cultural and social-economical realms. Baptists sometimes give the impression that they do not need other churches and other denominations, and that they can do without society, without culture

[1] Erik de Boer, 'Hoe katholiek is het Nederlands baptisme?', in Teun van der Leer and Arjen Stellingwerf, *Terug naar de toekomst: 175 jaar baptisme in Nederland in tien portretten,* Baptistica Reeks (Amsterdam: Unie van Baptistengemeenten in Nederland, 2020), pp. 103–109 (p. 105, 'hoe katholiek mag het begin van het baptisme in Nederland in 1845 heten?'), and p. 107 ('academische emancipatie').

and economy, even without government. They do not need any other environment but their own community of faithful believers. Such has been the felt self-understanding of many Baptist communities in the Netherlands.

Let me give an example, again, from the aforementioned book of portraits. Pastor Jan Louw (1887–1969) was a monumental figure for more than five decades in the early history of Dutch Baptist life. He was not only a trained pastor for forty-one years (at Hamburg *Predigerschule* from December 1912 to January 1954), he was also editor of *De Christen*, the well-known Baptist weekly journal (and read by many!), for no less than fifty years (1913–1963). Louw wrote extensively in *De Christen*, and deservedly left his mark on Baptist life at the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century. However, just to give an impression of Baptist culture by the end of the 1950s, I quote Louw as he wrote in the journal on his communal self-understanding as a Baptist:

> We, Baptists, are communal Christians. We wish and seek to realise the New Testament concept of congregation, which lives up to the purpose of Christ's return to the world. This community has its own particular trait, as it has a distinctive origin and destination! […] It is an entirely unique formation, superseding civic as well as governmental organisation, and cannot be a national church or a folk church. This community is a faith community: interface between heaven and earth, symptom of metaphysical life materialised in temporary and worldly existence.[2] (Translation mine)

Ever since the late fifties, things have changed dramatically in the Netherlands. After six decades of secularism, any attitude of Christian self-complacency and self-sufficiency is out of place. Baptists, too, have to deal with different times, with different churches, and yes, with different Christians, even with diversities of Christians. Not only culture and society secularise, Christians themselves also secularise. They may still 'wish and seek to realise the New Testament concept of congregation', but may capitulate to the rather presumptuous and superficial indication that the church 'supersedes' every other body of peoplehood. The time has come for the church to not supersede, not to be condescending, but to connect as equals.

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[2] Wout Huizing, 'Jan Louw (1887–1969): Leraar en leider', in Teun van der Leer and Arjen Stellingwerf, *Terug naar de toekomst*, pp. 58–67 (p. 62).

Therefore, the Baptist Seminary gratefully accepts the invitation to make this *JEBS* volume into a showcase of Dutch Baptist theology, so as to measure what its state of the art could actually be. As such this issue is just a piece of the puzzle of regional theology, one of the many sorts and sides of Baptist theology prevalent in different districts and countries. The Netherlands has its own hinterland of theological tracks and traces prompting Baptist churches in due course of time to develop their own emphases, and peculiarities, of believing and behaving.

So, in order to build this timely showcase, the Dutch Baptist Seminary invited staff, teachers, and students to participate. Our aim is to give a genuine impression of the research we are and have lately been involved in, and to underscore its feel for differentiation. This resulted in eight contributions from a variety of Baptist scholars.

In the opening article I present a resumé of most of the research executed and/or supervised by the Dutch Baptist Seminary, together with the James Wm McClendon Chair. The emphasis running through the presentation is both on scope and focus, on the variety of the research and its orientation, which is basically on the complexities of interpretive leadership within Dutch ecclesial contexts.

Subsequently, three historical articles reflect on Dutch Baptist history, the whereabouts of the early Christian bishop Ignatius of Antioch, and the intricacies of historical interpretation within theological discourse. First, Teun van der Leer and Arjen Stellingwerf navigate through chronicles, events, ideas, and names constitutive of Dutch Baptist identity, which they epitomise with the image of a 'multi-coloured robe', a metaphor reminiscent of the Joseph narrative in the book of Genesis. The colours on this robe are the result of the sweep of a 'pendulum' (Olof de Vries) between processes of institutionalisation and processes of motion and movement.

Thereupon Vincent van Altena works carefully through the spatial details of the seven authentic letters of the correspondence of the early Christian bishop and martyr Ignatius of Antioch. The research combines spatial-temporal techniques with exegetical and interpretive observations in order to clear logistic questions regarding the bishop's

itinerary. The result is a deep and multifaceted concern of Christian communities to reach out to fellow Christians in need.

Jan Martijn Abrahamse closes the brief historical strand with a critical investigation of the theory of retrieval. All too often the work of theology comes with historical 'evidence', which, on reconsideration, delivers no proof at all. Rooting theology in historical biases and inadequacies is not only wrong in terms of academic integrity, it has also moral repercussions, as it affects theology itself.

The second strand of articles is on the work of theology, mainly on practical theology, albeit that it is rather impossible to make a sharp distinction between lived theology and learned theology. However, Hans Riphagen opens with an evaluation of a collaborative research trajectory in Baptist theological education. He discusses its possibilities and hiccups, its significance and disappointment, as he attempts to critically assess and valorise this type of research for the benefit of the academy.

Then Wout Huizing, with Hans Riphagen, reviews his inquiry into small Baptist communities with a relatively high percentage of elderly people, and with almost no anticipation of renewal or growth. It is interesting to learn that the responses of these churches cannot be classified as reactions of surrender, defeat, panic or depression. On the contrary, for the outcome demonstrates vital health and open-mindedness towards the pending future of the church and to its intergenerational puzzles.

Finally, Ingeborg te Loo closes the second strand with an exploration into contemplative practices of Baptist pastors in their private lives. She interviewed a group of pastors and processed their responses for the purpose of a spiritual-theological estimation of non-Baptistic spiritual traditions. The outcome of this investigation, too, is rather confirmative of the fact that Baptist spiritual traditions tend to merge with other traditions.

In the closing article on the Baptist Seminary and the 'life of the mind' Regien Smit and I draw up concluding reflections on the list of contributions, inasmuch as they are indicative of Dutch Baptist theology. How does the seminary convey its theological strengths and

weaknesses, what are its current challenges? The seminary envisages as its future ecclesial leaders, trained hermeneuticians who understand the dynamics of interpretive leadership. Interpretive leaders are able to 'listen' to the Scripture, to their culture, to the church(es), and to their own hearts (mental well-being and spirituality), in order to bring these four meaningfully together for the sake of Christian theology (sense-making). All of this certainly pertains to the life of the mind, and the ramifications are far-reaching. The seminary, as an academic learning community, is being challenged to continue, and deepen, its interdisciplinary way of doing theology, and to broaden its vision (and dealings) on catholicity.

A Learning Community in Progress

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Abstract:
In this article I venture to give a survey of the theological work being done over more than a decade at the Dutch Baptist Seminary, in particular by its academic Chair at the Vrije Universiteit (VU) Amsterdam, and to give a brief description of its own academic finger prints, if any. The question if there actually is a Dutch proprium remains unsolved, as it should be, because this is for our peers from other theological institutions to decide. However, some leads seem to be apparent.

Keywords:
Baptists; the Netherlands; theology; Dutch Baptist Seminary; identity; James Wm McClendon Chair

Introduction

Three years ago, this article was projected to become an extended 'Forschungsbericht' of the Baptist Chair at the Vrije Universiteit (VU) Amsterdam. However, since the research focus on mapping Baptist identity was still in progress, the text was never finished. The present article is an abridgement of the original, and functions as an overview, more in particular as a presentation with the focal point on the many-sidedness of the Dutch Baptist Seminary as a learning community in progress. The versatility of Dutch research is not just to be looked upon as coincidence, but as strategy, or even better, as methodology. Apparently, the incitement to seek support from peers, to cooperate, and to do interdisciplinary work somehow fits naturally into the Dutch way of doing academic work. In explaining this proficiency, let me give some background information.

I grew up in the 1960s and 70s in the Netherlands, in an ordinary protestant family in the east side of the city of Haarlem, just a couple of miles from Amsterdam. My parents taught me to live, behave and believe like the average Dutch civilian did, and this was altogether modest and quite sober. Dutch culture more or less started around the beginning of the Christian era, with living and surviving in a delta-area, the port to Europe, and ever since the Dutch have valued the qualities of cooperation and modesty. You just cannot think you are better than someone else, and subsequently have to beg for help from others because your house or cattle are in danger of drowning. For that matter any typology of the Dutch national character should include characteristics like modesty, communal cohesion, and non-heroism.

Generally speaking, Dutch people display a deep suspicion toward heroism, mystifications, self-aggrandisement, self-gratification, and in particular toward the powers that do so. Dutch history shows the steely resolve of the people in de-mystifying the powers and the persons involved, with the intention of bringing back the power to the community where it belongs, that is, with those who live in the polder or uphill. Within the natural context of this cohabitation — the seas, the rivers, the polders, the peat-moors, the sandy plains, and its people — fresh varieties of theory and convictions emerged which cultivated new perspectives on the coherence between the realm of God, the Church, and the State (Calvinism), on the sphere of sovereignty and the right for each societal sphere to develop inherent responsibilities and jurisdiction (Abraham Kuyper, neo-Calvinism), and on the radical downgrading of the State and the established churches (Menno Simons, anabaptism).[1]

Playing the Anti-hero

Among others, the name of Hendrikus Berkhof comes to mind here, because it implies full engagement with the conundrums evolving from the uneasiness between the power of Christ and the powers that be. The Dutch theologian Berkhof was one of the first to articulate the Pauline notion of 'powers and principalities', and to foster its digestion within

[1] Cf. Cornelis van Duin, *Het bijbels ongeloof: Een radicaal-doperse theologie van het Oude Testament* (Delft: Eburon, 2010).

the work of theology.[2] According to Berkhof the 'powers' commonly refer to forceful non-personal systems which rule and direct human society. Most of these powers operate as recurring forces tending to take control of large segments of society. Categories such as 'world' (*kosmos*) and '*Zeitgeist*' (*stoicheia*) and 'powers of the world' (*kosmokratores*) often indicate systems that dominate by modes and methods deceiving humanity, subjecting them, controlling, exploiting, and dehumanising them. Coming out of the Second World War, and having experienced Nazi incarceration himself, Berkhof accurately sensed upcoming dark forces, sorts of machineries, prone to drag people of faith back to oblivion and secularisation.[3] Consequentially, he noted that the resulting vacuum of the post-war rebound, due to the evaporation of the Christian faith, would breathe heroisms and mystifications of the rule of power. New forms of paganism are bound to arise from the ashes of old paganism.

Another well-known Dutch theologian, Kornelis Heiko Miskotte, persistently emphasised during the decades after the Second World War that in serving the God of Israel, Christians should deter from attributing God's Name to new Molochs applauded for by the aristocracy. In terms of spiritual typology, paganism fascinates the average citizen living in the lower Rhine-Delta more than Christianity.[4] Therefore Miskotte, more or less prophetically, addressed the shared awareness within collective Dutch memory, that Christian morals do not match with the adoration of state, powers, and the powerful. Glorifications of presidents, the supreme, and elite, as can be found in the wake of Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, should not occur in the lower Rhine-Delta.

So, if there is a Dutch Christian identity at all, it is very hesitant and reluctant about governments becoming powerhouses. All too often they derail into institutions of self-interest and self-indulgence, more

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[2] See Hendrikus Berkhof, *De kerk en de keizer: Een studie over het ontstaan van de Byzantinistische en de theocratische staatsgedachte in de vierde eeuw* (Amsterdam: Holland, 1946), and *Christus en de machten* (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1952).

[3] Cf. Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity,* trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2011); originally published in French, *La subversion du christianisme* (Paris: Seuil, 1984).

[4] Cf. Henk Bakker, '"Het evangelie aan de Bataven:" Evangelisatie in Nederland na de millenniumwende', *Soteria*, 23, no. 2 (2006), 57–67.

concerned with their own positions than with the welfare of the people. Part of the reputed Dutch disposition may be captured with the denominator of the anti-hero. The Dutch love to play the role of anti-hero, this fuels their sense of humour. They laugh about heroes who fail, when some anti-hero outsmarts them. If any person could be called 'hero', it should be Hans Brinker or Anne Frank, who were rather young and did not perform extravaganzas to be remembered by the multitudes. Anne just wrote her diary, and Hans just put his finger in the dike ('the chubby little finger').[5] The Dutch anti-hero exhibits a no-nonsense attitude, does not look up to others just because they are somewhere up the ladder of a hierarchy.

Research Review

The Dutch inclination of playing the anti-hero definitely affects the way Dutch Baptists have been accustomed to doing theology. Their sensemaking operates on the other side of mythmaking, is strongly dedicated to the art of fact finding (*data bruta*), and for that matter also to establishing a community of equals to lean back to. This is how the Dutch Baptist Seminary came into existence (1958), first in cooperation with the University of Utrecht (1970), and then with Vrije Universiteit (VU) Amsterdam (2009). From 2009 on, Baptist House called for a '*kenniskring*' (BrainChain) to keep up with Baptists (or baptists) who are being academically trained, and who publish in the field of theology or close to the field of theology.[6] At this moment around twenty members participate twice a year, and the meetings are always stimulating and vibrant. The Baptist Seminary has chosen to make '*onderzoekszin*' (academic inquisitiveness) one of the core values of its vocation. It works with a quadrant tying four essential corners together: (1) students,

[5] The story of the little boy saving the city of Haarlem and the polders there is altogether fiction, see Mary Mapes Dodge, *Hans Brinker of De zilveren schaatsen* (Amsterdam: Athenaeum – Polak & Van Gennep, 2005; originally published as *Hans Brinker or The Silver Skates: A Story of life in Holland*, 1865), pp. 312–15.

[6] The Baptist House in Amsterdam is the actual location hosting the Dutch Baptist Seminary, the International Baptist Theological Study-Centre, the European Baptist Federation, and the administration office of the Dutch Baptist Union.

(2) churches, (3) teachers, (4) inquisitiveness. Love for research is pivotal for its cohesiveness.[7]

From there the Baptist Seminary has developed its own concept of interpretive leadership within the Dutch ecclesial context. As stated above, the idea of leadership in the Netherlands is a tricky one, because what type of leadership fits this particular context? We think that interpretive inquisitiveness adds up to interpretive leadership which cannot go unnoticed. Good church leaders know how to interpret in responsible ways. They know their times, themselves, their churches, and the Bible, and they know how to make these meaningfully conversant with one another. In the pursuit of this vision the Baptist Seminary opts for a critical historical-hermeneutical approach to the work of Christian theology and its sources. The phenomenon of revelation is foremost historically rooted, as has been the core conviction of Dutch theology for half a millennium and more.

Over a decade a variety of research has been conducted by the Baptist Seminary (2009–2021), in particular by the VU-Chair, which today is named *The James Wm McClendon Chair*. I will introduce these three fields of research now, and succinctly elaborate on them in the coming paragraphs. The design of these paragraphs is not oriented toward analysis, but to observation, and to calling attention to the Dutch Seminary's commitment to academic many-sidedness and synergy.

1. Baptist Life and Identity (Mapping Baptist Identity), conducted by the research group Baptist Identity in The Netherlands (OKBI, 2013–2018).
2. Evangelical Theology and Identity in The Netherlands, first conducted by the Centre for Evangelical and Reformation Theology (2005–2015), then by the Herman Bavinck Centre for Reformed and Evangelical Theology (2015–), and recently by the research group Evangelical Protestants on belonging, believing, and identity in Evangelical-Protestant communities in The Netherlands (2018–).
3. Leadership by Interpretation (or interpretive leadership).

[7] With this in mind the Baptist Seminary also started the Baptistica Reeks, a series of accessible booklets on subjects and discussions relevant to local churches.

a. The research group Church leadership and Ordained Ministry for the coming decades (VU University Amsterdam, 2011–2020, initiated by Eddy van der Borght).
b. The research group Inclusion and Exclusion (VU University Amsterdam, 2020–, initiated by Bernhard Reitsma).
c. The research group Martyrs and Martyrdom in Five World Religions (VU University Amsterdam, 2017–2021, initiated by Henk Bakker).
d. The research group Mystagogy and the Early Church, conducted by the Centre for Patristic Research at the VU University Amsterdam and Tilburg School of Catholic Theology (2008–, initiated by Paul van Geest)
e. The research group B/baptists and Sacramentalism, conducted by an international network of free church scholars based at different universities and colleges (2020–).

Mapping Baptist Identity in The Netherlands

In order to be able to trace some possible 'fingerprints' of a Dutch way of doing theology, I now take a close look at a variety of doctoral theses, master's dissertations, bachelor's dissertations, and other publications, which not only give the scope and breadth of the theological enquiries of the seminary, but may also provide some leads and hints for making any sense of a Dutch 'proprium'.

Again, I wish to underline that the following paragraphs will merely offer an overview of the research coordinated and registered with researchers linked (or to be linked) to the Dutch Baptist Seminary. In the closing article of this compilation more theological discrimination and interpretation will be given by Regien Smit and myself. In advance, I also wish to value the Baptist Seminary as a learning community delivering parameters for finding personal and communal academic focus, which generally results in a critical heuristic with a certain

emphasis on the act of finding and learning, not to say on the adventure of finding, personally and together.

During the years 2013 to 2018 the research group Baptist Identity in The Netherlands (OKBI) operated as a platform of fellow experts, conversant with different types of churches,[8] whose intention it was to initiate, conduct and supervise a variety of academic research on Baptist life, whether empirical, historical or theological.[9] For the study of Baptist life, we adopted the convictional approach of James Wm McClendon, since his starting point is with storied convictions, as they are communally preserved, passed on, interpreted and identified with.[10] Every convictive community carries with it identity stories in correlation with its identity narratives (scripture and normative traditions), durably expressed in powerful practices, such as prayer, proclamation, singing, baptism, the Lord's supper. Methodologically, this approach is to be situated in the field of descriptive theology, a subset of practical theology, and postulates the hypothesis that in any thick description theology plays an important role. Accordingly, theological research has no fixed methodological starting point or closing point. There is no Archimedean spot, a *pou stô*, from where the theologian may stand firm, move the world and explore. Rather, as Stanley Hauerwas maintains, 'you always begin in the middle'. There are no real prolegomena for the work of theology: 'It is performance all the way down.'[11]

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[8] See on the project Mapping Baptist Identity the inaugural 'Munificent Church: The Drama of Tangible Ecclesial Transformation', *The American Baptist Quarterly,* 31, no. 4 (2012), 366–378. OKBI consisted of permanent members Eduard Groen, Teun van der Leer, Hans Riphagen, Arjen Stellingwerf (secretary), Henk Bakker (chair), and short-term members Jack Barentsen, Miranda Klaver, Teus van de Lagemaat, Stefan Paas, Sake Stoppels.

[9] Cf. Henk Bakker, 'Mapping Dutch Baptist Identity', in *Zo zijn onze manieren! In gesprek over gemeentetheologie*, ed. by Teun van der Leer, Baptistica Reeks (Barneveld: Unie van Baptistengemeenten, 2009), pp. 23–31.

[10] See David McMillan, *Convictions, Conflict and Moral Reasoning: The Contribution of the Concept of Convictions in Understanding Moral Reasoning in the Context of Conflict, Illustrated by a Case Study of Four Groups of Christians in Northern Ireland*, Amsterdam Studies in Baptist and Mennonite Theology, 1 (Kampen: Summum, 2021). Cf. Henk Bakker and Daniël Drost, eds, *Andersom – een introductie in de theologie van James Wm. McClendon* (Unie van Baptistengemeenten in Nederland, Veenendaal: WoodyDesign, 2014).

[11] Stanley Hauerwas, *The Work of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), p. 24.

Still, practical theology regularly begins with empirical descriptions of elements of lived religion, with a view to rendering explicit vital theological convictions. However, as a work of descriptive theology, thick descriptions may not automatically be conceived as inductive explorations, they may be apprehended as deductive documents as well. For this reason, Charles Marsh distinguishes between lived theology and lived religion. Examining lived religion, scholars explore and investigate practices, beliefs, and objects with a view to understanding religion, whereas lived theology is studied by analysing human experiences of God's presence as purported in certain practices and beliefs. Accordingly, the research domain of lived theology duly reckons with the possibility and potentiality of God being present in human experiences.[12]

Hence all reflection on the church, ethnographic as well as sociological insights amongst others, may legitimately be tied to theological considerations, Nicholas Healy propounds.[13] No matter how much interdisciplinary science is involved, ecclesial studies will always display demonstrable theodramatic perspectives.[14] The church needs these tools to study and critique its own life and meaning, on account of which, doing lived theology becomes also an exercise in prophetic ecclesiology.[15]

I now offer a brief survey of most of the research enlisted by OKBI (2013–2018), first by looking at doctoral work, then moving to master's research conflating with some bachelor's research.

1.At the fifteenth OKBI meeting, on 14 October 2016 at the VU University Amsterdam, five Baptist doctoral students were asked to present some critical reflections, informed by their own research, as an address to the Dutch Baptist Federation in light of its present and

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[12] See Charles Marsh, Peter Slade, and Sarah Azaransky, eds, *Lived Theology: New Perspectives on Method, Style, and Pedagogy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 1–20 (pp. 6–9).

[13] Cf. Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 176.

[14] Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life,* pp. 76, 154, 165, 166, 168, 175–179.

[15] Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life,* pp. 52–54.

future.[16] Teun van der Leer steeped himself in meticulous analysis of eighteen Believers' Church Conferences (from 1955–2017),[17] and responded with pointing to some of the core values of the Believers' Church, such as its covenantal demeanour, its theology of baptism, and from there raised a piercing question: could it be that the issue of catholicity among Baptists and baptistic communities is more central for its shared identity than usually recognised? We like to think that our communities are thick and covenantal, and that they represent a high quality of the body of Christ, but how can this be if we define ourselves as somehow isolated from the body of Christ represented in other modalities?

Maybe the answer is to be found in the puzzling and problematic relation Baptists tend to have with other churches. Our lack of catholicity is *nolens volens* constitutive of some distinctives of the Baptist identity.[18] At the first Believers' Church Conference in Louisville, Kentucky in 1967,[19] the concept of the Believer's Church was at the heart of the matter, and was summarised as follows:

> The visible community is the organ of witness to the surrounding society. As discerning community it is led by the Holy Spirit to develop criteria of moral judgment in social issues. As forgiven community she brings to bear the qualities of compassion and love. As paradigmatic community the church is the pilot agency in the building of new patterns of social relations. The democratization of the power structures of society and the development of welfare concerns are pioneered and preached by the covenanted community. (Appendixes I art. IV.B)[20]

The conference was considered a landmark in the development of the Believers' Church tradition. The notion of the visible church became vital in Anabaptist and Baptist thinking. In fact, it was a battle term ('*Kampfwort*') stemming from early reformation time, and was

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[16] Present were Daniël Drost, Yme Horjus, Teun van der Leer, Hans Riphagen, and Kirsten Timmer.

[17] See forthcoming, Teun van der Leer, 'Looking in the Other Direction: The Story of the Believers Church Tradition' (doctoral thesis, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam).

[18] Cf. Brian Haymes, Ruth Gouldbourne, and Anthony R. Cross, *On Being the Church: Revisioning Baptist Identity*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought, 21 (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008).

[19] The first attempt at a Believers' Church Conference was projected in 1964 in Amsterdam, yet was cancelled due to 'insufficient interest'.

[20] James Leo Garrett, Jr, ed., *The Concept of the Believers' Church: Addresses from the 1967 Louisville Conference* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1969), p. 321.

connected with the practice of discernment.[21] At the same conference, J. Lawrence Burkholder typified the church as a prophetic community, which is a discerning community, enabling each individual to understand the will of God for today.[22] Every believer participated in the full ministry of Christ, and by consequence should be deemed a priest, a prophet, or a preacher.[23] Even at the pre-conference, at the Mennonite Biblical Seminary Chicago in 1955, all agreed on the heartfelt statement, 'We come with open minds desiring to find the mind and will of God.'[24] So, if Baptist churches can fairly well be described as discerning churches, this characteristic may be leading in our effort to give a descriptive survey of lived Baptist theology and identity.[25] However, it is precisely the high idealism going along with the discerning quality, which all too often takes churches captive into an attitude of moral superiority, and from there into cocoons of 'splendid isolation'.[26]

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21 Garrett, *The Concept of the Believers' Church,* p. 278.

22 Garrett, *The Concept of the Believers' Church,* p. 176.

23 App. I art. I.C; App. I art. II; App. II art. 6.c. in Garrett, *The Concept of the Believers' Church,* 'Appendices'.

24 *Proceedings of the Study Conference on the Believers' Church Held at Mennonite Biblical Seminary Chicago, Illinois, August 23–25, 1955* (Newton: The Mennonite Press, 1956), pp. 224–225. However, there is no direct connection between the 1955 Mennonite conference and the later series of Believers' Church Conferences.

25 Cf. Henk Bakker, "'We are all equal" (Omnes sumus aequales): A Critical Assessment of Early Protestant Ministerial Thinking', *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 44, no. 3 (2017), 353–76; 'Towards a Catholic Understanding of Baptist Congregationalism: Conciliar Power and Authority', *Journal of Reformed Theology*, 5 (2011), 159–83; and *Gunnende Kerk: Kompas voor een waardegestuurde gemeente ethiek* (Kampen: Brevier, 2012). See also Henk Bakker, Erik Groeneveld, and Yme Horjus, *Kunnende kerk: Gemeente-ethiek in de praktijk* (Kampen: Brevier, 2020), and Ingeborg Janssen-te Loo, ed., *Samen ontdekken! De uitdaging van de vergader(en)de gemeente: samen de wil van Christus onderscheiden*, Baptistica Reeks (Barneveld: Unie van Baptistengemeenten in Nederland, 2016), pp. 18–33.

26 Cf. forthcoming Hruaia Khiangte, 'A Historical Study on the Development of the "Baptist Distinctive Doctrines" and their Implications to the Baptists' Participation towards the Ecumenical Movement: A Search for Problems and Relevant Understandings with Special Reference to the Baptist Churches in India' (doctoral thesis, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam) and the master's research of Koert Baas on the ecumenical agenda between Baptists and the Catholic Church. Cf. to be published, Henk Bakker, 'Towards Free Church Ecumenical Theology: On the Pre-Given Vocation to Listen', in *Internazionale Kirchliche Zeitschrift* (an issue on 'apostolic succession and ecumenical theology').

2. At the same OKBI meeting Yme Horjus reported on his investigations into ecclesial discipline within Dutch Baptist Churches.[27] The compelling question he raised with a view to future Baptist life was about obedience to Christ. If Baptists wish to live as followers of Christ, they have to stick to the practice of mutual correction and accountability. Horjus observes an openness and readiness among Baptist churches to discuss 'bottom-up' common values.

3. In the same flow of thought Kirsten Timmer added her critical question on the idea of 'consensus' within baptistic circles. Timmer's research comprises a critical historical analysis of earliest Baptist correspondence between Mennonites and English refugees. Her findings prove the fact that Mennonite communities and English separatists drew up quite loose confessions in order to verify mutual consensus between communities and individuals.[28]

4. Daniël Drost focused his research on specific Jewish orientations in Free Church ecclesiology as articulated by John Howard Yoder.[29] He strongly points to the necessity for Baptist churches in a post-Christendom setting to consider themselves diaspora churches and to embody the Gospel of Christ without craving for power. Can Baptist churches be merely present without heralding their expectations, trophies and successes in the spiritual realm, and let suffering and failure also be part of their spiritual harvest? Moreover, do Baptist churches have enough capacity in their theological DNA to let this happen and adjust themselves to (rapidly) changing circumstances, and not mourn over what has passed, but face up to new situations and accommodate

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[27] Yme Horjus defended his thesis at Kampen Theological University on 11 December 2020: *Elkaar aanspreken: Is er nog draagvlak voor tegenspraak, correctie en tucht in de kerk?* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 2020).

[28] The provisional title of Kirsten Timmer's research is 'An Examination of Baptist Origins in the Context of Baptist and Mennonite Relationships in the Early Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic' (ongoing doctoral research, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam). See also regarding Baptist roots in Amsterdam, Olof H. de Vries, *Gelovig gedoopt – 400 jaar baptisme, 150 jaar in Nederland* (Kampen: Kok, 2009), Henk Bakker, *De Weg van het wassende water: Op zoek naar de wortels van het baptisme* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2008), and Henk Bakker, 'Baptists in Amsterdam', *The Baptist Quarterly*, 43 (2009), 229–34.

[29] Daniël Drost defended his doctoral thesis at the VU University Amsterdam on 12 November 2019: 'Diaspora as Mission: John Howard Yoder, Jeremiah 29 and the Shape and Mission of the Church.'

their identity to new allies? Here again, Baptists may stumble over their high ideals pregiven with their propensity to 'discern' and to define themselves away from others. Baptists' core strength apparently has a flipside. Strong in mutual discernment and the testing of spirits, Baptists tend (1) to disqualify possible allies on the grounds of superficial prejudice, and (2) to get stuck in tenacity and walking in circles.

5. Moreover, the question raised by Hans Riphagen in his academic analysis of Christian neighbour-ship makes this weakness all the more explicit.[30] Riphagen summons us to look carefully at practices and not to be judgemental at first sight when Baptists try to build bridges. Do Baptist churches succeed in religious 'place making'? How do they look at the theological 'other', and how does otherness construct (or deconstruct) identity?[31]

6. Critical questions such as these also pertain to issues of ecclesial office and types of leadership. Jan Martijn Abrahamse wrote his doctoral research on the primary sources of Robert Browne's theology (c. 1550–1633), one of the early fathers of congregational ecclesiology. His study is motivated by the modern controversy regarding ministerial office within Baptist churches as it articulates and assesses Browne's concept of ordained ministry in the light of the current debate.[32] Retrievals like these help Baptist churches to critically

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[30] Hans Riphagen defended his doctoral thesis at the VU University Amsterdam on 9 June 2021: 'Church-in-the-Neighbourhood: A Spatio-Theological Ethnography of Protestant Christian Place-making in the Suburban Context of Lunetten, Utrecht.'

[31] See on Christian hospitality the doctoral research of Michael Pears, 'Towards a Theological Engagement with an Area of Multiple Deprivation: The Case of the Cornwall Estate', defended at the VU University Amsterdam on 2 September 2015. Cf. Matthew Edminster's current doctoral research, 'The Reality of Fellowship: A Relational and Theological Examination of Fellowship in the Life of a Small Estonian Free Church Congregation' (Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam). See on types of Baptist prejudice for example Lee Spitzer's doctoral research, '"The Hand of Sincere Friendship": Baptist Responses to Nazi Anti-Semitism and Persecution of the Jewish People (1933–1948)', defended at the VU University Amsterdam on 6 September 2016, and the current doctoral research of Laura Dijkhuizen, 'The Invisible Woman: Gender Roles in Contemporary Evangelical Churches in the Netherlands'. See also the master's dissertation of Inge Boef, 'Bewegen In Vrijheid: Een onderzoek naar baptistentheologie in relatie tot volwaardige participatie van homoseksuelen in Amerikaanse baptistengemeenten' (University of Utrecht, 2013). Reggie Williams addressed racial issues among Baptists at the McClendon Lectures held at Baptist House, Amsterdam on 19 November 2018.

[32] Jan Martijn Abrahamse defended his thesis 'The Stripping of the Ministry: A Reconsideration and Retrieval of Robert Browne's Theology of Ordained Ministry' at the VU University

reconsider their so-called crown-jewels, their distinctive identity badges.[33]

The critical questions raised by these six addresses mainly concern the high standard Baptists and baptistic churches seem to have regarding their capacity to discern and to hammer out their policy and identity aloof from other churches. As Abrahamse's research indicates, the complexity of interpretive leadership within congregational churches requires much from its leaders. They should not only be respected pastors with charisma and unique personal qualities, but also pastors who are teachable, inquisitive, and who know how to study well and to use academic handbooks.

7. Joel Meindertsma compared two pioneer churches with regard to the local processes to find out their own communal policies in dealing with ethical issues.[34] To be equipped sufficiently for the task of interpretive leadership, pastors not only have to be familiar with peer-groups and supervision, the pressures they face requires them also to be able to mentor themselves and to access additional training and the solid provisions made available by the Baptist Union.[35] Local churches should

Amsterdam on 10 January 2018. See also Jan Martijn Abrahamse and Wout Huizing, eds, *Van onderen! Op zoek naar een ambtstheologie voor een priesterschap van gelovigen,* Baptistica Reeks, (Amsterdam: Unie van Baptistengemeenten in Nederland, 2014).

33 See also the retrievals of Lon Graham, "'All Who Love Our Blessed Redeemer": The Catholicity of John Ryland Jr', defended at the VU University Amsterdam on 19 January 2021. Cf. Samuel Renihan, 'From Shadow to Substance: The Roots and Rise of the Federal Theology of the English Particular Baptists (1642–1702)', defended at the VU University Amsterdam on 26 October 2017.

34 Joel Meindertsma, 'Ethische dilemmas' (batchelor's dissertation, Ede University of Applied Sciences, 2016). See also Ingeborg Janssen-te Loo, 'Creating a Culture of Communal Discernment in Dutch Baptist Churches' (master's dissertation, International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague, 2014).

35 See Marijn Vlasblom, 'Geleerd en geleefd: narratief onderzoek naar het geleefde geloof van studenten van het baptisten seminarium' (master's dissertation, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, 2016), and 'ChurchSense en de toepasbaarheid voor Baptistengemeenten' (bachelor's dissertation, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, 2015). Cf. Arjen Kwantes, 'Wie geneest de dokter?' (bachelor's dissertation, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, 2016). See also Arjan Dekker and André Molenaar, 'Voorganger ben je niet alleen?!' (bachelor's dissertation, Ede University of Applied Sciences, 2011), and Daniël van Maaren, Jonathan Vedder, and Jonathan van den Helder, 'Leiderschapstransitie binnen de Unie van Baptistengemeenten in Nederland' (bachelor's dissertation, Ede University of Applied Sciences, 2012).

be accurately informed about, and be held accountable for, the extended spiritual formation programmes of their pastors.

8. As interpretive leaders, Baptist pastors put effort in trying to read and reconstruct the narrative of the church as it emerges from lived faith, learned faith, and scripture. Research in this field has been accomplished by Mattias Rouw, Hans Baak, Martijn Nijhoff, and Paulus de Jong. Rouw compared two quite different Baptist churches, one high liturgical and the other almost non-liturgical, and typified them accordingly. He carefully observed and coded the prayers addressed to God during several services, and succeeded in making a thick description of the 'story' told in the communal services.[36] Baak and Nijhoff compared two Baptist churches as to their employment of sermons and biblical content during fifteen services. Which narratives have been told and retold by sermons and by use of the Bible, in particular by its interpretations and applications? What interconnectedness between these narratives and the shared self-understanding of the communities was apparent? Baak and Nijhoff carefully drew up a thick description of the 'story' told in the religious services by thorough analyses of the sermons, corroborated by interviews and surveys.[37] Paulus de Jong analysed the inclination of a local Baptist church to isolate itself by being absorbed in discussions on church music and communal singing.[38]

9. Quite differently, but altogether affirmative of the interplay between the whereabouts of churches, their communal self-understanding, and their interpretive leadership, is the research accomplished by Wout Huizing and Ronald van den Oever (see further in this *JEBS* issue), who elaborate on previous research done by Gerard Grit and Thomas Steenbergen. The purpose of the research *Groentjes* was to investigate and explore the narrative (storied) self-understanding of a number of ageing communities. Even though the subject matter has some uneasiness about it, the churches consulted were quite open

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[36] Mattias Rouw, 'Het verhaal van het gebed: Een onderzoek naar gebed en baptistenidentiteit' (master's dissertation, Utrecht University, 2013).

[37] Hans Baak and Martijn Nijhoff, 'Prediking en Baptisten identiteit' (bachelor's dissertation, Ede University of Applied Sciences, 2015).

[38] Paulus de Jong, 'Muziek en morele ruimte' (bachelor's dissertation, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, 2015).

and benefitted from the consultation and discussions on developing feasible policies with regard to setting the right conditions for raising intergenerational concern among their members.[39]

In closing this brief presentation of the research trajectory of Mapping Baptist Identity, the adage of Olof de Vries comes to mind, posing that 'Baptist communities are of time, and not of eternity'.[40] To be sure, Baptist churches are discerning churches, led by interpretation, but the storied embodiment of their convictions does convey timely idiosyncrasies and challenges, such as (1) to genuinely engage and be conversant with the non-believing world, with believers of different beliefs, and/or with believers who believe differently. Already in 2010, Ingeborg Janssen-te Loo published the rather alarming result of a broad survey conducted in the greater part of the Baptist Union that most of these churches were inclined to isolate themselves from society and to become almost invisible.[41] (2) Yet, in their pursuit for strong missional presence Baptist churches are prompted to transform into porous communities of discernment, bodies with strong relations in their communal centre (watchcare[42]), and ready to explore the mind of Christ. (3) Involvement in these dynamics confront churches with their political and ethical reservations, and challenges them to reconsider their

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[39] Wout Huizing and Ronald van den Oever, *Groentjes in Baptistengemeenten in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Baptistenseminarium, 2017). Cf. Gerard Grit and Thomas Steenbergen, 'Het zilveren fundament – een visie voor een ouder wordende kerk' (bachelor's dissertation, Ede University of Applied Sciences, 2013).

[40] Olof H. de Vries, *Gelovig gedoopt – 400 jaar baptisme, 150 jaar in Nederland* (Kampen: Kok, 2009), pp. 24, 74, 91. Cf. Olof H. de Vries, *Alles is geschiedenis: Bouwstenen voor een baptistische geloofsvisie uit de dogmatiek van Olof H. De Vries*, ed. by Henk Bakker, Jelle Horjus, Jos Jumelet, Teun van der Leer, and Anne de Vries (Utrecht: Kok, 2015); Henk Bakker, Albrecht Boerrigter, Jeanette van Es, and Winfried Ramaker, eds, *De geschiedenis van het Schriftwoord gaat door: Gedachten ter markering van de theologie van dr. O. H. de Vries* (Utrecht: Kok, 2014); and Henk Bakker and Teun van der Leer, eds, *Smeltend ijs: Olof de Vries over tijd en traditie, geschiedenis en gemeente*, Baptistica Reeks (Amsterdam: Unie van Baptistengemeenten in Nederland, 2017). See Arjen Stellingwerf, 'Johannes Elias Feisser: Nederlandse Baptistenpionier in Gasselternijveen' (bachelor's dissertation, Theological University Kampen, 2016). See also Sibbele Meindertsma, *Veilig of heilig* (Baptist Seminary, Amsterdam, 2015) on a comparison of the theological legacy of Jannes Reiling (1923–2005) with the missional vision of Urban Expression.

[41] Ingeborg Janssen-te Loo, *Gemeenten op een gezonde weg? Gezonde gemeenten in de Unie van Baptistengemeenten* (Barneveld: Baptistenseminarium, 2010).

[42] See for the notion of 'watchcare' James Wm McClendon, Jr, *Ethics: Systematic Theology, Volume 1* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), pp. 51–53, 77, 227–232.

reluctance and hesitance towards an inclusivist demeanour.[43] (4) Baptist reservations toward catholicity and ecumenism have become a constitutive element of Baptist identity, which intrinsically thwarts an open missional attitude of the church. Still, the gift of catholicity abides and rests with the church, even if neglected.[44]

Evangelical Theology and Identity in The Netherlands

Baptist scholars have been involved in the Evangelical movement from the late 1980s until now. When the Centre for Evangelical and Reformation Theology started at the VU University Amsterdam (CERT 2005–2015), the Baptist Seminary partnered in the enterprise. When the CERT was succeeded by the Herman Bavinck Centre for Reformed and Evangelical Theology (HBCRET 2015–), Baptist House partnered again. Moreover, it contributed in both programmes, and also to two major publications on contemporary developments in evangelical theology.[45] In 2017, independently from CERT, the first comprehensive treatment on the story, development, and peculiarities of the Dutch

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43 Cf. Albrecht Boerrigter, 'Dutch Baptist Way of Political Involvement' (master's dissertation, Faculty of Philosophy, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, 2013).

44 Cf. Henk Bakker, 'The Changing Face of Unity or: Cutting the Right Edges in the Proper Way', in *Catholicity under Pressure: The Ambiguous Relationship between Diversity and Unity: Proceedings of the 18th Academic Consultation of the Societas Oecumenica*, ed. by Dagmar Heller and Péter Szentpétery, Beihefte zur Ökumenischen Rundschau, 105 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2016), pp. 81–89, and Henk Bakker, 'Congregationalist en katholiek?', *Kontekstueel*, 22, no. 5 (2008), 15–18.

45 See Henk Bakker, 'Finding a Place of Holiness: Towards a Typological Characterisation of Evangelical Churches in the Netherlands', in *Evangelical Theology in Transition: Essays Under the Auspices of the Center of Evangelical and Reformation Theology (CERT)*, ed. by C. van der Kooi, E. van Staalduine-Sulman, and A. W. Zwiep, Amsterdam Studies in Theology and Religion, 1 (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2012), pp. 15–39, and Bakker, 'Towards an Evangelical Hermeneutic of Authority', in *Evangelicals and Sources of Authority: Essays Under the Auspices of the Center of Evangelical and Reformation Theology (CERT)*, ed. by M. Klaver, S. Paas, and E. van Staalduine-Sulman, Amsterdam Studies in Theology and Religion, 6 (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2016), pp. 25–43. Cf. Henk Bakker, 'Allemaal evangelicaal? Perspectieven op de evangelische beweging', in *Kerkelijk Nederland van de kaart*, ed. by Koert van Bekkum and George Harinck, Bavinck Lezingen 2007 (Barneveld: Historisch Documentatiecentrum voor het Nederlands Protestantisme [1800–heden], Vrije Universiteit en *Nederlands Dagblad*, 2007), pp. 31–51.

evangelical movement was published and presented on 18 May 2017 at Driebergen.[46]

Subsequently, a joint initiative was taken by the Baptist House (VU University Amsterdam) and Radboud University Nijmegen to conduct a research on 'belonging, believing, and identity among evangelical protestants anno 2020'.[47] Besides the VU and Radboud, a variety of other partners are involved (e.g. Kampen Theological University, The Dutch Evangelical Broadcasting Company, Missie Nederland, Stichting Opwekking, and other organisations, denominations, and single churches), whose aim it is to inquire into changing patterns of belonging as well as into the meaning-making associated with this, and to draw up a broad and up-to-date survey of the Dutch evangelical movement in this regard.

Currently HBCRET is in the process of hammering out a research programme on the 'immediacy and presence' that goes together with a 'heuristic of perceiving God'. In other words, the researchers involved set out to reflect on, discuss, and study humanity's susceptibility towards God, and how (if at all) they may perceive God. Despite the fact that the Netherlands may be considered a secularised country — after all, within half a century the established churches lost almost half of their membership — the average Dutch citizen does reckon with something 'divine' or 'beyond' or 'out there'. So, what exactly is knowledge from beyond, and what is transcending knowledge or revelation?

Leadership by Interpretation

So far, the issue of interpretive leadership has only briefly been addressed. In subsequent paragraphs its necessity as well as its complexity become more apparent and compelling. The following five fields of research, namely (1) 'leadership and ordained ministry', (2) 'Christian texts on inclusion and exclusion', (3) 'martyrdom texts in five

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46 Cf. Laura Dijkhuizen and Henk Bakker, eds, *Typisch evangelisch: Een stroming in perspectief* (Amsterdam: Ark Media, 2017).

47 Initiators are Hans Riphagen (Dutch Baptist Seminary), Paul Vermeer, and Peer Scheepers (Radboud University, Nijmegen).

world religions', (4) 'mystagogy and early Christian texts', and (5) 'Free Churches and sacramental traditions', clearly underline the importance of critical hermeneutical training and understanding within the Dutch Baptist academic community. Leadership by interpretation needs an academic learning community to critically materialise its desires, its parameters, and its objectives.

Church Leadership and Ordained Ministry

In 2011 Eddy van der Borght (VU) launched a national research platform, with various academies and church denominations involved, to mutually investigate how ecclesial leadership and ordained ministry coincide in these denominations, and how future leadership is envisaged from these different perspectives. In 2020 this resulted in an academic compilation of articles on religious leadership in a post-Christian era in the Netherlands.[48] In the same year, Jan Martijn Abrahamse's dissertation was published on ordained ministry from a Free Church perspective through a critical retrieval of Robert Browne. [49]

Inclusion and Exclusion

In 2020 the research group Inclusion and Exclusion started at the VU University Amsterdam, facilitated and run by Bernhard Reitsma. This research is oriented toward 'mechanisms of in- and exclusion', as these are operative within core texts of the Christian faith and lived religion. How are these texts being embodied in church life, and how do churches deal with tensions between texts, traditions, and multi-religious society, in particular within the context of Islam?[50]

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[48] Jan Martijn Abrahamse, Henk Bakker, Leo Koffeman and Peter-Ben Smit, 'Geordineerd ambt en leiderschap', in *Religieus leiderschap in post-christelijk Nederland*, ed. by Leon van den Broeke and Eddy Van der Borght (Utrecht: KokBoekencentrum, 2020), pp. 257–94. Cf. Henk Bakker, 'Het congregationele [independentistische] perspectief', in *Nooit meer eene nieuwe hiërarchie! De kerkrechterlijke nalatenschap van F.L. Rutgers*, ed. by Leon van den Broeke and George Harinck, Ad Chartas-Reeks, 34 (Hilversum: De Vuurbaak, 2018), pp. 125–33, and Bakker, 'De bisschop is van beneden, niet van boven: een congregationele benadering', *Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Kerk & Recht*, 5 (2011), 54-65.

[49] Jan Martijn Abrahamse, *Ordained Ministry in Free Church Perspective: Retrieving Robert Browne (C. 1550–1633) for Contemporary Ecclesiology*, Studies in Reformed Theology, 41 (Leiden and Boston; Leiden: Brill, 2020).

[50] Forthcoming: Henk Bakker, 'Otherness and Exile: Jesus' Attitude Towards Sinners and Outsiders'.

Martyrdom Texts in Five World Religions

In 2017, Baptist House took the initiative of calling together experts from the five world religions to sit together (heuristically) and read and interpret martyr texts from these traditions, and to publish our findings in Dutch in order to instigate discussion. This unique enterprise resulted in the publication of a compilation of presentations in 2021 by Amsterdam University Press.[51]

This book aims at a three-fold outcome: (1) critical study of religious texts on martyrdom; (2) analysis as to how these texts function in contemporary debate on martyrdom; (3) furthering dialogue and understanding between different religious strands on matters of suffering for one's faith. Contributors are Victor van Bijlert (Indian Religions and Sanskrit, Faculty of Religion and Theology (FRT), VU), Henk Blezer (Buddhist Studies and Asia Studies, FRT/VU; Leiden University), Michael Bloemendal (Jewish Studies, FRT/VU), Pieter Coppens (Islam Studies, FRT/VU), Jan Willem van Henten (Science of Religion, University of Amsterdam; Old and New Testament, Stellenbosch University), Ab de Jong (Comparative Religion, Leiden University), Lucien van Liere (Science of Religion, Faculty of Humanities, Utrecht University), Bert Jan Lietaert Peerbolte (New Testament, FRT/VU), and Henk Bakker (Baptistic and Evangelical Theologies, FRT/VU).

With regard to Baptist history and tradition, Baptist House is pre-committed to be engaged in research on the hermeneutics of martyrdom, persecution, suffering and violence.[52]

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[51] Henk Bakker and Bert Jan Lietaert Peerbolte, eds, *Dan liever dood! Over martelaren en hun religieuze drijfveren* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021).

[52] See Henk Bakker, 'A Martyr's Pain is Not Pain: Mystagogical Directives in Tertullian's *Ad martyras*, and some other North African Martyr Texts', in *Seeing Through the Eyes of Faith: New Approaches to the Mystagogy of the Church Fathers*, ed. by Paul van Geest, Late Antique History and Religion, 11 (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), pp. 629–48; '"Beyond the Measure of Man": About the Mystery of Socratic Martyrdom', *Church History and Religious Culture,* 95 (2015), 1–17; 'Potamiaena: Some Observations About Martyrdom and Gender in Ancient Alexandria', in *The Wisdom of Egypt. Jewish, Early Christian and Gnostic Essays in Honour of Gerard P. Luttikhuizen*, ed. by A. Hilhorst, and G. H. van Kooten, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity, 59 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), pp. 331–50; 'Animosity and (Voluntary) Martyrdom: The Power of the Powerless', in *Animosity, the Bible and Us: Some European, North American and South African*

Mystagogy and the Early Church

Likewise, the Dutch Baptist Seminary treasures critical reflection on Christian sources from the earliest Christian times to early medieval times. Hence its participation in the Centre for Patristic Research (VU University Amsterdam and Tilburg School of Catholic Theology, 2008–2018), and the Centre for Patristic Research and Studies of Early Christianity (2018–). At this moment the McClendon Chair partakes in the FRT/VU department of Texts and Traditions, and is involved in the Amsterdam/Tilburg Early Church and Mystagogy project,[53] as the project is within early Christological studies.[54] Precisely with regard to its conciliarism and apologetics early Christianity has much to offer for present debates on the marginalisation of the church in western

Perspectives, ed. by John T. Fitzgerald, Fika J. van Rensburg, and Herrie F. van Rooy, Society of Biblical Literature, Global Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship, 12 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), pp. 287–97. Cf. Henk Bakker, *Exemplar Domini: Ignatius of Antioch and His Martyrological Self-Concept* (doctoral thesis, Groningen University, Leuven: Peeters, 2003), and *Ze hebben lief, maar worden vervolgd. Radicaal christendom in de tweede eeuw en nu*, 3rd ed. (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2006). Baptist theologian Maurits Luth is preparing his doctoral research at the VU University Amsterdam (supervisors Bakker and Paas) on the idea of 'being persecuted' within different strands of European Christianity ('Estranged, but persecuted? A critical and heuristic exploration concerning persecuted Christians in Western Europe today').

53 About to be published, Henk Bakker, 'Kissing Hermas: Convertive Mystagogy in The Shepherd', in *Mystagogy & the Body*, ed. by Paul van Geest et al., Annua Nuntia Lovaniensis (Leuven: Peeters, 2022); Henk Bakker, '"So On Earth": Liturgy From Heaven', in *Prayer and the Transformation of the Self in Early Christian Mystagogy*, ed. by Hans van Loon, Giselle de Nie, Michiel Op de Coul, and Peter van Egmond, Late Antique History and Religion, 18: *The Mystagogy of the Church Fathers*, Volume 5 (Leuven: Peeters, 2018), pp. 41–60.

54 See Henk Bakker, *Jezus: Reconstructie en revisie*, 3rd ed. (Utrecht: KokBoekencentrum, 2021), and and 'Pneuma-Christology as Applied Christology: Intimacy and Immediacy in the Odes of Solomon', in *The Spirit is Moving: New Pathways in Pneumatology*, ed. by Gijsbert van den Brink, Eveline van Staalduine-Sulman, and Maarten Wisse, Studies in Reformed Theology, 38 (Brill: Leiden, 2019), pp. 93–108. See also Henk Bakker, '"Yes, We Can": The Almost Forgotten Flipside of Discipleship', *Baptistic Theologies*, 7, no. 2 (2015), 25–43.

society.[55] This involves not only solid textual exegesis, but also the willingness to explore interdisciplinary approaches.[56]

Free Churches and Sacramentalism

From 2020 onwards, the Dutch Baptist Seminary has been collaborating on a global scale with institutions and scholars from a variety of Free Churches to make an inventory of opinions regarding B/baptists and sacramentalism. Much reflection has already been done in this field,[57]

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[55] See Henk Bakker, Paul van Geest, and Hans van Loon, eds, *Cyprian of Carthage: Studies in His Life, Language, and Thought*, Late Antique History and Religion, 3 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010); Henk Bakker, '"Helpers en bondgenoten voor de vrede": Een peiling van vroege christelijke zelfinterpretatie', *Radix*, 35, no. 3 (2009), 190–205. Cf. Henk Bakker, '"Altijd bereid tot verantwoording": vroegchristelijke apologie op de grens', in *Verantwoord geloof: Handboek christelijke apologetiek*, ed. by H. A. Bakker, M. J. de Kater, and W. van Vlastuin (Kampen: Brevier, 2014), pp. 80–90; Henk Bakker, 'Herders', in *Apostelen: dragers van een spraakmakend evangelie*, ed. by P. H. R. van Houwelingen, Commentaar op het Nieuwe Testament (Kampen: Kok, 2010), pp. 292–313, 'Martelaren', in *Apostelen*, pp. 314–38, 'Getuigen', in *Apostelen*, pp. 339–61. See also Henk Bakker, 'Tangible Church: Challenging the Apparitions of Docetism (I): The Ghost of Christmas Past'; 'Tangible Church: Challenging the Apparitions of Docetism (II): The Ghost of Christmas Present'; 'Tangible Church: Challenging the Apparitions of Docetism (III): The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come', in *Baptistic Theologies*, 5, no. 2 (2013), 1–17, 18–35, 36–58 respectively; and 'De ziel van Europa en de Geest van God', in *De werking van de Heilige Geest in de Europese cultuur en traditie*, ed. by Erik Borgman, Kees van der Kooi, Akke van der Kooi, and Govert Buijs (Kampen: Kok, 2008), pp. 73–85; and 'Spirituality and Ethnicity in Holland', *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, 7, no. 2 (2007), 38–49.

[56] See Vincent van Altena, Jan Krans, Henk Bakker and Jantien Stoter, 'GIS as a Heuristic Tool to Interpret Ancient Historiography', *Transactions in GIS* (forthcoming 2021) <https://doi.org/10.1111/tgis.12762>;
Vincent van Altena, Henk Bakker and Jantien Sototer, 'Advancing New Testament Interpretation through Spatio-Temporal Analysis: Demonstrated by Case Studies', *Transactions in GIS*, 22, no. 3 (2018), 697–720 <https://doi.org/10.1111/tgis.12338>; Vincent van Altena, Jans Krans, Henk Bakker, Balázs Dukai and Jantien Stoter, 'Spatial Analysis of New Testament Textual Emendations Utilizing Confusion Distances', *Open Theology*, 5, no. 1 (2019), 44–65 <https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2019-0004>; Vincent van Altena, Jan Krans, Henk Bakker, and Jantien Stoter 'Ιουδαίαν in Acts 2:9: A Diachronic Overview of Its Conjectured Emendations', *Open Theology*, 6, no. 1 (2020), 306–18 <https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2020-0114>; Vincent van Altena, Jan Krans, Henk Bakker and Jantien Stoter, 'Ιουδαίαν in Acts 2:9: Reverse Engineering Textual Emendations', *Open Theology*, 6, no. 1 (2020), 378–91 <https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2020-0113; and also Henk Bakker, 'Wat is de aard van de zonde in evolutionair perspectief?', in *En God zag dat het goed was: Christelijk geloof en evolutie in 25 cruciale vragen*, ed. by William den Boer, René Fransen, and Rik Peels (Kampen: Summum Academic, 2019), pp. 279–90.

[57] Cf. Henk Bakker, 'Powerful Practices: Celebrating God's Farewell to the Powers That Be', in *Baptist Sacramentalism 3*, ed. by Anthony R. Cross, and Philip E. Thompson (Eugene: Pickwick,

however, the organising committee plans to arrange several conferences in the coming years, and expects to publish fresh insights with new voices.

Conclusion

Looking at the research trajectories surveyed above, the Baptist Seminary invests much time and effort in the study of Baptist identity (history and lived Baptist faith), the study of evangelical identity (history and lived evangelical tradition), and in the study of interpretive leadership, as it seeks to understand the dynamics between leadership and (communal) self-understanding. Its many-sidedness makes up the greater part of the Dutch strategy and methodology, because doing the work of theology for the benefit of the churches at the beginning of the third millennium forces the academy to look beyond its own scope and to cooperate, in order to accomplish the work as much as possible with an interdisciplinary mindset. Here the legacy of collaborative and sober Dutch theology pays off, as it urges the Baptist House to foster inquisitiveness and let critical and encouraging reciprocity flourish (BrainChain). As such the Baptist Seminary is a learning community in progress.

To enable regular publication in a variety of fields of interest, the Baptist Seminary took the initiative in starting up the series *Amsterdam Studies in Baptist and Mennonite Theology* in 2021 (Summum Academic, Brevier Kampen), which is a joint venture in cooperation with the Mennonite Chair of Peace Theology and Ethics (VU University, Amsterdam) and the IBTS Chair of Christian Social Ethics (VU University, Amsterdam).

Reflecting on the outcome of a wide range of researches — the evaluation of which can only be done briefly — the results indicate that Baptist identity as well as evangelical identity are in motion. Baptist

2020), pp. 259–79, and Jan Martijn Abrahamse, 'Enough to Set a Kingdom Laughing: Divine Tragicomedy and Easter Laughing in a Weeping World', in *Baptist Sacramentalism 3*, ed. by Anthony R. Cross, and Philip E. Thompson (Eugene: Pickwick, 2020), pp. 280–96. See also Henk Bakker, 'The Roaring Side of the Ministry: A Turn to Sacramentalism', *Perspectives in Religious Studies,* 38, no. 4 (2011), 403–26.

identity transforms from the inside out, as the core quality of this type of church is to sit down together and reflect on Scripture, and in particular how it pertains to church-and-world. In their pursuit of strong missional presence Baptist churches are prompted to transform into porous communities of discernment, bodies with strong relational ties in the community of faith, yet open to explore the mind of Christ for the world. Therefore, most Baptist communities in The Netherlands may be qualified as 'discerning churches', and for that matter as communities in need of interpretive leadership to conduct processes of communal self-understanding vis-à-vis a highly secularised society.

Training and equipping interpretive leaders may be seen as the core vocation of the Baptist Seminary and its VU-Chair. Pastors, and other ecclesial teachers, should be able to 'read' and understand the lives of individuals and communities in the light of contemporary texts (newspapers, literature, arts), combined with authoritative texts (Scripture, tradition). Consequently, interpretative leaders must be familiar with hermeneutical queries and complexities, and should be able to keep up with academic discussions and developments accordingly. Subsequently, they should be qualified to moderate, and 'feed', discussions in church and on other platforms on issues such as inclusivism/exclusivism (in terms of social, ethnic, and gender differences), sacramentalism (baptism, eucharist, and ordination), mystagogy (guiding Christians into a deeper life with God), even on martyrdom (and controversies between religions). See the aforementioned paragraphs for research and literature on these subjects.

The Baptist disposition towards cocooning, and hence neglecting the gift of catholicity, may be overcome by the gentle persuasion of today's inner transformation. Many churches do assemble, pray, listen to the Word, study the Bible, and reflect on urgent matters to be discussed. If the academy takes upon itself a leading role in this, future pastors trained at the Dutch Baptist Seminary may be a source of hope, comfort, and joy.

Dutch Baptist Identity (1845–2021): A Multi-Coloured Robe

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Abstract:
Dutch Baptist history is relatively short. In 1845 the first Baptist Church was founded in Gasselternijveen (Drenthe). During the 176 years of its existence, Baptist life has displayed different colours as it has responded to its environment and as the community has swayed back and forth between 'movement' and 'institution'. This becomes visible in the different historical phases that are described in this article. A variety of influences emerge, such as the pillarisation and de-pillarisation in Dutch society, revival movements, and ecumenical engagement. An important factor in the colouration of the community is the Baptist Seminary, which since its inception in 1958 has worked closely with the local churches, and whose successive rectors have helped shape the community. At the beginning of the third decade of the twenty-first century, the Dutch Baptist Union is about to merge with the CAMA churches and functions in a broad network of evangelical and ecumenical churches, educational institutions, and organisations.

Keywords:
History; Baptist identity; Dutch Free Church history; Dutch Baptist Union; Dutch Seminary

Introduction

In an article in *Inspirare* — a Dutch journal for charismatic and evangelical theology — pastor Kelvin Onyema writes about the church as a replica of the robe of Joseph: multi-coloured. In his contribution he

is referring to a multi-cultural church.[1] In this article we use the image in a slightly different way (although we note that Dutch Baptist churches are becoming increasingly multi-cultural). By looking at 176 years of Baptist history in the Netherlands, we will identify the various 'colours' of its identity throughout the years. So, the central focus of this article is the question of what has characterised Dutch Baptist identity throughout its history from the beginnings in the 1840s until the first decades of the twenty-first century. What were the important changes that came about over this time and what important marks have continued to exist?

To answer our question, we use the concept of Baptist identity as a historical phenomenon, as introduced by Baptist professor Olof de Vries (1941–2014)[2] in his *Gelovig gedoopt*. Olof de Vries wrote this study on '400 years of Baptist history, 150 years in the Netherlands' (subtitle) after a life of teaching and research as a tutor (from 1981–2014) and rector (from 1986–1993) of the Dutch Baptist Seminary, and professor of Baptist history at the University of Utrecht (1991–2009). According to De Vries, Baptist identity is historically determined, so it comes most clearly to the fore in its history, as opposed to traditions which derive their identity from factors which stand above history, such as Eastern-Orthodox liturgy, Roman Catholic apostolic succession, and Protestant church-confessions. As De Vries would say, Baptist identity is 'not of eternity, but of time'. This manifests itself externally through a lively interaction with its context by accommodation as well as opposition towards its environment, and internally by swinging back and forth between the extremes of 'movement' and 'institution' (like a pendulum clock).[3] This does not mean that the Dutch Baptists were in their

[1] N. van Hierden and S. Stoppels, 'Koersvast knoeien in Den Haag: Reflecties bij een kerk in transitie', *Inspirare,* 2, no. 3 (2020), 29–35; the contribution of Kelvin Onyema is on page 30.

[2] Teun Van der Leer and Arjen Stellingwerf, eds, *Terug naar de toekomst* (Amsterdam: Unie van Baptistengemeenten, 2020), pp. 95–102.

[3] O. H. de Vries, *Gelovig gedoopt* (Kampen: Kok, 2009), pp. 19–27; for a critical discussion of this concept, see H. Bakker, 'Niet van de eeuwigheid: Reflectie op een kritisch prolegomenon', in *De geschiedenis van het Schriftwoord gaat door,* ed. by H. Bakker, A. Boerrigter, J. Van Es and W. Ramaker (Utrecht: Kok, 2014), pp. 76–100. Bakker states that 'the eternal cannot simply be read in the Christian congregation, because the congregation is a product of church history, a historical phenomenon that is constantly changing. I would say that the one does not exclude the other or, in other words, *a church of time can also be a church of eternity.'* (Citation on page 77, our translation,

different periods either an institution or a movement, but that their history shows a permanent tension between these two poles. We will use this same lens in this article, with special interest in the various 'colours' of Dutch Baptist identity that come to the fore. With all its variations, De Vries sees three identity markers develop and return, which colour the Dutch Baptist identity from the end of the nineteenth century onwards:

1. The tendency to maintain an ordered local community of baptised believers, structured in the order of faith–baptism–membership–communion.

2. The independence of local churches, combined with supra-local connectedness with sister-churches.

3. Passion for revival and evangelism.[4]

We will see them emerge in the nineteenth century and return and develop through the twentieth century, and in our conclusion show that, and in what ways, they are still relevant.

The article is structured as follows: we describe four periods and in each we will discuss three topics which mark that period. These periods broadly correspond with the swinging of the internal 'pendulum clock' of Dutch Baptist identity and the (external) responding to important developments in the Dutch (and international) church and society. The first period is 'Dutch Baptist beginnings' (1816–1869), in which we discuss its context, the first beginnings and the influence of 'outsider' Jan de Liefde.[5] The second period is about supra-local

our emphasis.) After discussing the epistemology of 'time' and 'eternity' in the Gospel of John, he comes to the following conclusion on page 95: 'In John suffering transcends ontological and epistemological dualism. God is beyond the dualities and connects the extremes, as is evident from Jesus's coming and suffering in the Gospel of John. Dualism has been cracked in the suffering of Christ. *The church may not be of eternity, but conversely, eternity gives the church insight from above.'* (Our translation, our emphasis). So in this article we use De Vries's concept to study Baptist identity as a historical phenomenon, but theologically that does not rule out Divine intervention.

[4] De Vries, *Gelovig gedoopt,* pp. 169–181, 281–291, 296–297, 325–328.

[5] In 1816 the much-criticised General Regulation was imposed on the Dutch Reformed Church. These regulations played a significant role in the impeachment proceedings of the Dutch Reformed minister Johannes Elias Feisser, who would become the first Dutch Baptist minister. In 1865 Feisser died and in 1869 De Liefde died, which marks the end of the first period.

structuring (1869–1914), with attention to the Dutch Baptist Union, the influence of the Brighton movement, and consistency within the Baptist community.[6] The third period is about institutionalisation (1914–1963), in which we deal with pillarisation, the start of the Dutch Baptist Seminary and an ecumenical orientation.[7] The fourth and last period concerns old and new directions (1963–2021), in which we deal with an evangelical orientation, an international and renewed Anabaptist orientation, and the shift from learned to lived theology.[8] We conclude the article with our most important findings.

Dutch Baptist Beginnings (1816–1869)

Context of Dutch Baptist Beginnings: Protest against Liberal Theology

The roots of Dutch Baptist history lie within the protest movements of the *Réveil* and the Dutch Secession (1834). These protest movements responded to the influence of the French revolution (1789) and its effects throughout the European continent. Enlightenment ideas spread and churches embraced a liberal identity. The Swiss/French revival movement *Réveil* introduced the Anglo-Saxon concept of a free church to continental Europe. In several countries this led to collisions between committed believers who wanted to found a free church, and the established liberal elite, mostly a close collaboration between the established church and the state.[9]

In the Netherlands the Enlightenment influence on the established Dutch Reformed Church had its own moderate colour, which was actually a strange mixture of rational liberal and orthodox

[6] 1869 also was the year of the first attempt to start a Dutch Baptist Union. 1914 is the year that the First World War started; together with the Second World War it would mark a new period in the history of Western Europe in particular.

[7] In the second decade of the twentieth century a new generation of leaders arose within the Dutch Baptist community: Weenink (1911), Louw (1912) and K. Reiling (1918). They left their strong mark until the 1950s. In 1963 this period of institutionalisation took a first turn with the Dutch Baptist withdrawal from the World Council of Churches.

[8] From the 1960s onwards, a period of emancipation from the old 'pillarised' structures in Dutch society started. A new and open 'landscape' of society came about, which also influenced Dutch Baptist congregations (as counter- and co-movement) until this day, with a retrieval of various old strands from (Dutch) Baptist history.

[9] De Vries, *Gelovig gedoopt,* pp. 77–84.

ideas, called 'supra-naturalism'. After the 'French Period' — between 1795 and 1813 The Netherlands was a vassal state under French domination — King Willem I (reigning from 1813 to 1839) pursued a restorative policy which was moderately liberal. Willem kept his influence over the Dutch Reformed Church, which was more a state privileged and patronised church than strictly a state church, and imposed a General Regulation upon them. This General Regulation (1816) changed the organisation of the church from a Presbyterian structure to a top-down structure, and local congregations could only discuss topics concerning external government.[10]

These changes led to strong protests from the orthodox side of the church. So, in the Dutch context, the *Réveil* movement was largely committed to an internal struggle within the Dutch Reformed Church about the status of the church confessions (besides philanthropic activities in Dutch society). Aristocratic urban *Réveil* adherents were most likely to stay within the Dutch Reformed Church, but lower-class rural orthodox believers from the provinces united together in the Dutch Secession movement of 1834. They stated that the Dutch Reformed Church was in fact a false church and that they were the true adherents of the old Reformed church in the Netherlands, which was grounded on the 'Three Forms of Unity': the Dutch Creed (1561), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), and the Canons of Dordt (1618/19). The Dutch Secession was the turning point for new protestant groups to emerge, such as the Baptist churches, of which the first was founded in 1845 by a former Dutch Reformed minister, Johannes Elias Feisser.[11]

Beginnings of the Dutch Baptist Movement: 'The True Calvinist is a Baptist'

Feisser (1805–1865)[12] adhered to liberal ideas as a student (1823–1828) and during his first period as a minister (1828–1838). His time in his third church in Franeker (Friesland) ended dramatically after he lost his

[10] A. J. Rasker, *De Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk vanaf 1795,* 2nd ed. (Kampen: Kok, 1981), pp. 19–42.

[11] De Vries, *Gelovig gedoopt*, pp. 80–84.

[12] T. van der Leer and A. Stellingwerf, *Terug naar de toekomst*, pp. 14–22. See Stellingwerf's bibliography: A. Stellingwerf, *Johannes Elias Feisser: Nederlandse baptistenpionier in Gasselternijveen* (unpublished bachelor's dissertation, Kampen University, 2016), p. 46, available online from *Unie-ABC* <https://www.unie-abc.nl/seminarium/archieven/feisser-archief> [accessed 4 May 2021].

wife and two of his children. Feisser returned to his parental home to recover. In that time, he read some Puritan literature, which led to a strong theological conversion a few years later. After his recovery, he was called in 1839 by the Dutch Reformed Church of Gasselternijveen (Drenthe). He was still committed to his liberal ideas, but around 1841–1843 his theological turn took place.

Feisser — now committed to Puritan ideas, especially in his ecclesiology — wanted to reform his church, which he called a 'reformation of the reformation'.[13] This led to several collisions with the congregation. He refused a candidate for eldership because they lacked the 'characteristics of grace', and did not want to lead Communion because the elders refused to censure a member of the congregation. Also, Feisser started to prefer believer's baptism over infant baptism. He called for an intervention from the higher authorities, but, in line with the General Regulation of 1816, they would not listen to his theological objections. On 19 December 1843 he was removed from his office 'for categorically refusing parts of his work and for creating scandal and disorder'.[14]

Rumours of Feisser's dismissal spread, and between 1843 and 1845 he wrote several tracts about his new insights, especially on ecclesiology, pneumatology, and baptism. In 1844 this led to some encounters with other dissenters. First with adherents of the Dutch Secession movement, which did not lead to a collaboration. Feisser wrote that they 'were separated, but not merged'.[15] His main critique was that by baptising infants they were unable to distinguish between believers and unbelievers. The second meeting — with the Mennonite pastor Jan de Liefde — at first led to a warm correspondence. But soon the relationship cooled, which we will discuss in the next section. The

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[13] J. E. Feisser, *Eene roepstem tot alle ware geloovigen en begeerigen* (Groningen: W. van Boekeren, 1843), p. 5 (our translation). Available online from *Unie-ABC* <https://www.unie-abc.nl/seminarium/archieven/feisser-archief> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[14] G. A. Wumkes, *De opkomst en vestiging van het baptisme in Nederland* (Sneek: Osinga, 1912), p. 22 (our translation).

[15] J. E. Feisser, *Toespraak over den H. Doop des Heeren en de onderlinge bijeenkomst der heiligen* (Groningen: P.S. Barghoorn, [n.d.]), pp. 16, 20 (our translation). Available online from *Unie-ABC* <https://www.unie-abc.nl/seminarium/archieven/feisser-archief> [accessed 9 May 2021].

third encounter with German Baptists, however, led to a new direction for Feisser, which started the Dutch Baptist movement.

For Feisser it was an internal Calvinistic process. He did not think of starting a Baptist church, he did not even think of considering himself unbaptised. This changed when the German Baptist leader J. G. Oncken sent J. Köbner and A. F. Remmers to Gasselternijveen.[16] Several encounters and a correspondence followed. Feisser became convinced that he needed to be baptised (again), which happened with six followers on 15 May 1845, and started the first Baptist church in the Netherlands. Feisser was convinced now that his baptism was the logical consequence of his Calvinistic theology: 'The true Calvinist is a Baptist.'[17]

The Influence of Jan de Liefde: An Evangelical and Missional Contribution

In the paragraph above we already mentioned Jan de Liefde (1814–1869).[18] When he met Feisser in 1844, he was pastor of the Mennonite church in Zutphen (Gelderland). Just like Feisser, De Liefde made a turn to orthodox theology in the 1840s. When Feisser met the German Baptists in November 1844, he and De Liefde started discussing baptism. De Liefde also started to consider himself unbaptised — although he was baptised at the age of twenty — since he did not reckon himself a believer at that time.[19] But unlike Feisser, he started to have doubts about Baptists. He struggled with their succession thinking and was influenced by millennialism, in contrast to the German Baptists and Feisser. When Feisser and Köbner went to Zutphen after Feisser's baptism in Gasselternijveen, they were convinced that De Liefde wanted to be baptised. De Liefde strongly protested, and after a quarrel Feisser and Köbner left.[20]

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16 See for Oncken's influence on Baptists in continental Europe, I. M. Randall, *Communities of Conviction: Baptist Beginings in Europe* (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2009).

17 The quote is from De Vries, *Gelovig gedoopt*, p. 90; cf. T. van der Leer, 'The true Calvinist is a Baptist', *Baptist Quarterly,* 44 (2011), 21–35.

18 See Van der Leer and Stellingwerf, *Terug naar de toekomst,* pp. 23-31; Wumkes, *Opkomst en vestiging,* pp. 40–74, 96–141.

19 Wumkes, *Opkomst en vestiging,* pp. 49–50, 280–287.

20 See his letters to Feisser and Köbner, in Wumkes, *Opkomst en vestiging,* pp. 271–361.

De Liefde would keep an ambivalent relationship with Baptists and to believer's baptism. In 1849 he was baptised in a Baptist group in Amsterdam,[21] which, however, he left within three months. In 1854 he wrote a tract about preferring infant baptism and in 1856 he founded the Free Evangelical Church in Amsterdam. In this congregation persons baptised as infants as well as persons baptised on confession of faith were admitted as members. The 'preaching of salvation' was most important, while other topics should be freely discussed. De Liefde's preaching had a strong missional focus: in 1853 he started a school for evangelists (*Bethanië*) and in 1855 the Association for the Salvation of People (*Vereeniging tot Heil des Volks*). Through these organisations, De Liefde and his students had a major influence on Dutch Baptists in the second part of the nineteenth century. He sent several evangelists to the north-eastern peat colonies in the 1850s and 1860s, of whom some became pastors of the Baptist church in Stadskanaal (former Gasselternijveen). His student Kors Holleman worked in Leeuwarden (Friesland) and started an evangelist school in the same spirit (*Klein-Bethanië*). He baptised several students in his Free Evangelical Church and some became leading Baptist pastors.

In summary, the first period of Dutch Baptist history is marked through its context as a protest movement. Because Dutch church history is strongly 'coloured' by Calvinistic theology, this was an internal Calvinistic struggle, causing a mainly Calvinist Baptist identity. This becomes visible in the life of Feisser, who turned from a liberal stance to Puritan Calvinistic theology with a Baptist ecclesiology. In addition, we see the influence of De Liefde, who had a different background (Mennonite). He and his students emphasised the doctrine of general atonement and the importance of mission. This led to a different 'colouring' of the next generations of Baptists. So, we see the lively interaction of Baptists with their context, by protesting against it and by deriving from it. Also, we see the internal 'pendulum clock': Dutch Baptist history begins as a movement, but unlike Free Evangelical Churches, Baptists emphasised their ecclesiological structure of faith–baptism–membership–communion as the right order. Ironically, it was the two opposites Feisser and De Liefde who would define the two 'legs'

[21] This group officially became a congregation in 1866.

of Dutch Baptist identity: a strong focus on an ordered ecclesiology, based on believer's baptism, and a missional drive for making new disciples. In the next section we will see how H. Z. Kloekers was an exponent of both emphases.

Starting Supra-Local Structuring (1869–1914)

The Dutch Baptist Union: A Union of Free Local Congregations[22]

From the late 1860s onwards, Baptist congregations started to investigate how to cooperate in an association. There were three leading congregations in this process: Stadskanaal, Franeker, and Amsterdam, with the leading pastors Kloekers (Stadskanaal) and De Neui (Franeker). Henrikadius Zwaantinus Kloekers (1828–1893)[23] was a former Reformed missionary who had worked in China. During his first period in China, he was baptised by an American Southern Baptist missionary and in his second period he worked for the English Baptist Missionary Society, BMS. Back in the Netherlands in 1866, the Baptist church in Stadskanaal called him to become their pastor. Kloekers worked fruitfully and founded several new congregations in its surroundings. Peter Johannes De Neui (1828–1907)[24] was a German Baptist who was sent to Franeker in 1864 and founded a Baptist church after two years of evangelising. He also laboured in other Frisian places, which led to new Baptist churches.

In 1869 De Neui tried to bind together the Dutch congregations under the wing of the German Union. This union worked in a centralised way and the congregations had to subscribe to a (Calvinist minded) confession. The German churches were willing to take the Dutch churches into their union, if they would endorse their confession. Franeker agreed, Amsterdam hesitated, and Stadskanaal strongly protested, which resulted in a rejection. Yet the Dutch churches associated by starting their own monthly magazine and yearly

[22] Wumkes, *Opkomst en vestiging,* pp. 161–179, 243–269; De Vries, *Gelovig gedoopt*, pp. 151–159; J. van Dam, *Geschiedenis van het baptisme in Nederland* (Bosch en Duin: Unie van Baptisten Gemeenten in Nederland, 1979), pp. 69–74.
[23] Van der Leer and Stellingwerf, *Terug naar de toekomst*, pp. 32–39.
[24] Wumkes, *Opkomst en vestiging,* pp. 142–193.

conference. But the independence of the congregations was especially emphasised, so in the long run the alliance was not viable and after 1875 cooperation quickly deteriorated.

From 1879 onward several pastors again met on a regular basis. In 1880 they decided to start a union and later that year the draft statutes were formulated. So, on 26 January 1881 the Dutch Baptist Union was founded, with Kloekers as its first chair (De Neui had already emigrated in 1871to serve a church in the USA). Kloekers left a significant mark on its character: instead of a centralised model, the freedom of local congregations was emphasised, just as it was with the English Union. And the confession was limited to a fundamental statement: the Union included churches 'that confess and experience, that Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God and an all-sufficient Saviour for sinners; who maintain the baptism of believers, in distinction from sprinkling'.[25] However, the unspoken presupposition was clearly classical orthodoxy. Thus, when in 1884 Kloekers rejected the classic (Anselmian) doctrine of atonement in an article for the Union's periodical *De Christen*, his co-editor Johannes Horn responded indignantly, stating that this was going too far: 'Christ has done it for us. You turn it into: he showed it to us.'[26] It led to a big quarrel in the Union and on 25 June 1885, Kloekers stepped down from his position as chair and left the Union with part of his congregation.

The Influence of the Brighton Movement: Revivalist and Holiness Theology

In the early 1880s a revival wave went through several Baptist churches in the Netherlands, with Johannes Horn (1849–1924)[27] as its foremost advocate. Horn was a student of Holleman's school *Klein-Bethanië*. After being baptised in 1869, he was sent to Sneek (Friesland) as an evangelist of *Tot Heil des Volks*. There he worked fruitfully, and after Kloekers visited them, the evangelism group was constituted as a Baptist church in 1880. In 1875 Horn visited the Brighton conference together with his Baptist colleague Jan de Hart and Dutch pastors from various church denominations. This led to a sort of Brighton movement in the

[25] Wumkes, *Opkomst en vestiging,* p. 245 (our translation).
[26] Wumkes, *Opkomst en vestiging*, pp. 254–255 (our translation).
[27] Van der Leer and Stellingwerf, *Terug naar de toekomst*, pp. 40–48; Wumkes, *Opkomst en vestiging,* pp. 194–242.

Netherlands: revival meetings in the spirit of Moody were organised and they published their own magazine *Het Eeuwige Leven* (Eternal Life).[28]

Horn and other Baptist pastors would preach at Sunday and weekday meetings throughout the country. Especially in the north-eastern parts of the country this led to many converts. But sometimes it also led to conflicts and schisms within congregations. The most striking example is Weerdingermond:[29] in August 1881 there were over a hundred converts within this congregation through the preaching of Horn, and sixty people were baptised over two Sundays. But in March 1882 the congregation split over a conflict about abstinence from alcohol. Their pastor Philippus Lindeman, who held the moderate position, threw out the radical members. So, after a short and exponential growth, the congregation languished. In Groningen however, the revival campaigns of 1882 and 1883 led to a significant growth with seventy converts in 1882, and eighty in 1883. This congregation had been structured by Kloekers into a Baptist church in 1880 and was able to maintain itself under the guidance of their pastor Nicolaas van Beek. At the end of the 1880s the church had over two hundred members.[30]

The most important influences of the revival and holiness movement on Dutch Baptist churches was the emphasis on the work and person of the Holy Spirit, sanctification (for example alcohol abstinence), using follow-up meetings (emphasising instantaneous decisions on conversion), and a further emphasis on an universal offering of salvation.[31] It shows that among Dutch Baptists the revivalist

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[28] It should be noted that the Brighton conference was part of the Anglo-Saxon holiness movement, usually called the Keswick movement. In the Dutch context however, the holiness movement and the Moodian revival movement, both stressing revivalism and themes regarding the sanctification of the saints, were intertwined in one.

[29] A. Stellingwerf, 'When the Breaker Calls: Factors that Influenced the Revival of August 1881 in Weerdingermond', *Journal of European Baptist Studies,* 18, no. 2 (2018), 19–30; B. Roeles, *Het genadewerk Gods in de bekeering van zondaren in Weerdingermond en omstreken* (Sneek: Wiarda, [n. d.]), available online at *Unie-ABC* <https://www.unie-abc.nl/seminarium/archieven/19e-eeuw> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[30] De Vries, *Gelovig gedoopt*, pp. 149–152.

[31] De Vries, *Gelovig gedoopt,* pp. 142–148.

Arminian input, that had already started with De Liefde, gradually gained the upper hand over its Calvinistic beginnings.[32]

The Years of Consistency: Nicolaas van Beek and the Third Way

Earlier we mentioned the clash between Kloekers and Horn in 1884, resulting in Kloekers leaving the Union in 1885. Horn still had some influence — for example he ensured that the Dutch Union would be under the wing of the German Union in the last decade of the nineteenth century, which resulted in several students attending the *predigerschule* in Hamburg — but after a quarrel with his congregation in Groningen in 1895, he also left the Baptist Union. It was Nicolaas van Beek (1850–1931)[33] in particular who most strongly influenced the further course of the Baptist community around the turn of the century. In the conflict between Kloekers and Horn (and De Hart), Van Beek pointed to a 'third way'. He could not agree with Kloekers's rendering of the doctrine of atonement, but also struggled with Horn and De Hart's polemical response. It was Van Beek's more nuanced approach that helped the Baptist community through the conflict. Even though he had gifts as an evangelist, Van Beek was especially a man of consistency, depth, and a mediator. With these qualities, he led the Dutch Baptists into the twentieth century, a period in which the community continued to grow.[34]

In summary, the second period of Dutch Baptist history is a period of supra-local structuring with the start and continuity of the Dutch Baptist Union. Also, it was a period of significant growth through the influence of revival movements (for example, apart from the Brighton movement, the revival wave from Wales in the first decade of the 20th century, although Baptists rejected the Pentecostal movement emerging in that same period), and the consistency of men like Van Beek, who managed to relate together numerical growth, spiritual growth, and church development. Again, we see the lively interaction

[32] Though the advocates of the holiness movement were at pains to show its compatibility with Calvinist doctrine, nevertheless in the Dutch (Calvinist dominated) context, among other things, revivalist and holiness impulses gradually resulted in a stronger emphasis on the human ability to make choices and less on predetermined election.

[33] Wumkes, *Opkomst en vestiging,* pp. 213–216.

[34] Van Dam, *Geschiedenis baptisme,* pp. 87–133, 272–291.

with the context, especially in terms of a number of Anglo-Saxon influences. The English model for a union of free local congregations without a confession is favoured over a German centralised model. Also, the influence of the Brighton movement 'coloured' the Dutch Baptist identity with an emphasis on themes like sanctification and revivalism. Regarding the 'pendulum clock' of the internal side of the identity, we see a beginning institutionalisation with the forming and growth of the Union. But we also see that revival movements and the emphasis on evangelisation led to a lasting dynamism, which prevented the structure from ossifying. In the next section however, we will see a further degree of institutionalisation.

Institutionalisation (1914–1963)

Further Degree of Institutionalisation: Pillarisation in the Interwar Period

For a period of about forty years — approximately from the First World War until the 1950s — Dutch Baptists were led by the triarchy Jan Willem Weenink (1886–1975), Jan Louw (1887–1969) and Koop Reiling (1892–1973).[35] Weenink[36] was an enterprising person, who was involved in the founding of several associations as part of the Baptist Union. For example, the Dutch Baptist Youth Movement (NBJB, 1925), the Commission for Internal Mission (CIW, 1932) and a commission for publishing their own songbook (1940). He also played an important role in sending Geertruida Reiling as the first missionary on behalf of the Dutch Baptist Union to the Congo in 1923; from the 1950s onwards, others followed (previously other Dutch Baptists were sent directly by BMS).[37] Furthermore, the missionary work was supported by women's groups, which in 1932, led to the founding of the Dutch Baptist Women's Movement (NBVB), with Weenink's wife as its first chair. Louw[38] was more of a thinker. He, for example, was the editor of *De*

[35] Van Dam, *Geschiedenis baptisme*, pp. 123–128.
[36] Van der Leer and Stellingwerf, *Terug naar de toekomst*, pp. 49–57.
[37] Van der Leer and Stellingwerf, *Terug naar de toekomst*, pp. 68–76, 86–94.
[38] Van der Leer and Stellingwerf, *Terug naar de toekomst,* pp. 58–67.

Christen for fifty years (with short interruptions);[39] he especially tried to teach leaders of congregations, although his writings were quite complicated for the average Baptist; also, he gave a voice to the community in a context in which Baptists were seen as sectarians and in that way, he helped them to emancipate. The third person of the triarchy, Koop Reiling, belonged to a family who played an important role in Dutch Baptist history. His grandfather Roelof was one of the first seven Baptists in 1845, his sister Geertruida was the first missionary sent by the Baptist Union, and his son Jannes would be the first rector of the Dutch Baptist Seminary. Koop Reiling was particularly a networker, who for example helped found the first Baptist churches in the south of the Netherlands, namely Treebeek (Limburg, 1925) and Eindhoven (Brabant, 1925).[40]

As we can see, this is a period of emancipation and further institutionalisation with the development of a great number of associations. The rise of particularised associations was part of a specific Dutch phenomenon: pillarisation. Each group with its own philosophy or religion organised its own associations, radio broadcasters, schools, political parties, newspapers, and so forth. Because the Baptists were a relatively small group, they were not able to found all of these associations, so maybe we could call the Baptist pillar a 'mini-pillar'. Moreover, it is characteristic of the Baptists that these associations were often part of the local congregation. During this time the Baptist community still grew, several new churches were founded, and congregations gained new members. One of the reasons for this growth was the (work) migration from the peat colonies in Groningen and Drenthe — where there were many Baptists — to industrial regions, like Twente (in the east), Limburg and Eindhoven (in the south), and IJmuiden and Rotterdam (in the west), which led to the founding of new congregations.[41] This process was somewhat disrupted by the Second

[39] *De Christen* (The Christian) was the Union's periodical, which started in 1882 with its first monthly circulation.
[40] Van Dam, *Geschiedenis baptisme,* pp. 150–152.
[41] De Vries, *Gelovig gedoopt*, pp. 164–229.

World War, but soon the entrepreneurial spirit was rekindled, which led to the start of the Baptists' own seminary.[42]

Their Own Seminary: An Academic Bible School

The desire of Baptists to train their own ministers emerged early in the Union. Two years after its foundation, the church of Haulerwijk (Friesland) proposed starting such a training at its Assembly in 1883. One delegate expressed the fear that this might breed learned gentlemen rather than practical workers, but nevertheless the decision was made to try to find financial resources for such an undertaking. This would be the 'story' of ministerial formation for a long time: ambivalence regarding academic studies and lack of money. Until the 1950s most ministers would study at Baptist colleges either in Hamburg or in London.

But after the Second World War there was a renewed desire for their own training, aimed at the Dutch context. After a failed attempt from 1946 onwards, a second effort in the 1950s was more successful.[43] On 1 September 1958, the Dutch Baptist Seminary was founded, with Jannes Reiling[44] as its rector, a position he would hold until 1987. In the light of the previous history, it is interesting to see that Reiling called the brand-new Seminary 'an academic Bible school'. While this may sound like a certain ambivalence or compromise, he meant something else. He was in favour of good academic training and supported and developed this in the coming decades. But its starting point would always be the Bible, more specifically, the community in which the Bible is read and studied in a joint submission to the living Lord Jesus Christ. As he said in his opening speech, 'What we need is an education that is academically sound and grouped around the relation to Christ.'[45] So from its start, academic theology, Christ-centred Bible reading in community, and practical work were blended, although it took another twelve years before the cooperation with the University of Utrecht took shape and the education of Baptist pastors became a joint venture of

[42] Van Dam, *Geschiedenis baptisme*, pp. 189, 207.
[43] See O. H. de Vries, ed., *Een seminarium als roeping* (Leeuwarden: Friesch Dagblad Offset, 1987).
[44] Van der Leer and Stellingwerf, *Terug naar de toekomst*, pp. 77–85.
[45] J. Reiling, 'Rede uitgesproken bij de aanvaarding van het rectoraat op 1 september 1958', *De Christen,* 19 September 1958, pp. 1–3.

seminary and university. Reiling obtained the position of professor of Baptist history and theology in 1976 and some years later the position of professor of New Testament at Utrecht University. He was in favour of a linguistic approach to theology. According to him the Bible text is the lively witness of God's history with his people in the past, which is also God's history today and in the future. He criticised any theology that was dogmatically and philosophically predominant. Theology ought to be biblical theology. He was an adherent of this new branch of theology, which he commended because of its concentration on the Bible text as the source of theology.[46]

Not a Sect Anymore: Ecumenical Orientation

In 1946 the Dutch Baptist Union, without much discussion, joined the World Council of Churches (WCC) in its formation, which was founded in 1948 in Amsterdam. In contrast to the first half of the twentieth century, there was a growing openness among churches, and Baptists were not regarded as a sect anymore. Looking back on this period, Reiling commented in 1987, 'we, as Dutch Baptists, had to show a little more self-awareness, a little more awareness of the value of the theology we represented'.[47] Also, Karl Barth's rejection of infant baptism fuelled their self-confidence and the hope that things would change for the better. Reiling himself was member of the Commission on Faith and Order and initiated a (failed) attempt to have an international conference of 'baptiser theologians' in 1964 in Amsterdam to articulate the voice of believer's baptism in the ecumenical realm.[48] As a biblical scholar he expected that biblical theology would force a break-through in fixed dogmatic and traditional positions and in inter-church relations. He

[46] In the wake of neo-orthodoxy (Barth, Brunner) Biblical Theology was on the rise after 1945, marked by an emphasis on the Bible as a theological resource, the unity of the Bible, and the revelation of God in history. Representatives were, amongst others, W. Eichrodt, G. von Rad, H. H. Rowley, C. H. Dodd, O. Cullmann, and B. S. Childs.

[47] J. Reiling, 'Bijbel en gemeente', Farewell lecture 4 April 1987, available online *Unie-ABC* <https://unie-abc.nl/seminarium/archieven/jannes-reiling> [accessed 18 October 2021].

[48] It failed because of insufficient interest, but eventually became the springboard for a series of Believers Church Conferences, starting in 1967 in Louisville, Kentucky, USA, and continuing until today. About Reiling's initiative see Teun van der Leer, 'The Believers Church Conferences', in *Come Out from among Them, and Be Ye Separate, Saith the Lord. Separatism and the Believers' Church Tradition,* ed. by William H. Brackney with Evan L. Colford (Eugene: Pickwick, 2019), pp. 189–197.

hoped that it would inaugurate a new era of church renewal and ecumenical blossoming. His booklet entitled *Gemeenschap der Heiligen* (*Community of Saints,* 1964) breathes a bold Baptist vision of the church and an ecumenical spirit. He describes the church as a community of the Spirit that pervades church life in its entirety. Neither ministry, tradition, dogma, nor church order are basic for the church, only the Spirit. As Christians we not only have to lose our lives for the sake of the gospel but also 'our own ecclesiastical forms'. All the more since we live 'in the twentieth century, the post-Christian and ecumenical century'. He calls for a *kenosis*, an emptying of (fixed) forms, structures and traditions as a precondition for unity, a unity of the Spirit. The one holy catholic *ecclesia* will not be possible with anything less than *metanoia*.[49] But within the Dutch Union the ecumenical flame was already dying. The institutional shape of the WCC gave many an unpleasant feeling. They preferred a spiritual ecumenism as a movement of the Spirit; many saw institution and Spirit as opposites. The need to root their own identity firmly in their conviction of the church as a community of believers, even *baptised* believers, came at odds with institutional ecumenism. In 1963 the Assembly voted to withdraw from the WCC. Reiling tried in vain to convince them of the value of unity in diversity and to learn from and contribute to the ecumenical debate, since Baptists too needed to reconsider their 'sacred houses'. That they had sacred houses became clear when four years later emotions ran high over believer's baptism by sprinkling. A proposal to accept for membership those who were baptised based on personal faith but not by immersion, had already caused such a heated debate in the corridors that it was taken off the agenda even before being discussed. Both decisions showed that the ecumenical tide had passed, and that they needed to reflect on their own identity once more.

In summary, the third period of Dutch Baptist history is marked by numerical growth, development of their own organisation, and the emancipation from sect to church, which is in line with the pillarisation and the starting de-pillarisation of Dutch society before and after the Second World War. In 1963 it still valued the order of local gatherings

[49] J. Reiling, *Gemeenschap der heiligen: Over de gemeente van Jezus Christus naar het Nieuwe Testament* (Amsterdam: Ten Have, 1964), pp. 146–154.

of baptised believers with closed membership and (mostly) closed communion. However, its institutionalisation and ecumenical 'colour' began to come into friction and resulted in the decisions of 1963 (to leave the WCC) and 1967 (to drop the proposal to acknowledge believer's baptism without immersion). For Olof de Vries this marked the beginning of the turnaround from church to movement.[50]

Old and New Directions (1963–2021)

Passion and Polarisation: Evangelical Orientation

In the 1970s and 1980s another wind began to blow in Dutch society and accordingly in the churches. From the 1960s onwards the pillarisation began to crumble and traditional religious and socio-political barriers started to disintegrate. This not only led to a huge drop in church attendance, but also to a huge shift in church affiliation. Baptist and evangelical churches grew in these years partly through disappointed or concerned members of the larger traditional churches; disappointed for its supposed lack of living and cheerful faith, and concerned because of neo-orthodox or liberal theology. In particular, liberalism as a result of cultural changes in society regarding gender and homosexuality met with a lot of suspicion.

At the same time the evangelical movement grew in numbers and influence.[51] Christians from different denominations united in what they called 'ecumenism of the heart' to defend biblical values and to evangelise the secularising country. In 1967 the Evangelical Broadcasting Company (EO: *Evangelische Omroep*) was founded, and in 1979 the Evangelical Alliance. Interdenominational conferences on mission, evangelism, church growth and church development emerged everywhere, and global praise worship conquered its thousands. This appealed to many of the Baptist churches, which coloured them gradually more evangelical. In itself this was not a problem since

[50] De Vries, *Gelovig gedoopt,* p. 251.

[51] See for an overview of the development of the evangelical movement in the Netherlands, Henk Bakker and Laura Dijkhuizen, eds, *Typisch Evangelisch: Een stroming in perspectief* (Amsterdam: Ark Media, 2017) and C. van der Kooi, E. Van Staalduine-Sulman and A. W. Zwiep, eds, *Evangelical Theology in Transition* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2012).

revivalist impulses generally fitted well with Baptist life, as we saw in the second period (1869–1914). However, part of the evangelical movement was closely connected to forms of fundamentalism, which was strange to most traditional Baptist churches, but attracted several pastors and churches.[52] Attached to the influx of concerned, mainly reformed and dogmatic Christians, it fuelled the old suspicion towards academic theology. A 'battle for the Bible' emerged in the first half of the 1980s around the Seminary, mainly because of its link with the university and its historical-critical approach. Add to that a growing openness towards the ordination of women in a couple of congregations, and in at least one of them towards gay marriage, and one can imagine that a crisis around the Seminary in the eighties almost split the Union. Reiling tried to convince his critics that the difference was not so much over how to view Scripture, but how to interpret it.[53]

Two opposing groups emerged, one robustly evangelical and one robustly ecumenical, both representing the extremes of Baptist spirituality and identity in respectively 'movement' and 'church'.[54] Both were a minority and appealed at different points to the wide middle. In the end, this middle held the wings together and peace returned, after some shifts in the leadership of the Union and in the staff of the Seminary. The new rector Olof de Vries led 'the flock' with his modest and thorough performance into calmer waters. De Vries was a systematic theologian who had done his doctorate on the early Anabaptists, interpreting their work as a theology of history.[55] For De Vries it is in this concrete history of everyday life that Christians and churches are called to follow Christ. Doing theology is a way of loving

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52 Fundamentalism was a strand within modern evangelicalism which had its height during the 1930s in the UK and notably the USA. However, after WW2, missionary endeavours also brought fundamentalistic views to Europe; see the recent book by Hans Krabbendam, *Saving the Overlooked Continent: American Protestant Missions in Western Europe* (Leuven: University Press, 2020).

53 In his 1987 book, J. Reiling, *Het Woord van God: Over Schriftgezag en Schriftuitleg* (Kampen: Kok, 1987), Reiling explained, amongst other things, why the statement that the Bible is 'the inspired, infallible Word of God' (as was asked of the Seminary tutors to endorse) was not helpful at all, since 'infallibility' is a rational positivistic concept of truth, alien to the Bible.

54 De Vries, *Gelovig gedoopt*, pp. 278–281.

55 O. H. de Vries, *Leer en praxis van de vroege dopers, uitgelegd als een theologie van de geschiedenis* (Leeuwarden: Uitg. Gerben Dykstra, 1982).

God with your mind, which serves the communication of the Gospel and the articulation of discipleship. This makes theology a human, relative, and provisional effort, where every believer can participate. Under De Vries's leadership the Seminary continued its cooperation with the university in the 1990s and thereafter. In addition, it collaborated with several evangelical (bachelor level) schools and became co-founder of the Centre for Evangelical and Reformation Theology (CERT) at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam in 2003. The increasing border traffic between churches and the network society led to new hybrid forms of connectedness. As a consequence, most congregations switched to open communion. In this same period, evangelism as reaching out to the people around was increasingly shaped as church development, implementing programmes such as Natural Church Development (NCD),[56] Willow Creek Community Church (WCCC),[57] and Purpose Driven Church (PDC).[58]Also new challenges and opportunities with more flexible, so-called liquid forms of church, emerged.[59]

A Broadened Horizon: International and Anabaptist Orientation

At the turn of the century and after a major reorganisation, both the Dutch Baptist Union and the Baptist Seminary received new leadership (again).[60] The struggles of the 1980s had turned the gaze inward for years, but now there was room and vision to broaden the horizon. By visiting the centennial Baptist World Alliance Congress in 2005 in Birmingham with the staff, and by organising the 400-year celebration of Baptist beginnings in Amsterdam in 2009, many ties were (re)made. Also of great significance was the growing contact with the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague (now the International Baptist Theological Study Centre based since 2014 in Amsterdam) and with the Anabaptist Network, the Incarnate Network, Urban Expression and the

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56 *Natural Church Development* <http://www.ncd-international.org/public/> [accessed 19 May 2021].

57 *Willow Creek Community Church* <https://www.willowcreek.org/> [accessed 19 May 2021].

58 *Purpose Driven Church* <https://pd.church/12-characteristics-purpose-driven-church/> [accessed 19 May 2021].

59 See also P. Ward, *Liquid Church* (Ada, MI: Baker, 2001).

60 After a short interim period Teun van der Leer became the new rector (2007–2020) and Albrecht Boerrigter the new General Secretary (2007–2021).

Northumbria Community in the United Kingdom. Pioneering places for church plants emerged and were stimulated and sometimes sponsored by the Union. A part-time coordinator was appointed to guide the pioneers and to monitor the projects to reflect on and learn from these new practices.[61] It stimulated a renewed study of the (Ana)baptist roots and its spirituality,[62] and led to the establishment of the James Wm McClendon Chair for Baptistic and Evangelical Theologies at the Faculty of Religion and Theology (FRT) of the Vrije Universiteit (VU), with Dr Henk Bakker as full professor. From 2005 onwards, the number of bachelor, master and doctoral students at the Seminary grew substantially, and accordingly so did the staff. 'Doing theology the Baptist way' became a popular concept in these years and research was stimulated at all levels. Churches, students, and tutors were challenged not to take things at face value, but to be as curious as possible and ask the long questions. A learning and researching community developed under the stimulating leadership of Henk Bakker and Rector Teun van der Leer, with an appetite for research and the double focus of academic excellence and grassroots relevance.

Churches as Laboratory: From Learned to Lived Theology

The above-mentioned developments resulted in a much closer cooperation between the staff of the Seminary and the staff of the department for church development within the Baptist Union, and accordingly with the local churches. Tutors from this department reinforced the Seminary, and students and tutors related their research to practices in local congregations and in society.[63] Tutor Hans Riphagen (and now from 2021 rector of the Seminary) specialised in ethnographic research and developed a practical theological research programme on patterns of baptistic and evangelical belonging, as part of a broader

[61] See the booklet, Oeds Blok, ed., *Avontuur van geloof: Praktijkverhalen van gemeentestichting met reflectie voor heel de kerk,* Baptistica Reeks, 11 (Amsterdam: Unie van Baptistengemeenten, 2016).

[62] In 1955 the first vice rector (appointed 1958) of the Baptist Seminary, Jan Kiwiet, had written his thesis on Pilgram Marpeck (Jan J. Kiwiet, *Pilgram Marpeck: Ein Führer der Täuferbewegung im süddeutschen Raum* (Kassel: J. G. Oncken Verlag, 1957)), and in 1982 Olof de Vries wrote his thesis on the Anabaptists (see note 55).

[63] See the article by Hans Riphagen elsewhere in this issue.

research programme on 'belonging and inclusion in a network society'.[64] Where the Seminary had its focus on biblical theology in the first decennia, and later on Baptist history and theology, now there was a growing attention to practical theology. A shift occurred from learned to lived theology, and participative observation and grassroots theology became more central. In 2013, at a symposium at the start of his Chair of Baptist History and Theology (held until 2017), Henk Bakker put it this way:

> Systematic Theology and Practical Theology should not be separate disciplines. The church of Christ is, after all, the laboratory and the meeting place for theology. The Lord, who lives among the believers, speaks and makes the church into a worshipping, confessing, praying and singing church. This is where the essential features of true theology are to be found.[65]

Also important in the second decennium of the twenty-first century was the rapprochement of the Baptist Union with the Alliance of Baptist and CAMA-Churches (ABC), which presumably will result in a merger in 2023. This will not only double the size of the denomination, but will also give a new dynamic through another tradition (CAMA) with its roots in the holiness movement of the nineteenth century, its strong Christ-centred approach, and its focus on world mission.[66] At the same time, at the FRT of the VU, Baptist tutors and researchers work collaborative with Mennonite, Reformed, and migrant churches, and also with colleagues of different religions.[67] Doubtless this will add new colours to the churches, as there is a renewed openness to ecumenical

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[64] Johannes Riphagen, 'Church-in-the-neighbourhood: A Spatio-Theological Ethnography of Protestant Christian Place-making in the Suburban Context of Lunetten, Utrecht' (doctoral thesis, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, 2021). See also *James Wm McClendon Chair for baptistic and evangelical theologies, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam:*
<https://mcclendonchair.com/research/belonging-and-inclusion-in-the-network-society> [accessed 30 March 2021).

[65] Henk Bakker, 'Mapping Dutch Baptist Identity', in *Zo zijn onze manieren! In gesprek over gemeentetheologie*, ed. by Teun van der Leer, Baptistica Reeks, 1 (Barneveld: Unie van Baptisten Gemeenten in Nederland, 2009), pp. 23–31 (p. 30).

[66] CAMA is the Christian and Missionary Alliance, founded in the United States of America in 1887 by A. B. Simpson. In 1975 CAMA started church plants in the Netherlands. Simpson developed a 'Fourfold Gospel' with the Christological summary 'Christ as Redeemer, Sanctifier, Healer, and Coming King'. He also raised 'as a banner' Matthew 24:14 as the responsibility 'to hasten Christ's return'. See A. B. Simpson, *The Fourfold Gospel*, online version <http://awf.world/repository> [accessed 10 November 2021] (chapters 1–4).

[67] For example, in the research group 'Religious Martyrdom in Dialogue'.

collaboration, also among local congregations and pioneering communities. However, the call for a 'classic' Baptist identity is heard as well, even one returning to a Calvinistic 'colour'.[68]

In sum it can be said that in the last decades of the twentieth century the 'pendulum clock' moved back from institution to movement. Somehow this continued in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Many congregations continued to integrate an evangelical 'colour' in their practices, especially regarding worship, church development, and church planting. At the same time, the renewed Anabaptist orientation and the growing attention for missional and ethnographic ecclesiology gave a new 'colour' to church practices and to the curriculum of the Seminary, focusing on the Kingdom of God and *Missio Dei*. Also, the borders between evangelical and ecumenical have become much smoother. So while still a member of *Missie Nederland* (the former Evangelical Alliance), the Dutch Baptist Union also participated in several ecumenical networks and in 2019 — during a 'National Synod' with several different churches — signed the so-called 'declaration of solidarity'. In this declaration churches covenant together around the Nicene Creed to love and serve each other and strengthen the common witness of Jesus Christ in society. Somehow the ecumenical and evangelical orientation seem to merge in this period.

Conclusion

In the introduction we asked the question of what important alterations in the Dutch Baptist identity came about throughout the time under discussion and which important marks continued to exist. In short, which 'colours' marked Dutch Baptist identity within the various periods? As a lens we used Olof de Vries's concept of researching Baptist identity as a historical phenomenon, with an internal ('pendulum clock') and external (lively interaction with context) element.

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[68] From 2007 a group of Calvinist minded Baptists started to collaborate under the name *Sola 5 Baptisten,* since 2017 called *Stichting Proclaim* <http://www.stichtingproclaim.nl/geschiedenis/> [accessed 4 May 2021].

In the first period (1816–1869) Dutch Baptist history originated within a Calvinistic protest movement against liberal theology. This Calvinist 'colour' strongly influenced Feisser's Baptist identity, and with him, the first generation of Dutch Baptists. However, with the influence of De Liefde and his students, an evangelical 'colouring' came about, with an emphasis on general atonement and a focus on mission. So, in this period, Baptists tended to protest against the established church, but also derived marks from other protest movements. Within that frame Baptist identity is marked as movement, although the ecclesiological ordering of faith–baptism–membership–communion was also emphasised.

In the second period (1869–1914) we see a further sense of structuring, with the starting of supra-local collaboration within the Baptist Union (1881). Through the influence of revival movements there is a significant growth of congregations and members, but also conflicts arise. The influence of Anglo-Saxon revival movements leads to new 'colours' with emphases on sanctification and revivalism. In this period, we see a starting degree of institutionalisation but also a dynamic movement of evangelising congregations.

The third period (1914–1963) is also marked by numerical growth, but especially by the development of organisations and the emancipation from a sect to a church. With the membership of the WCC and the originating of their own seminary, the Dutch Baptists emancipated from their status as a sect and moved toward an institution and 'coloured' more and more ecumenical. A counter movement led to the withdrawal from the WCC and new internal discussions about the openness to other churches emerged. A new motion into a 'movement' came about.

From 1963 onwards, a renewed evangelical 'colouring' became manifest. In the 1970s and 1980s this led to a significant quarrel between the ecumenical and fundamentalist evangelical Baptists, especially around the leadership of the Dutch Baptist Seminary. In the next decades however, this evangelical 'colour' turned more moderate. Since the turn of the century other old and new 'colours' also (re)occurred: an Anabaptist and international orientation, which led to a turn from learned to lived theology; new institutional collaborations came about,

at the university, with an upcoming merge with ABC, and in the participation in ecumenical networks; but we also see a motion towards liquefaction of congregations and the influence of open pioneering communities, which connects to the de-institutionalisation of society.

We can conclude that the Dutch Baptist community has gained a 'multi-coloured' identity throughout its history, which started as a more or less 'mono-coloured' Calvinist minded community, and evolved into a community with various 'colours' and strands. This process is reinforced in the last decades by the retrieval of various old strands that influenced Dutch (and international) Baptist identity within its earlier periods. We already mentioned the strong evangelical influence on Baptist congregations, which among other marks led to some megachurches with strong organisational leadership. But also, we saw the renewed search for the Anabaptist roots of Baptist history (for example in pioneering and missional groups) and the revival of a Calvinistic Baptist strand. Furthermore, the increasing collaboration with churches of other denominations leads to a rekindled ecumenical orientation and the merge with CAMA could lead to a renewed interest in holiness theology. And last but not least, several migrant churches have emerged within the Dutch (Baptist) 'landscape', with whom there is initial contact from local congregations and the national church community.[69]

However, although the Baptist community is becoming more plural, still the three basic identity markers that surfaced at the end of the nineteenth century and developed throughout the twentieth century, remain visible in their own way. Most congregations tend to maintain the structure of an ordered local community of baptised believers, even though in some congregations, membership becomes less clearly framed.[70] Also, while there have always been independent Baptist churches, most congregations are bound together in the national union — in which the local church is central — which becomes visible in the upcoming merge of the Dutch Baptist Union and the ABC.

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[69] See E. Groen, 'Baptisten zijn niet van deze tijd', in *De geschiedenis van het Schriftwoord gaat door,* ed. by Bakker et al., pp. 103–118 (pp. 111–112).

[70] See Jaap-Harm de Jong and Teun van der Leer, eds, *Land in zicht! Doop en lidmaatschap opnieuw in kaart gebracht,* Baptistica Reeks, 5 (Barneveld: Unie van Baptistengemeenten, 2012).

Furthermore, passion for revival and evangelism remains an important mark, which became manifest in the 1990s around the different aforementioned church development programmes (NCD, WCCC, PDC) and thereafter in the originating of pioneering and missional communities. That also rekindles the passion for evangelisation within local congregations.[71] From 1958 onwards, the Baptist Seminary also achieved its own place within the Dutch Baptist community. After a deep crisis within the 1980s, it gradually reinforced its own position. Today it has its roots deep in the community, and through collaborative research it seeks to integrate education, research, and church practices.

Clearly, Dutch Baptist identity has never been unambiguous, and this is true for the twenty-first century as well. All church identities become increasingly plural, being part of a network society that leads to what some call a VUCA world: volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. Nevertheless, the Dutch Baptists retain some of their typical Baptistic 'colours', in a combination of a certain self-evident Reformed orthodoxy, seasoned with a strong evangelical flavour, and a growing ecumenical curiosity and openness.

[71] See De Vries, *Gelovig gedoopt,* pp. 169, 281–291, 296–297, 325–328.

Investigations into the Logistics of Ignatius's Itinerary

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Abstract:
From the post-apostolic era several writings have been handed down to us which provide a glimpse into the developments of Christianity in the early second century CE. Among these writings are seven letters of Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch who was led in captivity into Rome to die a martyr's death. During his travels Ignatius wrote a number of letters to Christian churches. The aims of this article are (1) to offer possible geographical reconstructions of Ignatius's travels to Rome and (2) to analyse the social world that can be extracted from Ignatius's letters and other contemporary sources (e.g. Polycarp's letter to the Philippians). This may enable us to visualise the relationships between Ignatius and the congregations as well as to gain insights into the social coherence of early Christianity.

Keywords:
Ignatius of Antioch; itineraries; hospitality; care for prisoners

Introduction

Ignatius and his Letters

Apart from the seven letters from his own hand, not much is known about Ignatius. He is 'without beginning or ending',[1] and although tradition tells he died a martyr's death in the Colosseum under Trajan,[2]

[1] Christine Trevett, *A Study of Ignatius of Antioch in Syria and Asia*, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1992), p. xxix; Markus Vinzent, *Writing the History of Early Christianity: From Reception to Retrospection* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 268 <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108647052>.
[2] Jerome (*Vir. ill.* 16*)* dates his death to the eleventh year of Trajan, i.e. 107–108 CE. Trebilco and Mellink are inclined to follow this traditional dating, see Paul Trebilco, 'Christian

both date,[3] place,[4] and cause of death are disputed. Possibly, he was of Syrian origin, and Joseph Lightfoot inferred from Ignatius's negative self-designation[5] that he might have been a pagan persecutor of Christians before his conversion.[6] He was the second or third bishop of the church in Syrian Antioch and (indirectly) succeeded Peter in that office (Origen *Hom. in Lucam* 6.4 and Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 3.22.1, 3.36.2).

Most about Ignatius is known from his letters, in which he introduces himself consistently as 'Theophoros'.[7] Under the guard of ten Roman soldiers (Ign. *Rom.* 5.1), he travelled from Antioch to face a martyr's death in Rome. On the way the company halted in Philadelphia, Smyrna, and Troas (respectively Ign. *Phld.* 7, 12.1; *Smyrn.* 10.1; *Phld.* 11.2, *Smyrn.* 12.1 and *Pol.* 8.1). Despite his captivity, Ignatius met representatives of the churches of Philadelphia, Smyrna, Ephesus, Tralles, and Magnesia. Subsequently he wrote letters to each (and to the

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Communities in Western Asia Minor into the Early Second Century: Ignatius and Others as Witnesses Against Bauer', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 49, no. 1 (2006), 17–44; Albert Osger Mellink, 'Death as Eschaton: A Study of Ignatius of Antioch's Desire for Death' (doctoral thesis, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2000), p. 50.

3 Nowadays, most scholars opt for a death between 100–117 CE at the end of Trajan's reign or in the early days of Hadrian, e.g. Virginia Corwin, *St. Ignatius and Christianity in Antioch*, Yale Publications in Religion, 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960); William R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), p. 5. Bakker and Decrept propose 114–117 CE as a more fixed date which enables them to be more specific on the persecution in Antioch, see Hendrik Adrianus Bakker, *Exemplar Domini: Ignatius of Antioch and His Martyrological Self-Concept* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003); Étienne Decrept, 'Circonstances et Interprétations Du Voyage d'Ignace d'Antioche', *Revue Des Sciences Religieuses*, 82, no. 3 (2008), 389–99 <https://doi.org/10.4000/rsr.433>. Because of an assumed relationship to Ptolemy's writings, Barnes suggests a date in the 140s CE, see Timothy D. Barnes, 'The Date of Ignatius', *Expository Times*, 120, no. 3 (2008), 119–30 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0014524608098730>.

4 Alternative locations for his martyrdom have been suggested. From Pol. *Phil* 9.1–2 it has been inferred that Ignatius was martyred in Philippi. In a sixth-century document John Malalas suggests Antioch as the location of trial and execution (John Malalas *Chron.* XI).

5 Ignatius describes himself as *ἔκτρωμα*: a child untimely born (Ign. *Rom.* 9.2) and he uses *ἔσχατος* to depict himself as being the least of the Antiochian Christians (Ign. *Eph.* 21.2, *Trall.* 13.1, *Smyrn.* 11.1). Ignatius mimics the terminology and self-designation of the apostle Paul, cf. 1 Cor 15:9.

6 Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers–Part II: S. Ignatius S. Polycarp Revised Texts* (London: Macmillan, 1885), 1:28.

7 *Θεοφορος* could be rendered as *Θεοφόρος*, 'bearer of God', or *Θεόφορος*, 'borne by God'. The latter gave rise to the legend (known since the 9th century CE) that Ignatius was the child Jesus took in his arms (Mark 8:9), cf. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, p. 36.

church of Rome), in which he exhorts them, warns against heresies, and expresses his yearning for martyrdom. From Troas he was deported to Neapolis (Ign. *Pol.* 8.1).

From the letter of his contemporary Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, and recipient of Ignatius's only personal letter, it can be inferred that Ignatius visited Philippi (Pol. *Phil* 9.1) After these events Ignatius disappears from sight. The final trajectory of his travel and his death are hidden in the past and can only be conjectured.

Ignatius's letters were held in high esteem in the early church, but their number and authenticity have been disputed.[8] Three 'recensions' (i.e. different collections) of the Ignatian epistles exist. Most elaborated are the Latin and Greek editions of the long recension, which were published during the late Middle Ages[9] and contain an interpolated collection of the seven letters in the middle recension, appended with other letters claiming Ignatian authorship.[10] Earlier Roman Catholic scholars accepted this collection as authentic, but Protestant scholars rejected them mainly due to their strong emphasis on episcopacy.

In 1848, William Cureton maintained that only the three letters in the so-called 'short recension' are authentic.[11] His view was rebutted in 1885 by Lightfoot who advocated the authenticity of the 'middle recension': the letters to the Ephesians, the Romans, the Magnesians, the Trallians, the Philadelphians, and the Smyrnaeans, and a personal letter to Polycarp. Although most scholars nowadays follow Lightfoot

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[8] See Allen Brent, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Martyr Bishop and the Origin of Monarchial Episcopacy*, T&T Clark Theology (London and New York: Continuum, 2007); Barnes, 'Date'.

[9] Faber published a Latin edition of 11 letters in 1498, Usher a Latin edition in 1644 and Vos a Greek edition in 1648, see *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. by F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, 3rd rev. ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 822.

[10] For an English translation, see Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds*, The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 1*: *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* (Buffalo, NY: CLC, 1885).

[11] Cureton based his work on a Syriac manuscript which only contained shortened versions of the Epistle to the Ephesians, the Romans, and Polycarp, see William Cureton, *Corpus Ignatium: A Complete Collection of the Ignatiun Epistles, Genuine, Interpolated and Spurious; Together with Numerous Extracts from Them, as Quoted by Ecclesiastical Writers down to the Tenth Century: In Syriac, Greek, and Latin; an English Translation of the Syriac Text, Copious Notes and Introduction* (London: Rivington, 1849).

and accept the seven letters as authentic, this position has not been uncontested.[12]

Previous Research

Ignatius's letters have been examined from different angles in modern study.[13] Initially, the question of the authenticity of the letters was dominant, but gradually the emphasis shifted to researching the relationship of Ignatius to other Christian and contemporary thought.[14]

Topics that have been researched include, for instance, church structure,[15] gifts, and ministries.[16] Further topics concern the intertextuality of the Ignatian letters with the canonical[17] and apocryphal[18] gospels, and with contemporary writings; questions about an Ignatian eschatology;[19] the relationship with and attitude of Ignatius towards Jewish Christianity;[20] and the background(s) of his opponents.[21]

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[12] See Robert Joly, *Le Dossier d'Ignace d'Antioche*, Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres, 69 (Bruxelles: Université libre de Bruxelles, 1979); Vinzent, *Writing the History of Early Christianity*.

[13] Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, p. 2.

[14] Corwin, *Ignatius and Christianity*, p. 10.

[15] Joseph Azize, 'Ignatius of Antioch on the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy: Logic and Methodology', *Phronema*, 30, no. 2 (2015), 105–36; Allen Brent, 'The Ignatian Epistles and the Threefold Ecclesiastical Order', *Journal of Religious History*, 17, no. 1 (1992), 18–32.

[16] Joel C. Elowsky, 'The Ministry in the Early Church', *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, 76, no. 3/4 (2012), 295–311; Kenneth Berding, '"Gifts" and Ministries in the Apostolic Fathers', *Westminster Theological Journal*, 78, no. 1 (2016), 135–58.

[17] Walter J. Burghardt, 'Did Saint Ignatius of Antioch Know the Fourth Gospel?', *Theological Studies*, 1, no. 2 (1940), 130–56.

[18] Pier Franco Beatrice, 'The "Gospel According to the Hebrews" in the Apostolic Fathers', *Novum Testamentum*, 48, no. 2 (2006), 147–95.

[19] Fritz Guy, '"The Lord's Day" in the Letter of Ignatius to the Magnesians', *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 2 (1964), 1–17; Richard B Lewis, 'Ignatius and the Lord's Day', *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 6, no. 1 (1968), 46–59; Edward Fudge, 'The Eschatology of Ignatius of Antioch: Christocentric and Historical', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 15, no. 4 (1972), 231–37.

[20] Paul J. Donahue, 'Jewish Christianity in the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 32, no. 2 (1978), 81–93; Robert R. Hann, 'Judaism and Jewish Christianity in Antioch: Charisma and Conflict in the First Century', *Journal of Religious History*, 14, no. 4 (1987), 341–60.

[21] Daniel L. Hoffman, 'Ignatius and Early Anti-Docetic Realism in the Eucharist', *Fides et Historia*, 30, no. 1 (1998), 74–88; Michael D. Goulder, 'Ignatius' "Docetists"', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 53, no. 1 (1999), 16–30.

More recent studies have approached the texts from sociological[22] and psychological[23] perspectives.

Outline of this Research

Although Joseph Lightfoot, Virginia Corwin, Leslie W. Barnard, and William R. Schoedel have already researched much of the geographical background and societal aspects of the Ignatian letters, the logistics surrounding Ignatius's travels have not been researched thoroughly. This article aims to fill this research lacuna by (1) offering possible geographical reconstructions of Ignatius's travel to Rome, and (2) by analysing the social world which appears from Ignatius's letters. For this reconstruction, knowledge about travelling in the ancient world and information from literature will be used to gain a better understanding of the reality behind Ignatius's epistles.

Section two of this article explores what it meant to travel in Roman times: what modes of travel were available to a second-century traveller and how did lodging function? Furthermore, the social cohesion and the far-reaching efforts to support fellow believers in the first centuries of Christianity are examined. These generic insights are used in section three to reconstruct a mental picture of the social cohesion and logistics surrounding the movements in Ignatius's letters. Section four then summarises the findings.

Background

Travelling

The ancients had multiple motives for travelling.[24] Many travels were made for business reasons, to further trade or government, but also for

[22] Drake Williams III, 'Pointing to a Paragon in Early Christian Communities: Considering Prototypical Behavior in the Letters Which Ignatius of Antioch Wrote', in *Drawing and Transcending Boundaries in the New Testament and Early Christianity*, ed. by Jacobus (Kobus) Kok, Martin Webber, and Jermo Van Nes, Beiträge Zum Verstehen Der Bibel, 38 (Berlin: LIT, 2019), pp. 115–35.
[23] Mellink, 'Death as Eschaton'; Bakker, *Exemplar Domini*.
[24] Lionel Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 147.

the sake of health, for pilgrimage, to attend festivals, and sometimes merely to see the world or to take a holiday.

In the first two centuries CE, almost the whole Mediterranean could be traversed without crossing a border, utilising Latin for the western, and Greek for the eastern part of the empire. A traveller only needed Roman coins, and a planned network of waterways and Roman roads, primarily intended for fast military actions, was at their disposal.

If the time of the year was right and budget permitted, the traveller could journey by sea. The fear of pirates was almost completely banished.[25] Nevertheless seafaring was still highly dependent on the weather conditions and was most favourable in the months of May to October. In the other half of the year weather conditions could be so unfavourable, and the risk of shipwreck so great, that a sea voyage was only undertaken for exceptional reasons such as the transport of military troops or to alleviate an urban food crisis. Weather also had its impact on the navigation capabilities of the crew. They needed to rely on landmarks during daylight, and stars at night to determine their position. Cloudiness by day and night was to be avoided. It would take centuries before the compass would be employed in nautical navigation.

Although travelling by boat had its advantages, it was there primarily for the transport of cargo. Passenger vessels did not exist, and a traveller was completely dependent upon the availability of a freight ship sailing in the desired direction. Cargo ships did not provide facilities, so passengers would stay on deck during the journey, where they were on their own, and if they had the luxury, were catered for from their own foods by their own servants.

Other factors that increased the unpredictability of seafaring were not only the changeability of weather conditions, but also the widespread belief of the Romans that dreams and real-life occurrences provided omens that encouraged or deterred a sea journey.

Travelling over land was more time-consuming and required the necessary physical effort, not only for crossing distances but also because camping equipment, such as kitchenware and bedding, had to

[25] Casson, *Travel*, p. 122.

be taken along. On the other hand, a land journey was less sensitive to seasonal influences or bad weather.[26] Weather, though, did have its influences on a daily travelling schedule. Not just daylight but also acceptable temperatures were needed to travel safely and comfortably.[27]

Transport and Lodging

The Emperor Augustus introduced the *cursus publicus*, a system primarily intended for official messaging in the Roman Empire. It consisted initially of a network of places where the official messages had to be transferred regularly to new couriers. The system was revised so that now carriages and (pack) animals were replaced, which also had the advantage that the courier could provide any additional information to the official message. Later, the system also provided facilities for the transportation and housing of individuals.[28]

Usage of the *cursus publicus* was strictly reserved for officials from the government or the military. They received a *diploma*, or warrant, to grant them permission to use designated facilities (including transport but also often sustenance) for a specific purpose over a delimited period. These facilities needed to be provided by the local population, but it was also decreed that the locals should be compensated financially. The certainty of having transport and housing facilities available for a journey made a *diploma* a treasured possession.[29] Well-to-do people had their own outdoor villas or a large network of other officials or friends to turn to for a stay, but these first-class facilities of transport and

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26 Casson, *Travel*, p. 180.

27 Compare the account of Aristides leaving Smyrna to travel to Pergamum in a summer in the late 160s CE: 'When the preparations had all finally been completed, it was noon and too hot for him to be out on the road. He waited around a few hours until the sun lost some of its bite, and about half past three in the afternoon he and his party got into their carriages and started off.' (Aristides *Or.* 27:1–8) See Casson, *Travel*, p. 193.

28 Casson, *Travel*; Anne Kolb, 'Transport and Communication in the Roman State: The Cursus Publicus', in *Travel and Geography in the Roman Empire*, ed. by Colin Adams and Ray Laurence (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2012), pp. 95–105.

29 These advantages led to misuse and abuse, see Pliny the Younger's fairly harmless example: 'up to this moment, I have never accommodated anyone with a diploma. […] However, my wife heard that her grandfather died, and since she wanted to run to see her aunt, I thought it unnecessarily severe to deny her the use of a diploma.' (Pliny *Ep.* 10: 1 20) Abuse however grew to great proportions and ultimately selling one's *diploma* could be punished by death, see Casson, *Travel*, pp. 188–89, 351–52.

lodging were certainly not at the disposal of a captive second-century bishop, who was being deported by a band of Roman soldiers.[30]

If the rank-and-file traveller was to avoid camping in the open field or sleeping on the street, their only available option was an inn. Inns were situated at a day's travel distance along Roman roads, and a town usually contained a multiplicity of them. They provisioned food for guests as well as the general public, offered lodging, shelter and care for pack animals, and repair facilities for travel equipment. In addition, inns functioned as centres of *divertissement* (entertainment, gambling, and prostitution).

Hygiene was an issue, as a legend in the apocryphal *Acts of John* illustrates. While returning from Laodicea to Ephesus, John and his servants spent the night at a deserted inn. It appears to have been past midnight that the apostle, having been given the only available bed, cried out 'I tell you, you bugs, to behave yourselves, one and all; you must leave your home for tonight and be quiet in one place and keep your distance from the servants of God.' His servants laughed at the event, but the next morning they were surprised when they found the bugs properly lined up at the front door.[31]

Hospitality in the Early Church

Given the deplorable state of inns, not much was to be expected from commercial hospitality. For that reason, high-placed officials preferred private hospitality offered by friends and relatives or the hospitality gained from strangers upon the display of a diploma. Though hospitality to strangers was a virtue in the Roman world, hospitality in reality was limited to people of similar social standing.[32]

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[30] Time and circumstances changed during the centuries. Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 10.5.23) documented a letter from the Emperor Constantine to Chrestus, bishop of Syracuse, in which he grants him a *diploma* to use the *cursus publicus* for himself, two companions, and three servants when travelling to the Synod of Arles (314 CE).

[31] Acts of John 60, 61 (*New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. by Wilhelm Schneemelcher, trans. by R. McL. Wilson, 2 vols (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 2: 193–94).

[32] A passage in Justin Martyr's Apology probably illustrates the change in stance towards outsiders '[…] we who hated and destroyed one another, and on account of their different manners would not live with men of a different tribe, now, since the coming of Christ, live familiarly with them' (Justin *1 Apol.* 14.3).

In Judaism private hospitality (which included strangers) was a virtue (e.g. Lev 19:33–34 and Deut 10:17–19) and was a by-product of personal piety towards God. This virtue was held in high esteem in the Jewish tradition,[33] but even then, ideal and reality were not completely interchangeable.[34]

The New Testament continues the exhortations to be hospitable (Rom 12:13; Heb 13:2; 1 Pet 4:9), especially to those who preach the gospel (3 John 8). It also offers several examples of hospitality within the early Christian congregations: in Acts 18:27 Apollos receives a letter of recommendation from the disciples in Ephesus with a request to provide him hospitality in Achaia. Similar requests to the congregations in respectively Rome, Corinth and Colossae were made for Phoebe (Rom 16:1–2), Barnabas (Col 4:10) and Timothy (1 Cor 16:10–11). In the last case this also included material support for travelling. John[35] even commends a congregation for its hospitality to strangers (3 John 5–7).

Ignatius *Trall.* 12.1, *Eph.* 2, *Magn.* 15, and *Smyrn.* 9.12 show that Ignatius also experienced such hospitality, both from congregations and individuals. He uses *ἀναπαύω* (to cause to halt, rest and therefore, refresh) several times to describe how he was received by the congregations, and this support was probably expressed mentally and materially.[36] In the context of Ignatius's deportation this also shows the social cohesion in the early church. It is not coincidental that Ignatius uses the expression *ἡ καθολικὴ ἐκκλησία* to emphasise the unbreachable unity of the church (Ign. *Smyrn.* 8.2).

Other illustrations of the early church's social cohesion are abundantly available in second- and third-century writings. For instance,

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[33] See the Mishnah tractate *Aboth*: 'Jose b. Joezer used to say: let thy house be a house of meeting for the Sages and sit amid the dust of their feet, and drink in their words with thirst […] Shammai said: Make thy [study of the] Law a fixed habit; say little and do much, and receive all men with a cheerful countenance' (*m. 'Abot* 1.4,15). (*The Mishnah: Translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes*, trans. by Herbert Danby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 446, 447.)

[34] cf. Gen. 44:4; Sir 29:21–28.

[35] The identity of the author of the 3rd epistle attributed to John is obscure.

[36] 'in all things': *ἐν πᾶσιν* (Ign. *Eph.* 2.1), *κατὰ πάντα* (Ign. *Smyrn.* 9.2, 12.1, 2); 'by body and spirit': *σαρκί τε καὶ πνεύματι* (Ign. *Trall.* 12.1).

Tertullian describes a voluntary monthly offering which is spent for caring for the needy, the aged, and the imprisoned (Tertullian *Apol.* 39, 5–6).[37]

In *De Morte Peregrini* the Roman satirist Lucian depicts an hilarious portrait of the pre-Christian, Christian and stoic phases in the life of Peregrinus Proteus, and his 'heroic' death. Although Lucian is at times evidently misinformed about Christianity,[38] his information about Peregrinus's Christian phase of life is illustrative for the social cohesion in the early church.[39]

Peregrinus joined the Christians of Palestine where he quickly gained a prominent position among them, which eventually lead to his capture and imprisonment.

> Well, when he had been imprisoned, the Christians, regarding the incident as a calamity, left nothing undone in the effort to rescue him. Then, as this was impossible, every other form of attention was shown him, not in any casual way but with assiduity; and from the very break of day aged widows and orphan children could be seen waiting near the prison, while their officials even slept inside with him after bribing the guards. Then elaborate meals were brought in, and sacred books of theirs were read aloud […] Indeed, people came even from the cities in Asia, sent by the Christians at their common expense, to succour and defend and encourage the hero. They show incredible speed whenever

[37] 'Even if there is a chest of a sort […] Every man once a month brings some modest coin — or whenever he wishes, and only if he does wish, and if he can; for nobody is compelled; it is a voluntary offering […] to feed the poor and to bury them, for boys and girls who lack property and parents, and then for slaves grown old and shipwrecked mariners; and any who may be in mines islands or prisons […].' (Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, *Apology: De spectaculis*, trans. by Terrot Reaveley Glover, The Loeb Classical Library, 250, repr. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998)).

[38] 'Lucian's ignorance of Christianity and Christian doctrine is really monumental', so asserts Gilbert Bagnani, 'Peregrinus Proteus and the Christians', *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte*, 4, no. 1 (1955), 107–12 (p. 111).

[39] Lucian's portrait of the Christian Peregrinus shows some resemblances with the portrait of Ignatius. This seems to presuppose knowledge on Lucian's side of Ignatius's letters. These resemblances are however not of such a kind that they justify Völter's odd claim: 'Vielmehr müssen der Verfasser der kleinasiatischen Ignatiusbriefe und Peregrinus Proteus eine und dieselbe Person gewesen sein' (Daniël Völter, *Polykarp und Ignatius und die Ihnen Zugeschriebenen Briefe* (Leiden: Brill, 1910), p. 174).

> any such public action is taken; for in no time they lavish their all. (Lucian *Peregr.* 11–13)[40]

Lucian's disdain for the charlatan and profiteer Peregrinus is evident in the story's sequel where he describes how Peregrinus continued to live off the purse of early Christianity after being released.[41]

Several passages in the *Didache*[42] confirm the potential abuse of the early church's hospitality. The document not only exhorts the church to test the teachings of travelling preachers, but also to limit their stay to a maximum of one, two, or, occasionally, three days and to support them only with bread, not with money. Such admonitions were to prevent profiteers from parasitising the early Christian communities (*Did.* 11.1–12.5).

Care for Prisoners

Besides the general care for and hospitality to strangers, the involvement with imprisoned co-believers is also a relevant feature of the social world behind Ignatius's letters.

Incarceration had no formal legal status as a punishment in Roman times. It was intended as a remand awaiting execution. However, delays in the judicial process, combined with poor circumstances and psychological pressure, meant that imprisonment was experienced as punishment.[43] The mode of custody to which one was sentenced depended on 'the nature of the charge brought, the honourable status,

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[40] Lucian, *The Passing of Peregrinus, The Runaways, Toxaris or Friendship, The Dance, Lexiphanes, The Eunuch, Astrology, The Mistaken Critic, The Parliament of the Gods, The Tyrannicide, Disowned*, trans. by Austin Morris Harmon, The Loeb Classical Library, 302 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936), vol. 5.

[41] See Lucian *Pergr. 16: ἱκανά ἐφόδια τούς Χριστιανούς ἔχων*, ('possessing an ample source of funds in the Christians'). D. Plooij and J.C. Koopman, *Lucianus, de dood van Peregrinus van inleiding en aanteekeningen voorzien*, Aetatis Imperatoriae Scriptores Graeci et Romani Adnotationibus Instructi, I (Utrecht: G. J. A. Ruys, 1915), p. 79, see this as an allusion to the generic hospitality commonly displayed within early Christianity.

[42] The *Didache* is an early Christian document that probably can be dated to the early second century CE and might have originated in Syria, the same period and region as Ignatius's letters, but within a more Jewish context.

[43] Brian M. Rapske, 'Prison, Prisoner', in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. by Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), pp. 827–30.

or the great wealth, or the harmlessness, or the rank of the accused' and an accused could 'be sent to prison, delivered to a soldier, or committed to the care of their sureties, or to that of themselves' (Justinian *Dig.* 48.3.1).

The severity of military custody (including transport and incarceration) depended on several factors. In the case of military transit, the rank, experience, and number of soldiers assigned for guarding could be brought into accordance with the custodian's importance or status.[44] Prisoners and guards were often chained together. The conditions in a prison were very poor. Often the places were overcrowded, poorly ventilated, devoid of natural light and extremely filthy. Daily diets were merely intended for survival. Against this background the care for prisoners becomes a necessity instead of a luxury and it is known from second-century sources that even the bribing of guards was utilised to facilitate contact.[45]

The story of the martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas[46] supports this picture. The deacons Tertius and Pomponius bribed the soldiers to obtain better conditions for the imprisoned (*Pass. Perp.* 3.7), and many believers visited the prisoners for mutual comfort (*Pass. Perp.* 9.1).[47]

Tertullian, the North African apologist from Carthage, is also familiar with the custom among early Christians to support imprisoned

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[44] Rapske, 'Prison, Prisoner', p. 828, seems to imply that this explains the huge number of soldiers appointed to guard Ignatius (Ign. *Rom.* 5.1). It is however not convincing that an aged bishop, who desired his martyrdom, had such status and importance. The number of soldiers could equally well be explained by other factors, e.g. the need to collect several prisoners in Asia Minor and Macedonia to deport them to Rome, see Pol. *Phil* 9.1. This suggestion has the advantage that it also explains why the band took the inefficient land route instead of making the voyage by sea.

[45] *The Martyrs of Lyons*, which should probably be dated to 177 CE, was written by the churches of Lyons and Vienne in Gaul to the churches of Asia and Phrygia. It tells of a very cruel persecution. The whole atmosphere was so hostile that the Christians were not allowed to bury their martyrs. Neither supplications nor efforts to bribe could persuade the guards (*MartLugd* 1.61), see *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, ed. by Herbert A. Musurillo, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), vol. 2.

[46] The *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis,* presents five second-century martyrs from the early African Christian movement. In the work, the spotlight is on Perpetua, a high-born, twenty-two-year-old, breastfeeding woman, and her pregnant slave Felicitas, cf. *Pass. Perp.* 2.2, 7.4, 16.2.

[47] That they even had the opportunity to dine together twice (*Pass. Perp.* 16.2, 17.1) seems to be an exceptional treatment by a guard.

Christians. He writes that 'also individual brethren from their own private resources supply to you in your prison' (Tert. *Ad mart.* 1). In a different passage, Tertullian exhorts the early Christians not to exaggerate their concern for martyrs: 'Plainly, your habit is to furnish cookshops in the prisons for untrustworthy martyrs, for fear they should miss their accustomed usages, grow weary of life, [and] be stumbled at the novel discipline of abstinence.' (Tert., *De jejun.* 12.3) Apparently, Tertullian believed that only true martyrs were worthy of the care of the early Christian community.

It is against this background that the letters of Ignatius should be read. During his travel in custody, under the guard of Roman soldiers, he probably was taken from barracks to barracks, or to some other sort of military station where he was imprisoned in whatever kind of jail was available. Conditions must have been poor and his relationship with his custodians was grim (Ign. *Rom.* 5.1).

Still, his letters provide evidence that he was able to be in contact with fellow Christians, and to write letters to the churches that sent him delegates. These delegates appear to have been instrumental in sending his letters, as ordinary people had to rely on their own couriers.[48]

These examples demonstrate that hospitality for fellow believers and care for prisoners in the early church were not limited to ideals, but part of church policy.[49] This widely practised early Christian tradition can be traced back to Jesus's words,[50] and the early church's passion to

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[48] The prime service of the *cursus publicus* was only available to officials or the well-to-do who gained access to the system through bribery or influence, see Casson, *Travel*, p. 223.

[49] A commendable study says that 'from a very early point […] church help was structured' and comprised several roles where 'church members donate; church leaders visit and disburse help' which was especially evident 'where churches come to the prisoner from a distance' (Brian M. Rapske, 'The Importance of Helpers to the Imprisoned Paul in the Book of Acts', *Tyndale Bulletin*, 42, no. 1 (1991), 3–30 (pp. 13, 14)).

[50] 'Luke is also speaking to the Christian community of his day, relating details of its missionary endeavours to the ministry of Jesus himself. Thus the teaching of the Christian community in the Period of the Church is rooted in his teaching and in a command of Jesus himself.' (Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Bible, 28A, 2 vols (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 2:845.) Jesus's instructions to the seventy(two) in Lk 10:3–11 'are economic' and place 'his emissaries in a place of tension between dependence on and the abuse of hospitality' (Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 413–414).

obey them is also evident from the logistics people were willing to organise to assist their fellow believers. The next section will elaborate on these geographical aspects.

Geography of Ignatius's Letters

Somewhere in the second half of the first quarter of the second century, Ignatius was arrested in Antioch on the Orontes. Local persecution appears to have prompted his arrest and his *damnatio ad bestias*. Since the sentence had to be executed in Rome, the bishop was deported under the guard of ten Roman soldiers. It is probable that an envoy was despatched from Antioch to inform the local church in Rome (Ign. *Rom.* 10.2).[51] Such a journey would have been most efficient over sea and might have taken approximately twenty-one days (Figure 1).[52]

Figure 1: Possible trajectory of the envoy's sea journey from Antioch to Rome (Ign. *Rom.* 10.2).

[51] Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, pp. 11–12, and Corwin, *Ignatius and Christianity*, p. 14, consider it likely that the ones preceding Ignatius were also victims of the same persecution.

[52] Modes, durations and distances of the individual travels have been derived from *The Stanford Geospatial Network Model of the Roman World* <https://orbis.stanford.edu> (except for the trajectory over land from Laodicea ad Lycum–Philadelphia–Smyrna where GIS data was used). When using Orbis, it should be borne in mind that it is a reconstruction based on documented, historical, and conjectured data. Therefore, actual journeys may have taken much longer due to the unpredictability of the weather or the unavailability of vessels. Cicero (*Fam.* 16:21:1) wrote that it took 46 days to despatch a letter from Rome to Athens since there was no ship readily available, but he also recounts a different occasion where the same travel was made *sane strenue*, mighty quickly, in only 21 days (*Fam.* 14:5:1).

Instead of a direct journey by sea, the band of soldiers took an indirect route through Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Italy.[53] The first trajectory, between Antioch on the Orontes and Philadelphia in Asia (Figure 2), can only be conjectured. One possibility is that they went from Antioch to Seleucia to embark on a ship heading for a southern port in Asia Minor, for example, Atallia,[54] which was approximately 678 kilometres and would have taken five to six days. From there they might have continued their journey over land to Laodicea ad Lycum, a journey of eight days and 225 kilometres.

Figure 2: The two options for the trajectory between Antioch ad Orontes and Laodicea ad Lycum.

The alternative is that the military escort and captive(s) left Antioch and headed northwest towards Tarsus in Cilicia. After crossing the Taurus

[53] Mellink, 'Death as Eschaton', pp. 20–21, deems it likely that already at this point the group consisted of multiple prisoners. This might be conjectured from the size of the squad, but it is unclear whether and when other prisoners were added. The indirect course of the route across Asia Minor and Macedonia might be explained if the squad had the assignment to pick up other prisoners along the way to the capital, see Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, pp. 11–12.

[54] For instance Trebilco, 'Christian Communities', and Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, p. 11, suggest that Ign. *Rom.* 5.1 could provide evidence that the first trajectory of Ignatius's travel was partially over sea. However this inference is not conclusive, since the verse could also apply to future sea voyages, see Corwin, *Ignatius and Christianity*, pp. 14, 16.

mountains, passing through the Cilician gates, they probably would have continued their land journey until they reached Laodicea ad Lycum.[55] The total distance of 900 kilometres could be covered in thirty-one days.

Close to Laodicea ad Lycum, where the rivers Maeander and Lycus converged, the road branched into a northern and western stretch. Some scholars suggest that Ignatius might have expected that they would have proceeded in their journey over the main highway across Southern Asia Minor to embark in Ephesus.[56] The squad of soldiers, however, preferred the northern branch towards Philadelphia (88 kilometres, 3 days). Here the company halted. Probably, as will have been the case in earlier, unnamed villages where they needed to spend the night, the soldiers made use of accommodation in military encampments, perhaps even from the *cursus publicus*, and otherwise of existing inns. Ignatius probably was locked up in whatever cell was available. In Philadelphia, Ignatius had the freedom to meet and teach local Christians (Ign. *Phld.* 7.1), but there appears to have been a conflict between him and some of the Philadelphians.[57]

The stay in Philadelphia probably lasted only a few days before the band continued its travel to Smyrna. The distance (130 kilometres) would have required a multi-day journey (4.5 days) and it seems very likely that they spent one of the nights in Sardis, the capital of the Roman province Asia Minor.

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[55] Since Rheus Agathopous and Philo from Cilicia have followed Ignatius (Ign. *Phld.* 11.2), it has been inferred that the journey must have been over land. Bart Ehrman supports a land journey, though he does not reference Ign. *Phld.* 11.2, see *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas*, ed. by Bart D. Ehrman, Loeb Classical Library, 25, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 2:204.

[56] E.g. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*. Ignatius's description of the Ephesian church as 'You are a passageway [*πάροδος*] for those slain for God' (Ign. *Eph.* 12.2) might not only be metaphorical, but also an allusion to the highway in reality, see Corwin, *Ignatius and Christianity*, p. 16; Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 779; Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, English edition ed. by Madeleine Goh and Chad Schroeder (Boston, MA: Brill, 2015).

[57] It might be that the quarrel with some of the Philadelphians (see *τινες* […] *τινων*, Ign. *Phld.* 7.1, 2) was over the authority of the verbal tradition against the Jewish scripture.

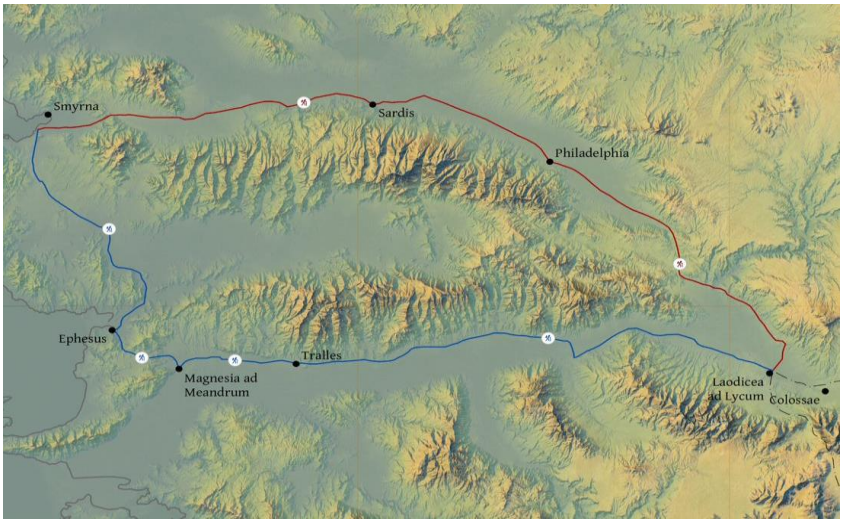

Figure 3: Ignatius's route through Philadelphia and the route of the messengers through Tralles, Magnesia and Ephesus.

The squad of soldiers and their captive(s) appear to have reached Smyrna sometime in the middle of August. The most probable scenario is that Ignatius was placed into custody again, perhaps together with other captives. Possibly the delay was due to some arrangements the soldiers had to make, or they might have halted to pick up some other captives. It could also have been that they had to wait for a ship heading in the direction of Troas to become available. Whatever the reason, the delay provided an opportunity for Ignatius to meet with local Christians, including bishop Polycarp. These individuals became dear to him and expressed their support both mentally and materially (Ign. *Smyrn.* 9.2, *Magn.* 15, *Eph.* 2.1; 5.1). Besides the Smyrnaeans, Ignatius could also rely on representatives from the local churches in Ephesus, Magnesia, and Tralles.

At what moment these churches had been informed about Ignatius's journey of captivity and his prospective stay in Smyrna is not stated in the epistles. One option is that the churches may have been informed when Ignatius had already reached Smyrna.[58] This would

[58] Corwin, *Ignatius and Christianity*, p. 17.

require the despatch of an envoy towards Ephesus, a distance of 72 kilometres that could be traversed in two and a half days, subsequently to Magnesia, (1 day, 21 kms), and to Tralles (1 day, 28 kms). This does not seem a very likely option since the journey there and back (when done by foot) would have taken ten days.

It seems more likely that an envoy was despatched via the southern route from Laodicea to Smyrna, informing the churches of Tralles, Magnesia and Ephesus that Ignatius was on his way to Smyrna.[59] It took about four days to reach Tralles (120 kms). There, Bishop Polybius joined the envoy (Ign. *Trall.* 1.1) and together they traversed 28 kilometres to reach Magnesia in one day. In that town, the company of travellers expanded with the addition of presbyters Apollonius and Bassus, Bishop Damas, and the deacon Zotion (Ign. *Magn.* 2.1). They continued their journey and reached Ephesus after another day (21 kms) where they met representatives of the local church. Receiving the news about Ignatius's journey in captivity, an Ephesian delegation of at least five people (Bishop Onesimus, deacon Burrhus, Crocus, Euplus and Fronto, Ign. *Rom.* 10.1) were enabled to meet Ignatius in Smyrna (Ign. *Eph.* 1.2; 21.1). The travel party, which meanwhile had grown to more than ten people, will have covered the final 70 kilometres to reach Smyrna in two and a half days, and there they became acquainted with the imprisoned bishop.

Ignatius and these representatives must have had some time and opportunity to build a relationship and to discuss the situation of the local churches, especially in the case of the deputies from the Ephesian and Magnesian churches (the Trallian bishop Polybius seems to have returned earlier to his hometown (Ign. *Trall.* 1.1; 13.1)). In response to their support and the reports concerning the local situation, Ignatius wrote letters to each of these churches. The delegates from Ephesus and Magnesia may have delivered them to their hometowns and to Tralles.

On 24 August, Ignatius wrote a fourth letter to the church in Rome (Ign. *Rom.* 10.3). He announced his arrival to the Roman congregation in order to prepare their response towards him. He wanted

[59] Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers II*, vol. 1; Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*; Mellink, 'Death as Eschaton'; Corwin, *Ignatius and Christianity*.

to prevent any action on their side that might hinder his martyrdom. Therefore, the letter had to reach Rome before the arrival of Ignatius himself, and it has been suggested that Crocus acted as the courier for this letter (Ign. *Rom.* 10.1).[60] If he were the one carrying the letter to Rome and there was some sense of urgency, seafaring might have been the best option. Crocus could have embarked in Smyrna on a ship for Corinth, where he continued to Regium. From there, the final trajectory would have led him to Rome. The journey from Smyrna to Rome was about 2100 kilometres and would have taken at least seventeen days (Figure 4). The letter-carrier probably arrived in Rome in mid-September.

Figure 4: Possible route of the letter carrier (Crocus?) from Smyrna to Rome.

It is quite possible that the group of soldiers and their prisoners resumed their journey soon after the letter to the Romans was sent (Figure 5). Whether their journey to Troas continued over land (9.3 days) or by sea (2.1 days), is unknown, but Ignatius was now accompanied by Burrhus, the deacon from Ephesus (Ign. *Eph.* 2.1). This man was generously facilitated by the Smyrnaeans and Ephesians to

[60] Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, p. 12.

support Ignatius, and would also serve as Ignatius's amanuensis (Ign. *Phld.* 11.2; *Smyrn.*12.1).[61]

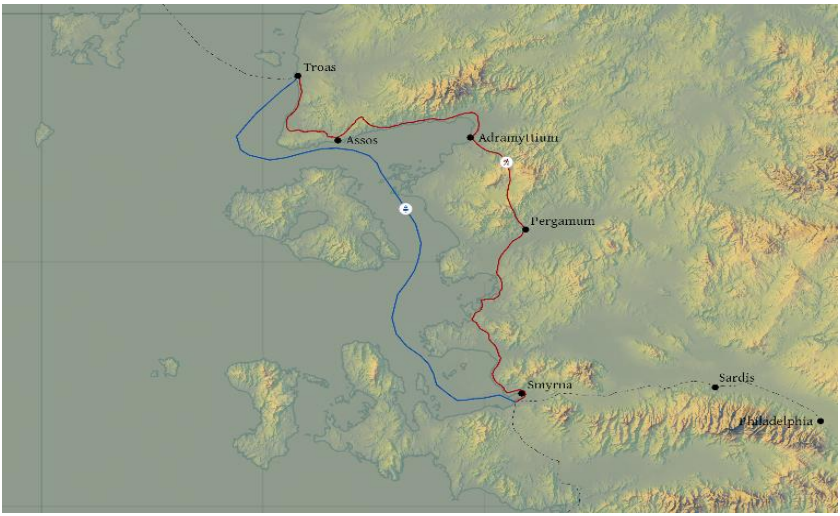

Figure 5: Options for Ignatius's route from Smyrna to Troas.

Ignatius had been followed by Philo from Cilicia, and Rheus Agathopous from Syrian Antioch. The texts are silent about whether Rheus Agathopous, after leaving Antioch, picked up Philo in Cilicia, but it appears that they had both been informed that Ignatius had taken the northern route to Smyrna, and they continued their travel jointly to Philadelphia. In that town they visited the local church, but not every member of the Philadelphian community received them positively (Ign. *Phld.*11.1).

From Philadelphia, Philo and Rheus Agathopous travelled to Smyrna (Ign. *Smyrn.* 10.1) and the attitude of the Smyrnaean church towards them appears to have been very positive: the Smyrnaeans refreshed both men in every way (Ign. *Smyrn.* 10.1, cf. 9.1–2), probably informing them that Ignatius already left for Troas. So, they travelled on. (Figure 6)

[61] Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, pp. 216, 251, suggests Burrhus could also have served as the letter carrier for the three epistles that were sent from Troas.

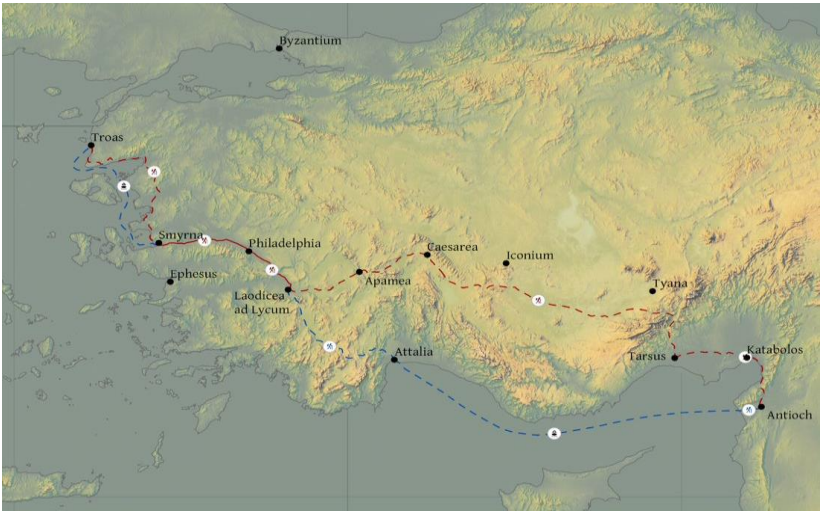

Figure 6: The trajectory of Philo and Rheus Agathopous.

Having travelled more than 1400 kilometres,[62] they were finally able to catch up with Ignatius in Troas (Ign. *Phld.* 11.1; *Smyrn.* 13.1), and to bring him the good tidings about the church in Antioch (Ign. *Pol.* 7.1; *Smyrn.* 7.1; and *Phld.* 10.1). This news brought the troubled mind of Ignatius to rest (cf. Ign. *Eph.* 21; *Magn.* 14). Rheus Agathopous seems to have left Ignatius before Philo (Ign. *Smyrn.* 13.1).[63]

Subsequently, Ignatius wrote letters to the churches of Philadelphia and Smyrna, and to the Smyrnaean bishop Polycarp. In these letters he expressed his gratitude for the restored peace in Antioch and exhorts his addressees to rejoice with him. He also urged them to send ambassadors to the church of Antioch in Syria to congratulate them (Ign. *Phld.* 10.1; *Pol.* 7.1; 8.2; *Smyrn.* 7.1–3), as neighbouring

[62] If the voyage was partially over sea, it could be traversed in 24 days. If it was fully over land, on foot, it would have taken about 48 days to reach Troas from Antioch.

[63] The fastest mode of travel to return to Antioch would have been a sea voyage of 9 days, but this was dependent on the availability of transport. Furthermore, the time of year was less favourable.

churches had already done in person or by letter (Ign. *Phld.* 10.2, *Pol.* 8.1).

Considering the short letters written from Troas (Ign. *Phld.* 11.2; *Smyrn.* 12.1; *Pol.* 8.1), Ignatius's stay was apparently rather short and abruptly terminated (Ign. *Pol.* 8.1). Maybe a change of weather or favourable omens made a vessel available to transport the band to the European continent.

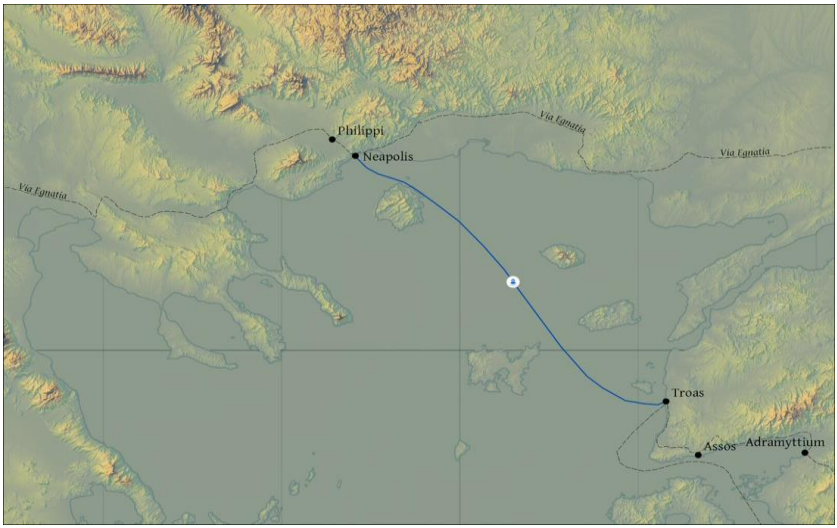

Figure 7: Route of Ignatius to Neapolis and thence Philippi.

The distance between Troas and Neapolis, the seaport of Philippi, was 347 kilometres and could be covered in two and a half days. From the harbour they probably proceeded on foot to reach Philippi in half a day (19 kilometres) (Figure 7). In that city, two other captives appear to have been added to the band (Pol. *Phil* 9.1). Unfortunately, the contemporary accounts stop here, and it is not certain what happened next. Ignatius may have died a martyr's death in Philippi,[64] or he may have faced his execution in Rome.

[64] Vinzent, *Writing the History of Early Christianity*, p. 278, claims that the ninth chapter of Polycarp's letter 'introduces Ignatius together with his companions Zosimus and Rufus as

Assuming the probability of a martyr's death in Rome, the squad of soldiers presumably continued their travel from Philippi over the Roman highway, the *Via Egnatia*. The journey of 540 kilometres would have taken approximately eighteen days and would have led them via Thessalonica and Hereklea. When they finally reached the harbour in Dyrrachium, they probably embarked on a ship to cross the Adriatic Sea to land at Brundisium, a distance of 169 kilometres which took a little more than one day.

Figure 8: Trajectory from Philippi to Rome.

To reach Rome, a land journey along one of the usual routes, for instance the *Via Appia*, has often been proposed.[65] In September or October they could reach the city in eighteen days, covering 539 kilometres. However, an alternative route over sea is also possible: they could have set sail from Brundisium to round the southern Italian coast. Comprising 1174 kilometres, this route is significantly longer, but it would only have taken approximately nine days. (Figure 8) Along the way they might have docked in various harbours. A clue that earlier

martyrs who together with others were killed in Philippi'. However, it is unclear on what basis Vinzent infers that the place of death should be Philippi.

[65] See Corwin, *Ignatius and Christianity*; Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*; Mellink, 'Death as Eschaton'.

generations found such a sea voyage from Brundisium over Regium to Rome plausible, might be discovered in the spurious letter from Ignatius to the Philippians.[66] On the other hand, at this time of year sea travel was less favourable.

Trajectory	Journey	Distance (kms)	Duration (days)	Mode
Antioch - Attalia	1a	678	6	sea
Attalia - Laodicea	1a	225	8	land
Antioch - Laodicea	*1b*	*900*	*31*	*land*
Laodicea - Philadelphia	2	88	3	land
Philadelphia - Smyrna	3	130	5	land
Smyrna - Troas	4a	277	9	land
Smyrna - Troas	*4b*	*295*	*2*	*sea*
Troas - Neapolis	5	347	2.5	sea
Neapolis - Philippi	6	19	0.5	land
Philippi - Dyrrachium	7	540	18	land
Dyrrachium - Brundisium	8	169	1	sea
Brundisium - Rome	9a	539	18	land
Brundisium - Rome	*9b*	*1174*	*9*	*sea*

Table 1: Summary of distances, durations, and modes of travel in Ignatius's voyage (alternative trajectories are italicised).

Probably after spending more than forty-two days over certainly more than 3000 kilometres (Table 1) – a journey with several stops that enabled the bishop to communicate with representatives of local churches – the band finally reached Rome (most likely no earlier than halfway through October). There, Ignatius likely died his desired martyr's death fighting the beasts. During his travel and imprisonments, he had met with local church members, but also with delegates and envoys who were willing to travel over 10,000 kilometres to lend their support (Table 2).

[66] 'I have sent you this letter through Euphanius […] happening to meet with him at Rhegium, just as he was going on board ship' (psIgn. *Phil.* XV).

		Trajectory	Distance (kms)	Duration (days)	Mode
1.	Envoy to Rome	Antioch – Attalia	678	6	sea
2.	Envoy and delegates	Attalia – Laodicea	225	8	land
3.	Letter to Rome	Antioch – Laodicea	900	31	hybrid
4.	Letters from Smyrna	Laodicea – Philadelphia	88	3	land
5.	Rheus Agathopous	Philadelphia – Smyrna	130	5	hybrid
6.	Philo	Smyrna – Troas	277	9	land
7.	Letters from Troas	Smyrna – Troas	295	2	hybrid
8.	Phil. envoy to Antioch	Troas – Neapolis	347	2.5	hybrid
9.	Sm. envoy to Antioch	Neapolis – Philippi	19	0.5	sea

Table 2: Summary of distances, durations, and modes of other journeys.

Conclusion

What exactly happened to the bishop on his way from Syria to Rome remains hidden in the past. Nonetheless, this study has shown that it is possible to enhance the image that emerges from Ignatius's letters based on historical-geographical details.

The extensive infrastructure of roads, waterways and inns made it relatively easy to travel from the farthest corners to the capital of the Roman Empire. Yet there were also the inevitable obstacles, including the weather and the availability of accommodation, that made the speed of travel unpredictable. Likewise, the quality of lodging could be very poor, and hygiene problematic for the rank-and-file who could not use first-class facilities.

The situation would probably have been worse for captives since they were condemned to whatever meagre prison was available. Since the only aim of the Roman soldiers was that Ignatius survived the

journey to fight the beasts, he did not have to expect any care. But he received much.

From early Christian tradition it appears to have been customary to provide hospitality to unknown fellow believers and to support the imprisoned. Likewise, no expenses nor efforts were spared to support an unknown bishop morally and materially. Envoys were sent over long distances and stewards enabled for longer periods of time. Moreover, delegates provided company to an unknown; namely the captive, needy Ignatius. Here we see that neither space, time, nor expenses hinder the words of Jesus in Matt 25:35–36, 40 from materialising.

Rooting Our Systematic Theologies: The Moral Dimension of a Theology of Retrieval

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Abstract:
In the last decades 'theologies of retrieval' have become a popular way of doing systematic theology and reconnecting pre-modern authors with contemporary theological issues. This 'retrieval' of history within systematic theology is, however, not without its moral challenges. Certainly, today we have become more conscious of our presumptions and one-sidedness in our interpretations of historical events (e.g. the Dutch 'golden' age). A theology of retrieval can hence quickly be used to serve particular contemporary theological ends that fail to do justice to the complexity of the actual sources and run the risk of 'overemplotting' the past. Based on an exploration of James McClendon's retrieval of the Radical Reformation in his baptist vision, an argument is made for a more conscious 'art of historical conversation' within present-day systematic theology, especially theologies of retrieval.

Keywords:
Theology of retrieval; systematic theology; church history; ethics; James McClendon; Radical Reformation

Introduction

Coming from a bi-ecclesial background, both reformed and evangelical, studying theology at an academic level was both something admired, as well as looked upon with suspicion. When I was about six years of age, my parents exchanged the Dutch Reformed church for an independent evangelical church. It was characterised by a high stress placed on personal faith and the typical 'cover to cover' approach to scripture. This direct connection between the 'then' of the Bible and the 'now' of the reader eliminated not only the need for careful exegesis, but also any accountability toward the generations of Christians who had read the

Bible previously. During my theological studies as an adolescent, I encountered a different understanding of the church, one in which I learned to see my personal faith as rooted in the church of the ages. As a result, I increasingly came to see the absence of such a conscious catholicity among Dutch free churches as a form of theological self-deprivation. For the church as the Christian community through history exists precisely as a long line of reception and transmission under the guidance of the Spirit: 'the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints' (Jude 1:3). Tradition, another dreaded concept, does not refer to a 'dead church' long gone, but denotes the very lifeblood of the church today — as Jaroslav Pelikan so famously remarked: 'Tradition is the living faith of the dead.'[1] Studying the past thus becomes a theological obligation. It is therefore not surprising that in my own research as a systematic theologian, I continue to look back to the past to retrieve these lively voices for the church of today.

However, the way we retrieve events and figures from the past is not without its difficulties. Certainly today, we are repeatedly reminded of how narrations of history are tainted by the contextual bias of the narrator. Constructions of the events of history also contain a particular evaluation of history. For example, the seventeenth century is branded as the famous Dutch 'Golden Age', which accentuates its economic success above the horrific circumstances in which slaves were shipped from Africa to Brazil and Suriname. Likewise, a partiality is evident in the use of the term 'pioneers' over 'imperialists' (or vice versa) when describing the missionaries of the Christian Missionary Movement in the nineteenth century. There is, using the words of Rowan Williams, 'a moral dimension to the writing of history'.[2] When we tell a story about the past we make (value) judgements, selections, and prominences that are given with our subject position. Accordingly, when we look back into the Christian past to strengthen or revive theological debate today,

* I thank Andy Goodliff, Henk Bakker, Kirsten Timmer and the independent reviewers for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

[1] See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Vol. 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 1971), p. 9.

[2] Rowan Williams, *Why Study the Past: The Quest for the Historical Church,* Sarum Theological Lectures (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005), p. 11, cf. pp. 24–26.

as specifically characterises the mode of theology commonly labelled as 'theology/ies of retrieval', we need to reflect on the kind of story we tell; for the way systematic theologians narrate history in their theological expositions subsequently 'expresses and nurtures' convictions of what it is to be Christian.[3] In view of further exploring this moral dimension in retrieving history, I will first describe the relation between history and theological argument in the so-called theologies of retrieval. Then I will reflect on the moral dimension from the perspective of historical theory which will provide the language tools to then subsequently analyse and reflect on James McClendon's retrieval of the Radical Reformation in the construction of his 'baptist vision'. Based on these findings, I will offer some preliminary thoughts on the moral dimension of retrieving historical voices in contemporary systematic-theological discourse.

The Retrieval of History in Systematic Theology

Since Christian faith is grounded in the history of the people of Israel, the witness of Jesus's ministry and passion by first-century Jews, and the continuing worship practice of the Christian communities over centuries, systematic-theological argument is intimately connected with the understanding of this historical trajectory.[4] For the central doctrines that make up Christian confessions did not come out of the blue, as the product of direct revelation, but are often the outcome — provisional as they may be — of debates set in a certain context and time. Consequently, as Colin Gunton reflects, 'what we make of questions of history will often have a bearing on how we see faith today'.[5]

The twentieth century, encouraged to do so by Karl Barth,[6] witnessed a resurgence of theological argument by way of resourcing the church's own history.[7] Among these *ressourcement* theologians there are,

[3] Cf. Christopher Ellis, *Gathering: The Theology and Spirituality of Worship in Free Church Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 2004), p. 98. Ellis writes in the context of liturgical celebration — yet his argument likewise applies to storytelling in general.

[4] See Colin Gunton, 'Historical and Systematic Theology', in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. by Colin E. Gunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 3–20.

[5] Gunton, 'Historical and Systematic Theology', p. 3.

[6] Cf. Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, vol. I/1 (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1947), § 1.

[7] See notably Michael Allen, and Scott R. Swain, *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), pp. 1–48; W. David

besides McClendon, many Baptist theologians: Stephen R. Holmes, Elizabeth Newman, and Curtis Freeman, and in the Dutch context, Olof de Vries and Henk Bakker.[8] The name-giver of this mode of doing constructive systematic theology is the late John Webster (d. 2016) who, in his contribution to the *Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, used 'theology of retrieval' to capture this trend.[9] In his wake, several scholars adopted his terminology to denote a methodology in which pre-modern authors and movements appear as principal conversation partners to discuss contemporary issues.[10] As Darren Sarisky recently explained, 'Theologies of retrieval unsettle present discussions by offering resources from beyond the current horizon with a view toward enriching ongoing debates.'[11] Webster, in the aforementioned chapter, though fully aware of the large variety and ecumenical diversity of retrieval studies, perceives a 'common concern' that motivates this diverse group of *ressourcement* theologians; namely that the influence of Enlightenment critique 'distanced theology both from its given object and from the legacies of its past'.[12] As such, Webster views theologies of retrieval as an attempt to *reconnect* academic theology to its own distinct sphere, the community of faith that connects past and present. Especially by way of re-reading pre-modern sources, theologians of

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Buschart and Kent Eilers, *Theology as Retrieval: Receiving the Past, Renewing the Church* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015), pp. 11–42; and Darren Sarisky, ed., *Theologies of Retrieval: An Exploration and Appraisal,* T&T Clark Theology (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

8 In order: Stephen R. Holmes, *The Quest of the Trinity: The Doctrine of God in Scripture, History and Modernity* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012); Elizabeth Newman, *Attending to the Wounds on Christ's Body: Teresa's Scriptural Vision* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012); and Curtis Freeman, *Undomesticated Dissent: Democracy and the Public Virtue of Religious Nonconformity* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017); Olof de Vries, *Leer en praxis van de vroege dopers: Uitgelegd al seen theologie van de geschiedenis* (Leeuwarden: Gerben Dykstra, 1982); and notably Henk Bakker, 'Tangible Church: Challenging the Apparitions of Docetism (Hughey Lectures)', *Baptistic Theologies,* 5, no. 2 (2013), 1–58.

9 See John Webster, 'Theologies of Retrieval', in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. by John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 583–599.

10 See J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), pp. 2–7; Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 5th edition (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p. xxiii; and Jan Martijn Abrahamse, *Ordained Ministry in Free Church Perspective: Retrieving Robert Browne (c. 1550–1633) for Contemporary Ecclesiology*, Studies in Reformed Theology, Vol. 41 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2020), pp. 10–15.

11 Darren Sarisky, 'Introduction', to *Theologies of Retrieval*, p. 2.

12 Webster, 'Theologies of Retrieval', p. 584.

retrieval aim to present to 'contemporary practitioners descriptions of the faith unharassed by current anxieties, and enabling a certain liberty in relation to the present'.[13] As of consequence, in theologies of retrieval historical research becomes systematic theology since the contents of historical documents (whether confessions, catechisms, monographs, or letters) are not only treated as merely containing past particulars but as representing actual voices whose theological arguments, ideas and concepts are considered a valued contribution to constructive theology in the present day.[14] Meaning that those categories which have become untenable for modern writers, such as divine inspiration, vocation, or providence, are not treated as outdated vocabulary but as sources to advance current debate. In sum, as Webster notes about theologians of retrieval, '[t]hey consider modernity, however understood, to be a contingent, not an absolute, phenomenon, and suggest that whatever misdirections have occurred can be corrected by skilful deployment of the spiritual and intellectual capital of Christianity'.[15]

In his article Webster also touches briefly upon some 'perils' of theologies of retrieval as he calls it. First of all, theologies of retrieval might employ a too solid understanding of 'the tradition' that overstates its actual historical substance or negates the process-based character of the formulation of doctrinal statements. The second temptation Webster mentions, 'is to subscribe to a myth of the fall of theology from Christian genuineness at some point in its past (fourteenth-century nominalism, the sixteenth-century Reformation, seventeenth-century Cartesianism, or wherever 'modernity' is considered to present itself)'.[16] By this Webster refers to the specific (moral) attitude with which we look to the past; either motivated by imagined superiority, by prejudice or by ignorance we can oversimplify our readings of the past. As such, narrations of the past can become 'myths'.[17] In other words, we can mistreat our historical conversation partners due to the moral templates

[13] Webster, 'Theologies of Retrieval', pp. 584–5.
[14] Webster, 'Theologies of Retrieval', pp. 585; cf. Gunton, 'Historical and Systematic Theology', pp. 5–6.
[15] Webster, 'Theologies of Retrieval', p. 589.
[16] Webster, 'Theologies of Retrieval', p. 596.
[17] Cf. R. Williams, *Why Study the Past*, pp. 22–23. Rowan Williams likewise speaks of 'foundational myths' when the past is used as a source of deception in the present: 'that there has been a primitive disaster in which truth has been lost or overlaid.'

with which we present their history. Of course, that does not mean that it is easy to identify where 'myth' begins and 'history' ends or vice versa.

The Moral Dimension: Managing Our Relations with the Past

Webster's caveats force us to rethink our handling of historical sources, especially since our motivation is inspired by a contemporary concern. Rowan Williams reminds us, 'We don't have a single "grid" for history; we construct it when we want to resolve certain problems about who we are now.'[18] How do we prevent a retrieval from becoming mere nostalgia ('it used to be better'), superiority ('this is the only pure tradition'), or romantic idealism ('would we only return to this authentic form')? Whereas total objectivity is beyond the attainable, systematic theologians should be aware of this moral dimension that accompanies their interpretations and presentations of history, certainly when in view of the purpose of strengthening a certain ecclesial tradition or reviewing a contemporary theological debate.

Rowan Williams's remark raises the question of the relationship between narrative and event, between what is told and what happened. Northrop Frye, the famous literary critic, makes a clear distinction between *mythos* ('plot') and history writing, between the poet and the historian. 'Myth' (*mythos*), as Frye applies it, refers to the narrative construction ('plot') of historical facts preferring unity and coherence over realistic or factual accuracy.[19] History represents 'events put into the form of words. The historian imitates action directly: he [sic] makes specific statements about what happened, and is judged by the truth of

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[18] R. Williams, *Why Study the Past*, p. 5.

[19] See the work of Northrop Frye, *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (New York: Harbinger, 1963), pp. 37–70 (pp. 21–38, 53); and *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1971; first published 1957). Though Frye acknowledges that it refers primarily to a type of storytelling (stories of gods located outside history), in practice he says to follow Aristotle's use of *mythos* (*Poetics*, 6) as the composition of events (*viz.* his four mythological archetypes: tragedy, comedy, irony, and romance). It is disputed if Frye's version actually represents Aristotle truthfully, as he fails to recognise Aristotle's distinction between the arrangement of actions or 'plot' (*mythos*) and the ascription of intention or 'character' (*ēthos*). Consequently, modern writers too quickly assume that the construction of narrative and the ethical dimension coincide, see Elizabeth Belfiore, 'Narratological Plots and Aristotle's Mythos', *Arethusa,* 33, no. 1 (2000), 37–70 (pp. 41-42, 55, 64).

what he says.'[20] Poets are, on the other hand, concerned with what happens with their writing, they write to make something happen: 'We notice that when a historian's scheme gets to a certain point of comprehensiveness it becomes mythical in shape, and so approaches the poetic in its structure.'[21] Yet Frye continues to make a sharp differentiation, arguing that a historian seeks to limit themselves to the action of human events, working inductively 'collecting his facts and trying to avoid any informing patterns except those that he sees', while the poet 'works deductively' by imposing a certain pattern (*mythos*) upon the subject.[22] In short, a historian 'works toward his unifying form, as the poet works from it'.[23] In this sense, Frye concludes, 'the historical is the opposite of the mythical'.[24]

The philosopher of history Hayden White, in response to Frye's thesis, opposes this sharp opposition between history and poetry. Historical events, he argues, do not contain narratives but only 'story elements' at most.[25] Historians 'familiarize the unfamiliar' by making a comprehensible story, an *emplotment*; yet telling a story *of* history includes attributing narrative meanings *to* history.[26] Historical narratives thus not merely reproduce facts, but already tell the audience what to think of these events and therefore contain a 'fictive element,' argues White.[27] The moral dimension, then, in White's explanation, is given with the subject position of the scholar who not only recounts history to the reader but provides it with meaning and directs the audience to see and respond to the narrated history in a certain way.[28] Since these constructions are therefore always provisional and susceptible to

20 Frye, *Fables of Identity*, p. 53.
21 Frye, *Fables of Identity*, pp. 53–54.
22 Frye, *Fables of Identity*, p. 54.
23 Frye, *Fables of Identity*, p. 55.
24 Frye, *Fables of Identity*, p. 55.
25 Hayden White, 'The Historical Text as Literary Artifact', in *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure, and Frames*, ed. by Brian Richardson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), 191–210 (p. 194).
26 White, 'The Historical Text as Literary Artifact', p. 196.
27 See White, 'The Historical Text as Literary Artifact', pp. 201, 208–9.
28 Cf. Kalle Pihlainen, 'The Work of Hayden White II: Defamiliarizing Narrative', in *The SAGE Handbook of Historical Theory*, ed. by Nancy Partner and Sarah Foot (Los Angeles and London: SAGE, 2013), 119–135 (pp. 119–120).

revision, historians should therefore present their accounts as such.[29] The risk is that we '*overemplot*' the historical facts in our narrative constructions and charge them 'with meaning so intense' that we forget to discern past from present and facts from our storied interpretations.[30] Hence, the question becomes: How to familiarise people with historical events without, to borrow White's term, 'overemplotting' the historical evidence? How do we discern narrative construction from mere myth?

In his book *Wanneer het verleden trekt* (When the past draws us in),[31] the Dutch philosopher of history Herman Paul explores this moral dimension when he discusses the ways historians relate to the past. Following White,[32] Paul acknowledges that 'story' is not something inherent to historical events but something which is laid upon the facts of history (*historia res gestae*) to provide them with meaning and significance (*historia rerum gestarum*).[33] The Dutch title above already captures the aforementioned ambivalence of historical investigation: our relation to the past is not neutral. The past can 'draw us in', fascinate us, give rise to awe in us, make us become angry or whatever. The 'historical distance' we have to a certain time can be explained both in temporal as well as in affective terms. That is why, he argues, we have to specify our relation to the past. Paul then surveys various ways of relating to the past, such as the epistemic (getting knowledge), the moral (denoting virtues and vices), the political (deriving social and societal significance), aesthetic (attributing genre and shape), and the material relation (how we encounter remaining material objects from the past):

> [H]ow then can the relations be distinguished from each other? The answer is that every relation except the material one […] focuses on one or more specific aims. Almost every relation with the past is characterized by one or

[29] Cf. White, 'The Historical Text as Literary Artifact', p. 192.
[30] White, 'The Historical Text as Literary Artifact', p. 197.
[31] Herman Paul, *Wanneer het verleden trekt: Kernthema's in de geschiedfilosofie* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2014), published in English as *Key Issues in Historical Theory* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015). The Dutch title (When the past draws us in) is derived from a poem by the Dutch poet Hendrik Marsman (1899–1940): 'als het verleden trekt, zoek dan een land, dat iemand heeft begaan, zoek naar den leegen weg.'
[32] See Herman Paul, *Hayden White: The Historical Imagination* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011).
[33] See Paul, *Key Issues in Historical Theory*, p. 28; cf. *Wanneer het verleden trekt*, p. 46. I will refer to the English version in the footnotes hereafter.

> more goods that people hope to acquire in that relation. This may be knowledge of human nature or insight into causal connections, but also pleasure or profit.[34]

In making our historical constructions we can identify our 'bias' with regard to the voices from the past by questioning ourselves: What am I after? What is the 'good' I aim to preserve? Though there is a distinction, as said above, between *lived lives* and *narrated lives*, there is also interaction:

> Stories not only have a referential aspect, in the sense that they refer to reality and try to interpret it, but also a performative dimension. That is to say: they intervene in reality by providing people with frameworks in the light of which they think and act.[35]

Paul, combining White's thesis with J. L. Austin's speech-act theory, explains that our narrative constructions of history contain illocutionary intentions and have perlocutionary effects.[36] Our constructions of the past can, for example, be motivated (illocution) by critiquing certain moral values or practices, with the possible effect of changing perspectives and attitudes (perlocution). Yet, Paul comments, the desire to see our own ideas confirmed by history quickly runs the risk of making the past a 'ventriloquist's puppet' of the present.[37] This is essentially what White meant by 'overemplotment'. Historians need to be aware of their particular tradition (or 'subject position'), as these traditions provide our unavoidable 'starting points' for orientation in the world, by which we recognise 'that every interpretation starts from prejudices that traditions supply to the interpreting subject'.[38] In other words, to be aware of one's subject position demands awareness of one's own tradition; to know both its strengths as well as its weaknesses, its limitations, and its incentives.

To address the above observations and conclusions, Paul suggests approaching the moral dimension of historical investigation in

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[34] Paul, *Key Issues in Historical Theory*, pp. 33–34.
[35] Paul, *Key Issues in Historical Theory*, p. 64.
[36] See Paul, *Key Issues in Historical Theory*, pp. 39–40.
[37] Paul, *Key Issues in Historical Theory*, p. 128.
[38] Paul, *Key Issues in Historical Theory*, pp. 44–46, 51.

terms of relationship management, 'the art of historical conversation'.[39] Rather than letting contemporary motivation for studying the past have priority, the art of historical conversation starts with considering the past on its own; listening to history as a strange past before arguing *with* or *on the basis of* history in the present. Paul essentially argues to treat an historical event, document, or person, first as a stranger. When one treats historical sources first like an unknown 'other', self-questioning rather than self-confirmation becomes the central feature. Before deriving any moral, political, aesthetic *goods* from a certain source, the epistemic relation needs to be fostered: knowledge and understanding. That means asking questions relating to knowledge and understanding of the past, being open for correction by other scholars, and from the actual sources themselves, and the importance of keeping some distance toward the other relations (other than the epistemic).

Paul enables us to better understand the difference between emplotment and overemplotment by stipulating the different relations we can have towards the past when doing historical research. Paul's picture of the scholar's moral responsibility shows the importance of postponing one's own interest in order to listen more carefully to the sources. When we forget to approach the past as a stranger whom we need to get to know (epistemic relation), the past quickly becomes an instrument in the pursuit of our own theological agenda. Theologians who argue by way of historical retrieval and pursue a degree of realism, must be willing to 'listen' to the actual conversation in which the source is historically located. To prevent overemplotting historical events, they must be open to correction. The past might theologically be alive through the community of faith ('tradition as the living faith of the dead'), historically there are only remnants of the past that demand careful consideration. Especially since the way systematic theologians narrate history in their theological expositions also 'expresses and nurtures' convictions of what it is to be Christian, they need to reflect on their relation to the specific past they aim to retrieve: what kind of story do I tell, how do I relate to this past event, what *goods* do I aim to

[39] See Paul, *Key Issues in Historical Theory*, pp. 129–33, 142–7. See for a similar argument with regard to the general interpretation of texts Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

retrieve, and what is my aim for present debate? To relate these findings to the practice of systematic theology, I will examine James McClendon's retrieval of the Radical Reformation to see how he relates to this past in order to assess his emplotment of the historical facts of the sixteenth-century reformations.

McClendon's Baptist Vision and The Radical Reformation

James McClendon (1924–2000) presents his 'baptist vision' in his three-volume Systematic Theology, *Ethics, Doctrine*, and *Witness*,[40] not coincidentally also a core element, both beloved and feared by students, in the curriculum of the Dutch Baptist Seminary in Amsterdam. McClendon is an exponent of what some have referred to as a 'neo-Anabaptist' resurgence in the second half of the twentieth century, prominently associated with John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas.[41] Central to their contributions is their looking into the history of the Radical Reformation to critique and renew modern theological discourse (e.g. voluntarism, consumerism, just war theory) by providing an alternate systematic-theological proposal with distinct roots in Christian history. References to the Radical Reformation and its representatives can be found throughout McClendon's three volumes, yet for our purposes here, I have selected those parts where McClendon explicitly comments on his methodology, and his retrieval of the Schleitheim confession as a more concrete example.

In the first volume, *Ethics,* McClendon introduces his particular approach and methodology for his baptist vision; he specifically explains his aim to draw on the heritage of the Radical Reformation to root his own theology in an independent ecclesial tradition alongside the Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, and Anglican traditions: 'A Christian

[40] James Wm McClendon, Jr, *Ethics: Systematic Theology, Volume 1*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002; first published 1984); *Doctrine: Systematic Theology, Volume 2* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994); *Witness: Systematic Theology, Volume 3* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000).

[41] See James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 109–10, 150–66; and Stefan Paas, 'The Counter-Cultural Church: An Analysis of the Neo-Anabaptist Contribution to Missional Ecclesiology in the Post-Christendom West', *Ecclesiology,* 15, no 3. (2019), 283–301 (pp. 287–89). McClendon's agenda is obviously influenced by Harold Bender's influential proposal 'The Anabaptist Vision', *Church History,* 13 (1944), 3–24.

theology, we may say provisionally, must have a community of reference that cannot without confusion be subsumed under some more general ecclesial type.'[42] McClendon casts a fairly wide net when it comes to the various ecclesial groups he identifies as 'heirs' of the Radical reformers,[43] including even those who do not necessarily share his 'baptist vision'. Fundamental to his historical construction is the conviction that the Radical Reformation represents a distinct, yet overlooked and marginalised, tradition of ecclesial reformation in which contemporary 'baptists' (intentionally written with a small 'b' to include more ecclesial movements than just denominational Baptists) find their roots: 'The baptists in all their variety and disunity *failed to see in their own heritage, their own way of using Scripture, their own communal practices, their own guiding vision,* a resource for theology unlike the prevailing tendencies round about them.'[44] Clearly, McClendon aims to rectify not only the neglect of the Radical heritage but also to substitute dominant theological agendas (e.g. Calvinist, Arminian, Modernist) that fail to provide sufficient ethos and doctrine in light of contemporary challenges. The purpose of his ecclesial emancipation, namely, to retrieve the Radical heritage as a distinct baptist theological voice for today, returns again notably in the introduction to the second volume, *Doctrine*, where he writes that his

> contribution is to show that one large segment of Christian believers, next in size perhaps to Roman Catholics and exceeded in age by none, is under-represented in recent theology, and to remedy that defect as best as I can.

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[42] McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 19.

[43] For example, McClendon, *Ethics*, pp. 33–34 identifies, 'Disciples of Christ and Churches of Christ, Mennonites, Plymouth Brethren, Adventists, Russian Evangelicals, perhaps Quakers, certainly Black Baptists (who often go by other names), the (Anderson, Indiana) Church of God, Southern and British and European and American Baptists, the Church of the Brethren, the Assemblies of God and other Pentecostal bodies, assorted intentional communities not self-identified as churches, missionary affiliates of all the above (and, as pointed out in an earlier section, hundreds of other bodies even in the United States and Canada alone).'

[44] McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 26 (emphasis original). See for the 'small-b baptists', his 'The Voluntary Church in the Twenty-First Century', in *The Believers Church: A Voluntary Church*, ed. by William H. Brackney, Studies in the Believers Church Tradition (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 1998), 179–198 (p. 183). See the discussion of McClendon's complex use of 'baptist' in Spencer Boersma, 'The Baptist Vision: Narrative Theology and Baptist Identity in the Thought of James Wm. McClendon, Jr.' (doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto, 2017), pp. 244–53.

> Heirs of the Radical Reformation are often theologically pigeonholed as confused (though sincere) Protestants.[45]

The underlying unity behind McClendon's baptist tradition is provided by what he calls the '*narrative common life*'.[46] He directs us to understand the stories of past and present baptists, thus including the Radical Reformation, as one, continual tradition of practices and convictions on the basis of which he can speak of 'the baptist vision': 'by a vision I mean the guiding pattern by which a people (or as here, a combination of peoples) shape their thought and practice.'[47] This 'narrative common life' of Radical reform is then identified by five theological *notae* or 'distinguishing marks of the heirs of the Radicals': Biblicism, Liberty, Discipleship, Community, and Mission.[48]

In the course of mapping out his baptist vision, references to the heritage of the Radical reformers appear frequently to root or exemplify, among other things, his narrative methodology, his embodied ethics, and views on war, violence and authority and, of course, his characteristic hermeneutics of 'this is that/then is now'.[49] Since space does not allow for a full exploration of every instance where he makes an argument based on or reference to the Radical Reformation, I want to highlight a particular and more extensive example that can be found in chapter nine of *Ethics*. Here McClendon presents the Schleitheim confession as an event in which the communal dimension (*koinonia*) of the post-resurrection ethics as described in the New Testament is restored. Before going into the text of the confession itself, he explains his selection of this event:

> Conventional church history, when it adverts to the sixteenth-century baptist movement, has all too often cited Muenster. Indeed the tragedy at Muenster, like that at Jonestown, Guyana (1978), shows how the baptist vision can be perverted (just as the Crusades, the Inquisition, the Thirty Years' War, and the witchcraft trials show how the Catholic and Protestant traditions can be

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45 McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 8.
46 McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 26 (emphasis original).
47 McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 27.
48 McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 27.
49 See for example *Ethics*, pp. 37, 68–71, 315; *Doctrine*, pp. 184, 341–3, 482–7; and *Witness*, pp. 78, 330–1.

> perverted). But an earlier and more typical picture of Baptists—one of the very earliest communal pictures—comes not from Muenster but from a gathering of radical Christians on a mountainside near Schleitheim, a Swiss-Austrian border town, in February 1527.[50]

As is fitting with his emancipatory project, McClendon aims to retrieve a confident theological heritage to root his communal and non-Constantinian baptist vision.[51] To do so, he refuses the often rehearsed 'Münster-image' and adopts the Schleitheim confession as the central picture to motivate the communal character of his baptist vision, as it more adequately represents the history of Grebel, Blaurock, Manz, Hubmaier, Sattler, and others, who understood that old 'Christendom' undermined Christian life. Schleitheim's rejection of 'the sword' as a symbol for earthly political power and violence (Article 6), therefore, is a more accurate representation of the radical reformers' legacy.[52] To demonstrate the gravity of the Schleitheim confession, McClendon makes a sharp differentiation between the conformity of the Magisterial Reformation ('submitting the word of God to the power of the princes or prelates'), and the direction in which these 'radical baptists' under the leadership of Michael Sattler went.[53] Against the prevalent *cuius regio, eius religio* these Anabaptist leaders gathered in Southern Germany where they 'adopted a method that was to have historic consequences — the *dialogue of those concerned*. They called a meeting for dialogue and decision, beginning on a day in February 1527, near centrally located but quiet Schleitheim."[54] According to McClendon, it was during these

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[50] McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 246.

[51] Cf. John Howard Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, ed. by Michael J. Cartwright (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), especially pp. 242–261. In line with Yoder, McClendon understands the Constantinian turn in the early fourth century as an ecclesial 'Fall' that led to a situation in which the church became mixed up in political affairs and lost its eschatological dimension. Cf. Hunter, *To Change the World*, pp. 152–6.

[52] Already in the introduction to *Ethics*, McClendon commented that among the sixteenth-century Anabaptists there 'were with few exceptions nonviolent, that is, pacifists, and individually they were widely regarded as men and women of good character'. McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 20. For the text of the Schleitheim confession, see *The Schleitheim Confession*, trans. and ed. by John Howard Yoder (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1977), pp. 14–15. This booklet was earlier published as *The Legacy of Michael Sattler* in 1973 and forms McClendon's main historical source.

[53] McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 247.

[54] McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 247 (emphasis original).

conversations that the state-church compromise was substituted for 'a separate, radical church'.[55] His use of radicalism here, of course, adheres to the Radical tradition, but, because of the way he contrasts radicalism with the course advocated by the Magisterial Reformation, it also receives the flavour of 'higher commitment' to Scripture. Although actual reports about this gathering (e.g. the number and identity of its participants, the procedures followed, etc.) are absent, McClendon believes that participants met as equals (gender aside, he notes) and, following Yoder, states that 'perhaps uniquely in Reformation history, minds were changed in the course of a discussion! The baptist movement acquired at Schleitheim a free church ecclesiology that has survived to the present time.'[56] On the basis of his own reconstruction he then makes his argument for today:

> Most important for present purposes, the dialogue gave concrete expression to the koinonia-love that guided the conference, and that koinonia-love shaped the ethics of the movement into a social structure fitted for the 'resurrection walk' to which they committed themselves.[57]

To McClendon, 'Schleitheim' represents the restoration of the 'the community spirit of early Christianity', as can be found in Paul's Corinthian correspondence, the book of Acts, and 1 John, presuming a return to a pre-Constantinian situation.[58] In McClendon's baptist vision, the Schleitheim confession thus represents a defining moment, a restoration of the New Testament practice; this gathering of these hunted Anabaptists 'witnesses the truth of that argument' and although many of its participants did not live to see how it would continue, 'it is for us to supply their want, as they have supplied ours'.[59]

McClendon's baptist vision is built upon a narrative construction that allows him to tell the history of these radical reformers

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[55] McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 247.
[56] McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 248.
[57] McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 248.
[58] Cf., 'It remains only to point out that the content of the Articles was the setting forth of a simple but effective structure for church life understood as a way of life, focusing on just those points that the old Constantinianism of the Roman South and the new Constantinianism of the Lutheran and Reformed North had made unlikely.' (McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 249)
[59] McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 249.

as a distinct theological tradition manifesting and maintaining a 'truth' (e.g. the *goods* of non-violence, communal ethics, equality). The particular value pattern in which he places the story of Schleitheim (namely, Christendom/Constantianism, submitting to Scripture/or princes) strengthens the impression that Schleitheim represents a turning point in the 'fallen' status of Christianity: the lost notion of *koinonia* that was restored or counteracted by these 'radicals' who went back to the New Testament roots; an example of commitment to scripture that accordingly therefore requires the follow-up of the reader (cf. 'they have supplied our want'). These value judgements are not inherent to historical events themselves, but they are McClendon's emplotment of the Schleitheim gathering in support of his theological vision. It is an example of how he as a systematic theologian retrieves the history of the Radical Reformation: he reads it as a narrative of the subversion of Constantinianism and, therefore, representing a purer version of obedience to the New Testament's witness.[60] Precisely because of his theological agenda as a systematician, McClendon seems to be concerned to a lesser degree with the epistemic relation towards his sources and more orientated toward the moral relation: correcting the present misapprehension and neglect of the aforementioned *goods* of radical history in 'conventional' history and theology.

The Emplotment of the Radical Reformation

To better assess McClendon's relation to the past as a systematic theologian, I need to say a bit more about his historical categorisation, separating a 'Radical' from a 'Magisterial' Reformation. This historical differentiation was prominently suggested by George Hunston Williams in 1957 and subsequently developed in his classic *The Radical Reformation* (1962). Although very influential, Williams's proposal was criticised from the start by other historians. Williams's intention was to create historical space and singularity (a 'third way') for those sixteenth- and

[60] With this moral scheme of interpreting the Radical Reformation, McClendon (again) follows Yoder's (to whom he frequently refers) interpretation, see John Y. Yoder, 'Anabaptism and History: "Restitution" and the Possibility of Renewal', in *Umstrittenes Täufertum 1525–1975: Neue Forschungen*, ed. by Hans-Jürgen Goertz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1975), pp. 244–58.

seventeenth-century dissenting groups and, especially, their offspring today.[61] Though he did recognise the diversity between groups, 'the underlying premise of Williams's approach was to argue the cohesiveness of the phenomenon', observes Hans Hillerbrand.[62] Williams used 'radicalism' (Latin *radix,* 'root') in a positive manner to highlight the thoroughgoing and exclusive biblical orientation that these groups pursued: these were 'radicals' who returned to the roots of biblical Christianity. As such, radicalism is not an historical observation, but a value judgement made by Williams to make a coherent story or emplotment of these different streams and figures. Northrop Frye calls such a device a 'conceptual myth'; meaning 'radicalism' functions as an image to make a certain classification or grouping that unifies by metaphor rather than by logic.[63] While Williams's efforts of shedding light on these neglected reformist streams in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century reformations are still applauded,[64] his use of radicalism as a cohesive description is challenged by many historians for being a too rough and biased classification of reformation history. For the definition of what these biblical roots are is very much dependent on the judgement of the narrator. Hillerbrand summed up the criticism toward Williams's employment of 'Radical Reformation' as a discriminatory category in two reflective articles in 1988 and 1993, concluding that radicalism is not only loaded with value judgement, but also that as soon as one agrees upon a definition, it immediately loses the ability to bring coherence among the various groups one wishes to associate with it.[65] Hans-Jürgen Goertz argued accordingly that

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[61] See George H. Williams and Angel M. Megal, eds, *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers: Documents Illustrative of the Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957); George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies, vol. 15, 3rd ed. (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 1992). Williams's basic distinction is made on the basis of 1) the practice of believer's baptism, signifying the radical break with the *corpus Christianum*; 2) a critical, or indifferent attitude towards the state; 3) the conviction that older ordinations and divine commission have lapsed with the completion of redemptive work of Christ; and 4) the acknowledgement of lay apostolate.

[62] Hans J. Hillerbrand, '"The Radical Reformation": Reflections on the Occasion of an Anniversary', *Mennonite Quarterly Review,* 67 (1993), 408–420 (pp. 413–14).

[63] Frye, *Fables of Identity*, p. 57.

[64] See Hans J. Hillerbrand, 'Was There a Reformation in the Sixteenth Century?', *Church History,* 72, no. 3 (2003), 525–552 (pp. 527, 532–33).

[65] Hans J. Hillerbrand, 'Radicalism in the Early Reformation', in *Radical Tendencies in the Reformation: Divergent Perspectives*, vol. 9 (Kirksville: Sixteenth-Century Essays & Studies, 1988),

radicalism should not be treated as an intensification of reformation insights nor as a cry on the margins, but its innate expression ('ureigenen Ausdruck').[66] The claim that there was a 'third way-type' of reformation neglects this inherent radical tendency of the wider reformations to aspire to social or religious change.[67] It follows then, that 'the Radical Reformation' does not represent an identifiable historical entity, but is rather an invention of Williams as a modern-day narrator, created to amplify coherence in view of emancipatory purposes in the twentieth-century ecclesial landscape. The prevalence of the moral relation becomes particularly evident in the value judgement that comes with the term 'radicalism'. It is meant to draw attention to Williams's idea of a higher devotion to the Bible, and particularly to the New Testament. As such, in a historical sense, the Radical Reformation comes close to what has been called earlier a (foundational) myth.[68]

25–41 (p. 29); and '"The Radical Reformation"', p. 417. Besides Hillerbrand, notable scholars such as Hans-Jürgen Goertz and James Stayer have disputed the sui generis conception of Williams's thesis, see Hans-Jürgen Goertz, ed., *Profiles of Radical Reformers: Biographical sketches from Thomas Müntzer to Paracelsus* (Kitchener, Canada and Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1982); and *Radikalität der Reformation: Aufsätze und Abhandlungen,* Forschungen zur Kirchen-und Dogmengeschichte, Band 93 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007); also James M. Stayer, 'Die Anfänge des schweizerischen Täufertums in reformierten Kongregationalismus', in *Umstrittenes Täufertum 1525–1975*, ed. by Hans-Jürgen Goertz, pp. 19–49; and James M. Stayer, 'The Radical Reformation,' in *Handbook of European History 1400–1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation, Volume 2: Visions, Programs, Outcomes*, ed. by Thomas A. Brady, Heiko A. Oberman, and James D. Tracy (Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp. 249–82. Williams himself defended his thesis but acknowledged that '[t]he term 'Radical' is admittedly, equivocal' ('The Radical Reformation Revisited', *Union Seminary Quarterly Review,* 39, no. 1-2 (1984), 1–23 (p. 8)).

66 Goertz, *Radikalität der Reformation*, p. 9.

67 'die sich zunächst durchsetzende Reformation allgemein könnte als ein radikales Geschehen aufgefaßt werden' (Goertz, *Radikalität der Reformation*, p. 11); cf. Bridget Heal and Anorthe Kremers, eds, *Radicalism and Dissent in the World of Protestant Reform* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017). During the symposium 'The Protestant Reformation and its Radical Critique' in London (15–17 September 2016) preceding this publication, it was remarkable how united the gathered scholars were in their conclusion that 'radicalism' is a much too ambiguous and multi-interpretative concept to function as characteristic to distinguish between figures, groups, movements in (Reformation) history.

68 Cf. the statement by Diarmaid McCulloch, 'A story of the past told in order to justify the present', in McCulloch, *All Things Made New: The Reformation and Its Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 239–255 (p. 241). See also his 'The Myth of the English Reformation', *Journal of British Studies,* 30, no. 1 (1991), 1–19. In this famous essay MacCulloch displayed how interpretations of the ecclesial changes in the English church of the sixteenth century correlate to the subject position (namely, the denominational or religious tradition) of

The moral relation of reading history through the lens of Williams's radicalism becomes particularly evident in McClendon's adoption of the Schleitheim confession as a theological 'turning point', restoring the New Testament picture of the 'radical church'. From a mere historical perspective, his statement that the Schleitheim confession represents the true witness of scripture and the character of the sixteenth-century radicalism is quite arbitrary. First of all, since historically it is not particularly clear why Schleitheim surpasses the millenarian violence surrounding the invasion of Münster as an identity marker.[69] And second, the Schleitheim articles are surrounded by many unknowns. Not only with regard to its authorship, the number and identity of the participants, or the precise location of the meeting place, but also its intended audience.[70] Additionally, the influence of the Schleitheim confession upon the broader Anabaptist tradition was very small as it was rejected by a large number of Anabaptist leaders.[71] The innovative power of the rejection of 'the sword'(Article 6) by Christians for being 'an ordering outside the perfection of Christ', is tempered by Michael Sattler's schooling in Benedictine thought and practice, which is a likely candidate to explain the distinct Christological argumentation.[72]

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the historian. He uses 'myth' as a hegemonic historiographical narrative that fails to do justice to the available data.

[69] For a recent description of the events surrounding the invasion and occupation of the city of Münster in 1534–1535, see Ralf Klötzer, 'The Melchiorites and Münster', in *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521–1700*, ed. by John Roth and James Stayer, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition, vol. 6 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), pp. 217–56.

[70] Cf. C. Arnold Snyder, *The Life and Thought of Michael Sattler,* Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History, no. 26 (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1984), pp. 97–100; and James M. Stayer, 'Swiss-South German Anabaptism, 1526–1540', in *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism,* 83–117 (pp. 89–92).

[71] See C. Arnold Snyder, 'The Influence of Schleitheim Articles on The Anabaptist Movement: An Historical Evaluation', *The Mennonite Quarterly Review,* 63, no. 4 (1989), 323–44 (p. 343): 'it is clear first of all that important doctrines articulated at Schleitheim were known and rejected by a significant portion of first-generation Anabaptists. In fact, the list reads like an Anabaptist who's who. Looking just to the questions of separation, sword and oath we find Hubmaier, Denck, Hut, the Marpeck circle and Melchior Hoffman adopting positions that either deny Schleitheim outright or stand independent of Schleitheim. Thus to posit a general influence of Schleitheim on the Anabaptist movement as a whole is to ignore the evidence arguing for widespread rejection of key Schleitheim teachings among the South German and Melchiorite Anabaptist branches.'

[72] Cf. Snyder, *The Life and Thought of Michael Sattler*, pp. 151–69. Snyder locates the 'life of perfection' (p. 157) in the Benedictine background of Sattler who possibly served as a prior of the monastery of St. Peter of the Black Forest.

Regardless, the non-violent radicalism of Schleitheim is hardly representative of all streams put together under the Radical Reformation. Besides Münster, there is the violence of Thomas Müntzer (who championed, inspired or, maybe, even lit the fires of the Peasant wars, 1524–1525) and Balthasar Hubmaier's encouragement of the violent expulsion of Jews from the city of Regensburg. Closer to the Baptist home in England, there are the seventeenth-century baptistic congregationalists (among whom John Bunyan) who fought side by side with Oliver Cromwell in the Revolution and later with the Duke of Monmouth to overthrow Charles II.[73] These b/Baptists — to make things even more difficult — wanted nothing to do with the label 'Anabaptists' and associated themselves more closely with a larger network of Reformed Congregationalists.[74] McClendon's attempt to unite sixteenth-century Swiss Anabaptists with twentieth-century (American) Baptists into one distinct tradition can hardly be done without confusion and the inclusion of theological positions that contradict his view.

These historical observations and criticisms enable us also to highlight where the systematic theologian's art of historical conversation might diverge a little from that of the historian. Although he ostensibly borrows Williams's inclusive emplotment of the Radical Reformation, in reality McClendon makes a differentiation between what he sees as truthful and erroneous 'radicalism'. Although he does not make his definition of radicalism explicit, it shows that the moral dimension in McClendon's proposal serves precisely as a value judgement that explains *why* a certain past is worth retrieving in the present. In McClendon's narration, his subject position as a systematic theologian leads him to read history theologically, as becomes particularly evident in the way he positions (or 'constructs') 'Schleitheim' as a model for

[73] See John Coffey, 'From Marginal to Mainstream: How Anabaptists became Baptists', in *Mirrors and Microscopes: Historical Perceptions of Baptists*, ed. by C. Douglas Weaver, Studies in Baptist History and Thought (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2015), pp. 1–24; and Michael P. Winship, *Hot Protestants: A History of Puritanism in England and America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018), pp. 130–44, 230.

[74] See Matthew C. Bingham, *Orthodox Radicals: Baptist Identity in the English Revolution,* Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 90–117.

genuine Christian witness.[75] Nonetheless, he should have been more attentive toward the epistemic relation to avoid the risk of overemplotment. It is true that Schleitheim is a fascinating confession, yet besides the articles themselves there is barely any information available. McClendon's historical inferences regarding the particulars of the drafting process and its significance cannot be verified. Moreover, his overall presentation could have been more forthcoming regarding the disruptive history of Anabaptists and Baptists in which the coherence assumed under the category 'the Radical Reformation' anything but corresponds to the available sources.[76]

History in Systematic Theology: Balancing between Affection and Realism

In this article I have explored the relation between the events of history and their narration, particularly in view of theologies of retrieval. When systematic theologians retrieve history, they are not just representing the events of history, but they are *emplotting* a narrative of identity formation. They 'construct' events in such a way that they become a coherent and comprehensive story of who 'we' (as Christians or a denominational group) are, or can seek to be.[77] In narrating history, the systematician clearly constructs historical events, or emplots them in view of a present concern: the retrieval of some 'moment of truth' in the past.[78] McClendon's retrieval of the peaceful *koinonia* concept as 'a moral good' for his communal ethics is a captivating example. Herein, a systematic

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75 See Hunter, *To Change the World*, pp. 109–10: 'They are, in effect, "political theologies," and they are powerful in part because they are shrouded by compelling myths that give voice to the ideals and public identities of different parts of the Christian community. And though the political landscape is changing, these myths provide a source of continuity in the language and logic of their competing positions.'

76 Cf. David W. Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries: A History of a Global People* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), pp. 25–26; and David C. Cramer, 'Mennonite Systematic Theology in Retrospect and Prospect', *The Conrad Grebel Review,* 31, no. 3 (2013), 255–273 (pp. 257–58): 'I sometimes fear that discussions of "Anabaptism" tend to downplay or ignore the historical particularity of the Mennonite tradition in favor of ethical abstractions or core theological essentials.'

77 See Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 41.

78 Cf. R. Williams, *Why Study the Past*, p. 102.

theologian is akin to Frye's poet who seeks new expressions, not new content; they read history through the lens of a theological pattern (namely, a recurring conviction that gives consistency to a certain 'tradition') in order to present coherent pictures of a past with the aim of reforming present convictions and practices.[79] Measured along the line of Paul's art of historical conversation, the systematic theologian then differentiates themselves by explicitly cherishing the affective relation to the past: the systematic theologian does not aim to reconstruct history per se, but openly seeks to retrieve 'goods' from the past. Given the contemporary objective of changing perspectives and attitudes, the role of the moral dimension which is now shown to be a 'relation', is naturally more heightened in systematic theology than one would expect in church history.

Nonetheless, since theologies of retrieval also presume a reasonable degree of realism, there is the risk of what Hayden White has called 'overemplotment' when disturbing parts are ignored without sufficient argument, and/or the past is oversimplified or instrumentalised to fit present concerns. For instance, Matthew Bingham's recent study *Orthodox Radicals* (2019) has shown that particularly from nineteenth-century Baptist historiography onwards, the early seventeenth-century 'Particular Baptists' are wrongly emplotted as a coherent group next to the 'General Baptists' on the basis of a common Baptist identity.[80] Rather than understanding themselves as a *particular* brand of Baptists, they saw themselves as part of a larger network of Calvinist-orientated congregationalists that included pedobaptists. Bingham's revision of Baptist historiography, as a result, offers a less clear-cut understanding of Baptist theological identity by nuancing the deeply rooted impression that 'believer's baptism by immersion' and the rejection of pedobaptism delineate the core of this common Baptist tradition extending from John Smyth until today. A contemporary retrieval of early modern concepts of believer's baptism should, then, besides arguing for this particular practice of baptism based on early modern baptistic authors, also give account of the different functions that these theologies of baptism had in relation to

[79] Cf. Abrahamse, *Ordained Ministry in Free Church Perspective*, p. 12–13.
[80] See Bingham, *Orthodox Radicals*, pp. 147–55.

their ecclesiastical positioning. While such an approach retains affection for these early advocates, based on a contemporary concern for believer's baptism by immersion, historical reality also demands restraint in portraying this mode of baptism as *the* distinguishing Baptist feature under some guise of 'the tradition'. Rather, on the contrary, by listening to the actual voices of among others John Spilsbury and Henry Jessey, a systematician should be open to question rigid interpretations of Baptist identity and, in addition to stimulating a less combatant attitude in ecumenical conversations, give impetus to ecclesiological revisions within Baptist communities in their stance on baptism (e.g. open membership).

It is just an example of how systematic theologians need to consciously balance their moral relation (in which value judgements are made) to the past with the attention for the epistemic relation (that seeks better understanding by listening carefully and being corrected), doing both justice to the past's familiarity and strangeness. This requires openness about how a particular theological agenda affects our reading of history. In other words, a systematician needs to give an account of how they manage their relations to the past. This is where the moral concern that motivated this paper is located: while a systematic theologian does have their own angle towards retrieving history, this does not relieve them from doing 'justice' towards the past. Rowan Williams adequately points out, 'But the figures the historian deals with are not modern people in fancy dress; they have to be listened to as they are, and not judged or dismissed—or claimed and enrolled as supporters—too rapidly.'[81] To prevent a theology of retrieval from becoming an 'anachronical cross-dresser' Paul's art of historical conversation is a viable tool: approaching history with an attitude of self-questioning rather than self-confirmation. Bad history, according to Rowan Williams, is to leave out that which is strange to us, while

> [g]ood historical writing, […] is writing that constructs that sense of who we are by a real engagement with the strangeness of the past, that establishes my or our identity now as bound up with a whole range of things that are not easy for me or us, not obvious or native to the world we think we inhabit, yet

[81] R. Williams, *Why Study the Past*, pp. 10–11.

> which have to be recognized in their solid reality as both different from us and part of us.[82]

The moral relation in theologies of retrieval does not only require a concern for historic realism (doing justice to the facts of the past), but also, as Rowan Williams writes, theological humility: story-telling should not rely on the consistency and coherence of my narrative constructs but on God's consistency that sustains this disruptive and broken people called Israel and the church.[83] In other words, the 'living faith of the dead' that makes the Christian tradition is not dependent on the unity I can construct, but on God's relation to people over time and place, of any language and culture. And precisely for this reason, systematic theologians can retrieve history without the need to polish a coherent 'we-story' that functions as a foundation for our present-day theologies. As John Webster reminds us, 'there is no pure Christian past whose retrieval can ensure theological fidelity'.[84]

Conclusion

The manner in which we retrieve the stories from history in our theological proposals counts. If I use history solely as an instrument to make my case, I neglect the moral task of treating my source as an actual other; *that is* after all what 'theologies of retrieval' aim for, bringing a voice from the past in lively conversation with contemporary discourse. When we pursue such an encounter with the past, solid research of the relevant sources needs to accompany our narrative constructions of the past. Rooting systematic theology in history in pursuit of keeping traditions alive requires systematicians to give voice both to what affirms and what contradicts contemporary agendas or preferences, and to exercise reluctance toward making grand identity claims by propelling contemporary labels back onto the past in acknowledgement of the lasting strangeness of the past.

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[82] R. Williams, *Why Study the Past*, pp. 23–24.
[83] R. Williams, *Why Study the Past*, p. 10.
[84] Webster, 'Theologies of Retrieval', p. 597.

Doing Theology Together in a 'Baptist way'? An Evaluation of the Potential of Curriculum-Embedded Collaborative Research Projects

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Abstract:
In the autumn of 2020, students who were enrolled in the course 'Doing Theology' at the Dutch Baptist Seminary engaged in a small research project on the effects of the covid-19 pandemic in baptist communities and on the spiritual life of its members. The research was done as an experiment in collaboration with a number of churches, church leaders as well as regional coordinators of the church fellowship. The stated aim was to help churches reflect on the effects of the current crisis, while also giving students first-hand fieldwork experience in actual communities. As such, the experiment attempted to join the academic triad of education, research and valorisation in a curriculum-embedded collaborative research project. This article discusses and evaluates its potential for baptist ways of doing theology.

Keywords:
Collaborative research; practical theology; communal discernment; curriculum-embedded research

Introduction

The Dutch Baptist Seminary provides ministerial training for students pursuing ordination in baptist churches in the Netherlands.[1] The Seminary is embedded at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam and has

[1] More particularly, the Seminary is part of the Dutch Baptist Union, which is in the process of merging with the Alliance of Baptist and CAMA churches. The CAMA churches (internationally known as CMA or Christian Missionary Alliance), bring in their own 'missionary' DNA. In this article I will refer to these churches together as 'baptist' with the small 'b', reflecting the usage by James McClendon to denote a family of churches, rather than those that self-designate as 'Baptist'.

integrated curricular programmes with other theological institutions. Its primary aim is to provide training for leaders in baptist churches, focusing on ministerial and personal formation, knowledge of the baptistic traditions, and the ability to 'do theology', or 'theologically reflect' amidst the challenging Dutch post-Christian context.[2] An emphasis is placed on the ability to interpret today's world and its everyday life in light of the theological sources of Scripture and tradition (at the Seminary, this is referred to as 'leadership by interpretation'). Especially in light of the rapidly changing culture, 'interpretation' is understood as a dynamic and creative process, requiring openness and inquisitiveness. It aligns with concurrent ideas on the task of academic institutions to train 'reflexive' practitioners and 'reflexive' researchers who are used to the idea of being 'life-long learners'. Or, as it is explained at the Seminary, seeking to foster a curiosity or an appetite for research (*onderzoekszin*), while at the same time pursuing this as a form of 'discipleship' in a faith community of learners (*leergemeenschap*).

Around 2009, the Seminary moved to the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam with the emphatic invitation of finding and voicing a particular 'Baptist way' of doing theology.[3] In order to heed this invitation, the Seminary staff have been inspired especially by the theology of James Wm McClendon — or to be more precise his *theological method* — to define this 'Baptist way', noting three elements in particular:[4]

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[2] In the curriculum, this translates into a focus on three core competences of ministry: following, understanding, and leading, which are derived from the three 'acts' of pastoral ministry (prayer, scripture, and spiritual direction) according to Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

[3] See the conversations in Teun van der Leer, ed., *Zo zijn onze manieren! In gesprek over gemeentetheologie* (Barneveld: Baptisten Seminarium, 2009); especially too, Parush R. Parushev, *Doing Theology in a Baptist Way,* Keynote Lecture, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, 16 April 2009 <https://www.baptisten.nl/images/seminarium/publicaties/artikelen/artikel_baptistway_parushev_h1.pdf> [accessed 11 October 2021].

[4] See on this Henk Bakker, *De weg van het wassende water: Op zoek naar de wortels van het baptisme* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2008), pp. 13–14, and Henk Bakker and Daniel Drost, *Andersom: Een introductie in de theologie van James Wm. McClendon* (Amsterdam: Baptisten Seminarium, 2014); see also in this issue, the article by Henk Bakker, 'A Learning Community in Progress'.

1. A focus on 'lived theology', that is, a theology that occurs in visible and tangible practices of faith and in an ethical living.[5]
2. A strong ecclesial orientation: theology is embedded in the 'convictional', gathered community of followers of Christ, together discerning the will of Christ.[6]
3. A hermeneutical, narrative perspective that seeks to align 'congregational life with the biblical story', or in McClendon's famous adage (the baptist vision): 'this is that, then is now'.[7]

Whether these characteristics are typically 'Baptist' or 'baptistic' is a matter of debate that will not be addressed here. For the purpose of this article I note at least that they can be situated in broader developments in the social sciences and theology in general.[8] The direction pointed towards, inspired by McClendon, is the aim to study ecclesial practices in a critical, appreciative and faithful way, as both socio-cultural as well as theological phenomena.[9] While McClendon can be seen as a theologian who was a brilliant and unconventional frontrunner in

[5] See James Wm McClendon, *Ethics: Systematic Theology*, *Volume 1*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), pp. 167–182; see also Henk Bakker, 'The Munificent Church: The Drama of Tangible Ecclesial Transformation', *American Baptist Quarterly* (2014), 366–378.

[6] See James Wm McClendon, *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology* (Nashville: Trinity Press International, 1974), p. 35; also Ingeborg Janssen-te Loo, ed., *Samen ontdekken! De uitdaging van de vergader(en)de gemeente: samen de wil van Christus onderscheiden*, Baptistica Reeks (Barneveld: Unie van Baptistengemeenten in Nederland, 2016).

[7] McClendon, *Ethics*, pp. 26–34; see Parushev, *Doing Theology*, p. 4.

[8] Here, one can think of the turn to practice and culture (Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); Karin Knorr Cetina, Theodore R. Schatzki, and Eike von Savigny, eds, *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (London: Routledge, 2001)), and parallelly in religious studies, the study of 'lived religion' (Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Nancy T. Ammerman, ed., *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)). See on the narrative turn, e.g., Jaco S. Dreyer, 'The Narrative Turn in Practical Theology: A Discussion of Julian Müller's Narrative Approach', *Verbum et Ecclesia,* 35, no. 2 (2014), 1–9, and on the 'ecclesial turn' in contemporary theology, e.g., Daniel Drost, 'Diaspora as Mission: John Howard Yoder, Jeremiah 29 and the Shape and Mission of the Church' (doctoral thesis, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, 2019), pp. 20–26.

[9] See on this James Wm McClendon, *Witness: Systematic Theology, Volume 3* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994).

incorporating a number of nascent developments in his theology in his day,[10] it also needs to be noted that the debates have moved on.[11]

Increasingly, as a result of the search for a 'Baptist voice', the theological reflection on ecclesial practices has become a spearhead for the Baptist Seminary.[12] It has come to be reflected in a schematic quadrant (see Figure 1), that has been formative for Seminary policy. It expresses the aim to integrate the field of practice (the church fellowship), the research and educational activities of the Seminary, as well as the personal formation of students. In the curriculum, this integration is pursued in a number of ways: courses mostly have an interdisciplinary character in which a combination is sought between practice-oriented education (involving case studies) and theological theory. Education has also become more involved in research.[13]

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[10] In this regard, it is worthwhile mentioning the interesting chapter by Elizabeth Phillips, 'Charting the "Ethnographic Turn": Theologians and the Study of Christian Congregations', in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. by Pete Ward (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), pp. 95–106. Phillips traces the current popularity of ethnography ('the ethnographic turn') back to the work of McClendon and his student Theophus Smith (Theophus Smith, 'Ethnography-As-Theology: Inscribing the African American Sacred Story', in *Theology Without Foundations: Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth*, ed. by Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy, and Mark Nation (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), pp. 117–139).

[11] McClendon's theology can be criticised for example on the selective use of historical sources (see the article by Jan Martijn Abrahamse in this issue), and more generally, the postliberal theology he somewhat reflects is criticised for its linguistically oriented accounts of ecclesial practices, the lack of detailed engagement with actual fieldwork, the idealistic representations of the church, and the power issues involved in the production of theological knowledge. I do not have the space to engage these matters here, but for a discussion see Christian B. Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics* (London: Continuum, 2011); Pete Ward, ed., *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); Pete Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology: The Gospel and The Church* (Leiden: Brill, 2017); Nicholas M. Healy, *Hauerwas: a (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014); much of these issues have been debated in the Ecclesiology & Ethnography network and its publications. On a critical discussion of McClendon's language of 'convictions', see David John McMillan, 'Convictions, Conflict and Moral Reasoning: the Contribution of the Concept of Convictions in Understanding Moral Reasoning in the Context of Conflict, Illustrated by a Case Study of Four Groups of Christians in Northern Ireland' (doctoral thesis, Vrije Universiteit, 2019).

[12] At the seminary, lecturer Eduard Groen has been a significant catalyst in this (Eduard Groen, *Geloofwaardige gemeente: Uitgangspunten van een baptisten gemeenteopbouw*, Baptistica Reeks (Barneveld: Unie van Baptistengemeenten in Nederland, 2011).

[13] The seminary staff themselves are also involved in a range of research projects, and participate in the 'kenniskring' — the academic research group of the Seminary, where each other's work is discussed — as well as in other interdisciplinary research groups.

Students engage too in an intensive period of internship, which also requires them to do small research tasks.

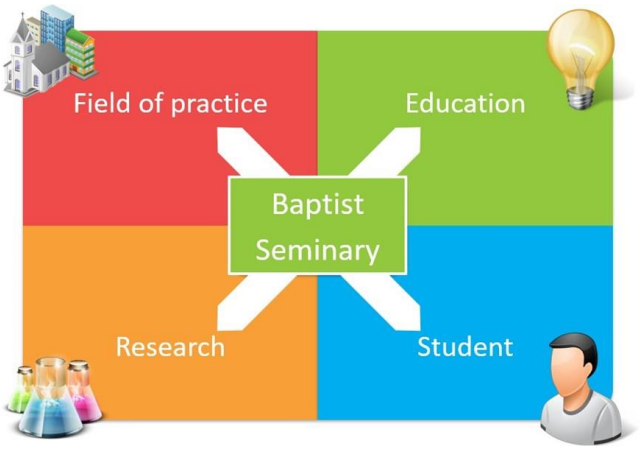

Figure 1: Seminary quadrant, which shows the aim to integrate the formation of students, the Seminary's research and educational activities, and the field of practice.

However, in this article I posit that currently there is an area of weakness in the implementation of this model, which primarily lies in the integration of *research* and the *field of practices*, thus the left side of the quadrant. Often these remain quite isolated fields, in which good research is not disseminated among practitioners and does not 'translate' into good practices (valorisation), while at the same time in-depth reflection on actual practices *together with* the field of practice remains limited. Although this is the aspiration, a number of hurdles are encountered, such as the challenge of motivating and equipping the field of practices to formulate manageable research projects (and address the *right* problems) or the challenge of managing the only very limited resources in terms of students, time, and funding. Vice versa, research that is being done is often stashed away, as the 'practical advice' at the end insufficiently captures the complexity of the actual reality, may not always 'suit' the best interests of those in charge, or simply is of questionable quality itself. Let me hasten to say that this is not merely a challenge for the Seminary, but for theological education and the academy in general. Knowledge valorisation, the quest of making

research useful for the field of practice — as a means to generate income and to legitimise the relevance of the academic enterprise — is high on the agenda of Dutch universities. I also contend that this is not merely a challenge for the Seminary, but also for the field of practice itself, namely the Dutch baptist churches. In the trying and rapidly changing context they face a range of adaptive challenges, such as changing patterns of ecclesial belonging, diverging theological, ethical and generational identities, and disintegrating functional organisational structures.[14] Churches often struggle to find new perspectives and ways of innovation.

In this article my aim is to examine whether 'collaborative research' in a curriculum-embedded form may be a promising lead for the Baptist Seminary to engage these challenges (that is, the 'valorisation challenge' for the Seminary, as well as the 'adaptive challenge' for the field of practices). I do so by evaluating a small curriculum-embedded collaborative research experiment in the 'Doing Theology' class of autumn 2020. As it has been the Seminary's first attempt in collaborative research, the evaluation has a heuristic and provisional character.[15] I reflect on the lessons learnt and look ahead at future possibilities, doing so especially in light of fostering a *baptist way* of doing theology collaboratively.[16] Before committing to that evaluation, however, a few words will be given on collaborative research in practical theology.

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[14] See in particular Miranda Klaver, Stefan Paas, and Eveline van Staalduine-Sulman, eds, *Evangelicals and Sources of Authority*, Amsterdam Studies in Theology and Religion (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2016); these challenges will also be examined in a joint research project on evangelical Protestants in the Netherlands that the Seminary is undertaking together with the Radboud University Nijmegen.

[15] An exception to this has been the church development project 'Groentjes', discussed in the article by Wout Huizing and myself elsewhere in this issue. However, the approach there differs to some extent from the proposal of collaborative research in this article, as 'Groentjes' was not 'research driven'.

[16] A note of explanation here: in using the phrase 'doing theology', I refer to *a* way of doing theology that reflects the conversations above and reflects a particular interpretation of the baptist tradition. It is in no way my contention to argue that this is somehow *the* baptist way of doing theology, nor do I want to suggest that it is the only legitimate way of doing theology. At the Seminary 'doing theology' has come to entail a reflection on actual practice, in light of

Collaborative Research in Practical Theology

In the past two decades, a range of collaborative research methods have gained prominence in the academy. These have emerged in theology as well, although collaborative research is still in its infancy: the standard in theology remains for most research to be undertaken by 'solo researchers'.[17] In what follows, I draw on the excellent, recently published book *Collaborative Practical Theology: Engaging Practitioners in Research on Christian Practices*, by Henk de Roest of the Protestant Theological University, Groningen. Throughout the book, he uses an impressive range of examples from recent practical theological projects, and engages in an extensive discussion on the methodological implications and possibilities. His case can be summarised as a plea that the discipline of (practical) theology has much to gain by involving research subjects (practitioners) right from the start of a research project, and within the process: 'We need', De Roest suggests, a 'turn to the community' or a 'relational turn' to 'enable the valorisation of academic practical theology right from the start of a research project'.[18] While the word 'collaborative' may suggest many different forms of collaboration (such as collaboration in research groups or inter-institutional academic collaboration), De Roest narrows down the specific meaning of doing research together with practitioners: 'Collaborative practical theology does not and should not simply extract information from people, but rather should learn from and collaborate with people in order to be relevant for people.'[19] A number of rationales

theological sources; thus it seeks to integrate voices from Practical Theology and other theological disciplines.

17 See Henk P. de Roest, *Collaborative Practical Theology: Engaging Practitioners in Research on Christian Practices* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 15–49, 157. A number of academic publications have started to appear on this subject in theology, notably Helen Cameron, *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010); Elaine Graham, 'Is Practical Theology a Form of "Action Research"?', *International Journal of Practical Theology,* 17, no. 1 (2013), 148–178; Natalie Wigg-Stevenson, *Ethnographic Theology: An Inquiry into the Production of Theological Knowledge* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

18 De Roest, *Collaborative,* p. 184.

19 De Roest, *Collaborative*, p. 3.

are mentioned for involving practitioners and everyday believers in the research processes of Practical Theology. For brevity's sake, I summarise three of these, slightly changing the order set out by De Roest.[20]

Perhaps the primary reason for engaging in collaborative research is the quest for valorisation, the challenge with which De Roest starts his book, and what he calls the *utility-rationale*. Put simply, the question asked is 'who benefits from research?'[21] The argument is that much research focuses strongly on interpretation, while leaving 'action' or 'application' to an afterthought, placed *at the end of* or *after* the research.[22] Put differently, the task of valorisation within practical theology (knowledge dissemination and implementation) finds expression in a one-directional way from the researcher to the practitioners. Often, as a result, there is a mismatch in advice as it remains unrealistic and is not owned. While De Roest is not advocating for all research to have equal practical relevance, he notes that too often this dimension is insufficiently on the mind of the researcher. Thus, he asserts that the goals of practical theology 'are better realised and will be easier to disseminate or implement *in collaboration with* practitioners than without them', especially in a context where 'valorisation is deemed necessary, as it increasingly is today'.[23] De Roest proposes that

[20] In what follows I take what De Roest calls the 'emerging community rationale' and the 'innovation and professionalisation rationale' together. Besides the other two that are discussed in more detail below, De Roest also mentions the *Missio Dei* and the 'postcolonial' rationale. With the first, De Roest situates his take on Practical Theological as *missional* in nature, as it seeks to 'understand, evaluate and stimulate' the Christian community in its vocation towards living faithfully in the world, and seeking its flourishing' (De Roest, *Collaborative*, pp. 158–161), a point made among others by John Swinton and Harriet Mowatt, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006); Dorothy C. Bass et al., *Christian Practical Wisdom: What it Is, Why it Matters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016); Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun, *For the Life of the World: Theology That Makes a Difference* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2019). The 'postcolonial rationale' stresses the political dimension of research, and raises issues of the power relations involved, the reflexivity required and the empowering potential of research.

[21] De Roest, *Collaborative,* p. 33.

[22] This pattern shows itself for example in the pastoral cycle as developed by Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); see for a critical discussion de Roest, *Collaborative*, pp. 31–33; Pete Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology: Mission, Ministry and the Life of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), pp. 95–114.

[23] De Roest, *Collaborative,* p. 158.

practitioners, students, and senior researchers should work together in the generation and dissemination of knowledge, or in what he calls an upscaling of knowledge:

> The different activities involved in practical theological education, practical theological research and protestant practices are being connected. Knowledge will be *transformed* in ways that enable it to become useful, via a process involving scholars (having expertise as senior researchers), students and practitioners. By publishing the research, discussing it with experts, and discussing it in sessions with practitioners, knowledge will be codified and *enabled to circulate* in a wider collection of networks, creating a series of beneficiaries. Finally, knowledge will be *consolidated*, leading to improved skills.[24]

A second reason for collaborative approaches is found in the *epistemological rationale*. It is argued that practitioner knowledge is different from and precedes academic knowledge, in that it is tacit, vernacular, habituated, embodied and traditioned knowledge. Increasingly, such forms of knowledge are being studied and reflected on as forms of Christian practical wisdom.[25] 'Everyone who is or has been involved in the practices that may serve as research domains for practical theology can be a possible participant in the conversation about the divine reality that people experience in these practices.'[26] The argument then becomes that the discernment of theological truth requires the dialogical conversation with the field of practice in a continuous process of conversation, striving for 'consensus after consensus'.[27] Seeing practical theological research thus, brings it very close to the heart of baptistic visions of communal discernment.

De Roest also mentions the *emerging community rationale* and the *innovation and professionalisation rationale*, which I take together here, as both referring to the performative potential of the collaborative research

[24] De Roest, *Collaborative,* p. 17 (emphasis original).
[25] See Bass et al., *Christian Practical Wisdom.*
[26] De Roest, *Collaborative,* p. 167.
[27] De Roest, *Collaborative,* pp. 166–167.

process.[28] Thus, it is argued that besides generating knowledge, the research process itself may cause 'new practices, new relationships, new perspectives and new discourses' to emerge. Likewise, discussing challenges in communities of practice may lead to innovation of practices and the overcoming of stuck 'crises of routines'.[29] De Roest relates this to a conviction that 'community is the source of theologising' a conviction deeply cherished by baptists:

> In the church, groups are formed in time and space for common tasks, mutual care and sustainable memberships. In this way, the practice of collaborative research groups is likely to support the idiosyncrasies, the inherent characteristics of ecclesial community formation. As part of ecclesial practices, groups and particular in-depth groups have an effect on ecclesial learning, but they also set things in motion. Ecclesial practices are highly conversational and constantly in-the-making.[30]

As such doing collaborative research may itself be seen as a possible way of church development.

I will return to these three arguments for collaborative research in the reflections below. Following the focus of this article to look at the potential for collaborative research embedded in a curricular course, I now turn to describing the actual research experiment that was conducted. This educational embeddedness and the involvement of students, is itself mentioned as a promising lead in collaborative approaches, as De Roest notes: 'In the last five years, not only in theology, but also in the social sciences and humanities in general, in order to become a reflective practitioner, a tendency to instruct students to conduct practice-oriented research can be observed.'[31]

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[28] See on the turn to performance in social sciences, Norman K. Denzin, *Performance Autoethnography: Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Culture*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2018).

[29] De Roest, *Collaborative,* p. 34.

[30] De Roest, *Collaborative,* p. 164.

[31] De Roest, *Collaborative,* p. 295. De Roest also states, 'Furthermore, I would suggest that there are also possibilities for actually *conducting research in a class setting*, by interviewing practitioners, holding focus groups, having an expert panel, etc. […] Next, both graduate and undergraduate students in a theological seminary, faculty or divinity school can learn to conduct empirical research with professional practitioners and with everyday believers. Supervising a student can in this case be defined as both teaching […] and research.' (De Roest, *Collaborative,* p. 183)

A Practical Collaborative Fieldwork Assignment: Covid and Ecclesial Belonging

Students enrolling at the Baptist Seminary start with the course 'Doing Theology' (bachelor year 3 or 4, EQF level 6).[32] These students come from a range of theological educational backgrounds, which makes it challenging to assess and build on their previous knowledge, although a basic knowledge of theology is presupposed. The course 'Doing Theology' is designed as an introductory module, a 'pressure cooker', initiating students to the Seminary's way of doing theology in a nutshell. Thus, it aims to create a shared point of departure from which all subsequent courses draw. An introduction is given to 'our' interpretation of a 'baptist way' of doing theology, focusing on themes such as lived theology, communal discernment and narrative hermeneutics, while also the larger contextual debates (such as secularisation) and missiological developments (*Missio Dei* theology) are explored.[33] As a way of enabling students to be acquainted with the terminology, a Seminary glossary — a summarised, conceptual framework — is provided.[34] As an integrated part of the course, students are required to do a small fieldwork assignment in baptist churches as a form of theological reflection *in actu* — practising it both in the church

[32] The course was tutored by Jan Martijn Abrahamse and myself. The aims are stated as threefold, translated as follows: (1) The student explains how the concepts of lived faith, narrative theology and *Missio Dei* form the basis for the way of doing theology at the Baptist Seminary; (2) The student reflects on the way their biography shapes their theology, view on church and the world, and their own role; (3) The student describes lived faith in an ecclesial practice in its context, by using qualitative research methods, and the student is able to reflect on this process (observation, interpretation, reflection).

[33] Students read the Dutch version of Stefan Paas, *Pilgrims and Priests: Christian Mission in a Post-Christian Society* (London: SCM, 2019) and parts of the recent book on secularisation by Herman Paul, *Shoppen in advent: Een kleine theorie van secularisatie* (Utrecht: Kokboekencentrum Uitgevers, 2020).

[34] See 'Glossarium, Baptist Seminarium':
<https://baptisten.nl/images/seminarium/documenten/Glossarium_2020-2021.pdf>
[accessed 2 April 2021].

and in the classroom. In this section, I will give a brief description of this fieldwork assignment.

In previous years the fieldwork was primarily prompted by an educational aim: to introduce students to the empirical study of ecclesial practices, to learn to reflect theologically, and to familiarise themselves with the setting of baptist church life.[35] In 2020, however, fuelled by the ideals of collaborative research, some of the staff members of the Seminary decided to pursue a more experimental project. On the one hand this involved an attempt to embed the experiment in a piece of ongoing research on the changing patterns of ecclesial belonging. On the other hand, and perhaps as central focus, a 'valorising' aim was pursued to seek collaboration with a number of churches, so as to involve them in the process of reflection through the students' work.[36] As such, it was envisioned as an experiment in collaborative research. As the course only lasted six consecutive weeks with some additional time for examinations, the research had to be planned and prepared in advance with a certain level of rigidity.

The suggestion to involve a number of churches in a reflective, explorative process on the effects of the covid-19 pandemic was born in a conversation I had with regional coordinators.[37] They were enthusiastic about the collaborative approach, and committed to facilitating the relational arrangements with church leaders, churches and students. They solicited eight baptist churches to participate, and through church leaders, involved about five to ten church members from each church.[38] Before the actual class started, these church members were invited to fill in a brief online questionnaire (made and

[35] In 2018 to 2019, students mapped and reflected on the church small group work in their own churches; in 2019 to 2020 the focus was on secularisation and the 'backdoor' of the church.
[36] To the valorisation may be added the 'interest' to make the work of the Seminary and the national body more visible in actual church life, through doing a project with churches.
[37] Regional coordinators function in the Unie-ABC fellowship as a sort of church consultant with a role to connect churches within a broader region. As such they have much relational knowledge of what is going on in individual churches.
[38] Each regional coordinator was asked to solicit the cooperation of a church. In some cases, they sought to connect two churches in one place, in line with their role to connect churches within the same region.

coordinated by myself in advance to keep the project manageable), followed up by a student-led focus group conversation.

During the first class of the course the 'relational arrangements' were made: matching one or two students to a regional coordinator, and to one or two churches.[39] Students were given the results of the questionnaire to shape a first impression on the effects of covid-19 on church life. As most of the students were only vaguely familiar with fieldwork, the steps were outlined in the course syllabus (including some instructions to help them analyse the data). They were then tasked to organise a focus group conversation with the church members within a four-week timeframe to discuss their initial findings in more depth, adding experiences and narratives. Preparation for this focus group was (mostly) carried out in pairs, and in coordination with the regional coordinator and church contact person. Most students succeeded in organising the focus group within that time frame, which allowed us to use the final classes to reflect on the findings together in light of theological and sociological theory. After the final class, students rounded up their fieldwork assignment by writing a blog-post for the churches they had visited in order to present their findings.

I framed the exercise as an *experiment*, which involved over sixty people (church leaders, regional coordinators, students, church members, teaching staff), although not all who filled in the initial survey ended up actually participating in the focus groups. Through carefully written instructions to the churches, online Zoom conversations with the regional coordinators as well as class instructions to the students, I tried to be as clear as possible on the steps to be taken, the expectations, the aims and the required consent and privacy protection of

[39] This was a crucial moment in the actual start of the course; before that moment the exact number of students was unknown; moreover, matching students to churches — sometimes in pairs — required the negotiation of their mobility and distance to the relative churches. One student approached me in advance of the course to ask whether they could also do the same research in their own church, as they functioned as a leader there. I decided that this was acceptable, as long as they also undertook to cooperate with another student in that student's fieldwork.

participants.[40] After the practical assignment, I asked students, regional coordinators, and church leaders to give their feedback on the experiment. Students did so in written reflections, regional coordinators through an evaluative online conversation, and church leaders through email.

Lessons Learned and a Provisional Evaluation

In this section, I briefly summarise the evaluations from stakeholders of the experiment, to be followed by my own reflections, both on the concrete experiment, and in the more general light of the potential of curriculum-embedded collaborative research projects.

What stands out from the evaluation of the students is that the experiment was perceived as both challenging and instructive. Challenging, as the whole course for them was an experience of being thrown into the deep end, with challenging reading assignments, a first acquaintance (for most) with forms of qualitative fieldwork and unfamiliarity with how to write a popular blog for a church audience. Instructive, in that much of what they learned throughout the course was new, and the various pieces of the puzzle — how the different methodological, fieldwork and theoretical elements fit together — came together gradually, as the course progressed. The clear instructions for the fieldwork as well as the availability of a glossary were mentioned as helpful. For students, the focus-group evening, the actual conversation with participants, was the part of the research they enjoyed the most. This enthusiasm for the focus groups was shared by the participating regional coordinators. They valued the relational collaboration that in a

[40] In the last decade regulations for doing fieldwork have tightened, requiring the researcher to heed General Data Protection Regulations, seek informed consent and safeguard participants' privacy. As religious opinions (the core of practical theology) are categorised by law as the most sensitive 'personal data', fieldwork cannot be undertaken without heeding the research ethics involved. For this present research, this required being specific as to how data would be used, as well as safeguarding privacy. I regarded sharing data with students and involving them in the research project also as an opportunity to introduce them to the topic of research ethics.

sense also aligned with their own function in the church fellowship. One of them remarked that for them it expressed well the hallmarks of the Seminary: doing theology from the church, starting with the lived faith. However, regional coordinators were less positive in their assessment of the actual knowledge generated and the quality of the blog-posts. A significant difference in quality was noted, and in general no convincing or new observations were made. This latter point was also made by the church leaders who remarked that the relational collaboration as well as the possibility to contribute to the learning process of students was valued, however the learning output, expressed in the blogs, was not very helpful. In general, my own reflections align with the evaluations from these stakeholders. I will proceed with discussing some of them in more detail by relating them to the three rationales for collaborative research as mentioned above.

First, the *utility rationale* focuses the reflection on whether the field of practice may benefit from such forms of collaborative research. From the evaluations it is clear that the 'knowledge generation' and 'knowledge dissemination' was perceived rather ambiguously and as disappointing. The data that was generated by students, as well as contextual factors proved to be so divergent and of different quality, that no clear patterns were observable, and as such no 'upscaling' or knowledge circulation was possible (see above). Reflecting on this, I note a number of factors: firstly, the limited research experience and differing abilities of the students; in general, they were pre-occupied with doing the research 'right', while trying to figure out what was expected of them, rather than being open to the questions emerging from the field. Secondly, the data was very limited and fragmented (as was the actual time spent in 'the field'), which to some extent is a given in such a small curriculum-embedded research project, but severely limits what can be derived from it. As one of the students lucidly comments, 'I have learned that we should not be too quick in drawing conclusions: do not hang an elephant on a spider web.' Thirdly, I note that the explorative nature of the research with its wide scope — that is, exploring the effects of the covid-19 pandemic in baptist communities

and the spiritual life of its members — is difficult to manage for relatively inexperienced researchers. Theorising only started during the final classes, and as such did not really influence the fieldwork. Finally, the rigid time frame allowed for little opportunity for interventions from the tutors in the research project to reflect on the research process. Taken together, it could be said that while the experiment was 'practice-oriented', it was 'theory driven' and 'research informed' only to a very small extent. For future projects, it might be helpful to delimit the number of stakeholders to two or three churches, and to help students focus the research by asking them to test a particular hypothesis. It would also require a much more focused research question, a clear and simple theoretical framework and more guiding interventions during classes.[41]

To what extent is the practical wisdom of ordinary church members used in this research experiment (the *epistemological rationale*)? I make two reflections here. I evaluate positively how, especially through the focus groups, ordinary believers were invited to take part in the conversation, share their experiences and stories in a somewhat open and safe environment. Students remark that they struggled with these perspectives, as they were more diverse and sometimes conflicting, than they had expected. On a positive note, the experiment has fostered an awareness of the complexities of everyday church life, and an appreciation of the expression of the lived theology in a church. As one student notes in their reflections, 'I gained more appreciation for the everyday church life. The creativity of how people adjust to new situations is encouraging. Church life is something that happens on the level of ordinary church folks who authentically try to shape faith in times of crisis.' Likewise, an interesting conversation developed during class when a rather uncharacteristic answer in a questionnaire was discussed. A disabled person, who for some time had not been able to

[41] In terms of interventions during class, I am thinking of educational forms that instruct students in the intricacies of doing research, such as the preparation of a focus group, reflecting on a video recording of a focus group, reading a verbatim report of a focus group together, or arranging discussions with church leaders and regional coordinators *in class* to reflect on research findings together.

attend their church in person, mentioned how one of the effects of the covid situation was that, as no one could visit churches physically anymore, for them the fellowship had become more equal. Some time was spent in class discussing this as an expression of lived theology, as an ordinary voice which had something important to contribute and which was worth listening to. On a more critical note, I observe that although the vernacular knowledge and practical wisdom of ordinary church members was 'tapped into', the research design did not allow it to be 'utilised'. Put differently, the church members remained 'research subjects' rather than 'co-researchers'; they were not engaged in or empowered to contribute to envisaging better ways to cope with the covid-19 situation. It would be interesting to see subsequent experiments more as Action Research,[42] drawing much more on the practical wisdom and problem-solving capacity of a group of church members. This point also relates to the power mechanisms at stake in research, that is, the question of who gets to decide on the research that is being done, who is doing the representation, which voices are heard and which voices not. It would at least be worthwhile in new projects, to spend more time in the classroom to reflect on these issues.[43]

Considering the above points, and noting how the innovative potential of the focus group was not really used, it was rather surprising to note the almost unanimous positive appraisal of the focus group conversation among all stakeholders. Here, it is worthwhile to reflect on the *performative* rationale, of what occurs when a group of people comes together to discuss a shared challenge. In one focus group, members from two different baptist churches in the same city became uneasily aware of the fact that they did not cooperate together at all, agreeing to try to do so more in the future. Similarly, in another focus group, a student was able to listen to a few people who shared their

[42] Action Research is a particular research methodology that seeks to effect social change through simultaneously doing research and taking action. See for an overview Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury, eds, *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2012).

[43] De Roest spends a whole chapter examining the limitations and constraints in participation, discussing the issue of power as well (De Roest, *Collaborative,* pp. 271–278).

disappointment over what had gone wrong in that particular church, thus providing a listening ear to an open wound. She was able to give this back to the church, in a pastorally sensitive, hope-giving way, in a well written blog, receiving a number of positive responses from church members.[44] Taken together, my interpretation is that the focus group serendipitously allowed for something *new* to happen, through its unique arrangement of different people coming together. As such it disrupted the normal flow of things — and perhaps also the power arrangements in a church — allowing each member to speak out. It was interesting to see students preparing this setting well, also by drawing on their own spiritual resources, so as to provide a safe but recognisable open space for conversation. Thus, they somewhat intuitively shaped their research, in line with what some practical theologians argue for, as a spiritual exercise.[45]

Concluding this paragraph, I note that much happened that I did not foresee when I designed the research project. On a critical note, the experiment lacked a 'theory-driven' approach, and thus insufficiently applied and generated knowledge. Likewise, it insufficiently allowed church members to help shape the research in various stages. Future experiments might need to be more focused, hypothesis driven, and allow for more conversation both in the field and in the classroom. On a positive note, I was surprised to see the performative potential in the relational collaboration that was sought. Likewise, I contend that for the students, the whole experience of being thrown into the deep end, of learning to conduct a fieldwork experiment in relational interaction with others, is itself a formative process that aligns well with the intended

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[44] On practical theological research as a pastoral response to a 'wound', see Scharen and Vigen, *Ethnography*, pp.65–68; also Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Perhaps in such situations collaborative research has the potential to be a 'healing methodology'; see De Roest, *Collaborative,* p. 174.

[45] See Eileen R. Campbell-Reed and Christian B. Scharen, 'Ethnography on Holy Ground: How Qualitative Interviewing is Practical Theological Work', *International Journal of Practical Theology,* 17, no. 2 (2013), 232–259; Christian B. Scharen, *Fieldwork in Theology: Exploring the Social Context of God's Work in the World,* The Church and Postmodern Culture (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015); Graham, 'Is Practical Theology'.

goal of helping them to become 'reflexive practitioners', inquiring and curious about the actual life of the church.

A reflection that keeps haunting me is that while parts of the experiment were received well, none of those involved were unequivocally enthusiastic. This at least shows how difficult it is to manage expectations when it comes to research in practice (aligning with the obstacles mentioned in the introductory paragraph of the challenge to combine research and the field of practice). Moreover, the reflections in this article help me to realise that I myself have been overambitious in the aims of the project: I wanted too much, to involve too many people, and as a result, the experiment has lost in depth, detail and learning potential. Engaging the field of practice in research projects requires a lot of skill, reflexivity and awareness of the many intricacies involved. For follow up collaborative experiments, I intend to heed that remark, and reserve more space and attentiveness for reflection on these intricacies in the classroom.

Conclusion

In this article, I started out by noting how some of the baptistic core values, such as communal discernment, everyday lived theology (ethical lives) and a narrative, biblical hermeneutics, strongly co-align and resonate with developments in practical theology in recent decades. I contended that 'Baptist ways of doing theology' might have much to gain by learning from these approaches. My aim was to examine whether 'collaborative research' in a curriculum-embedded form may be a promising lead for the Baptist Seminary in bringing academic research and the field of practices closer together, sketching the two interrelated challenges of 'beneficial' academic valorisation for the Seminary, and the adaptive challenges that many baptist churches face.

By evaluating the research experiment on the effects of the covid-19 pandemic conducted in a Seminary course in the autumn of 2020, I noted a number of intricate complexities involved in the ideal of doing relevant, valorising empirical research, with only limited resources

available. How to enable such a project that can use and generate knowledge, and involve a number of stakeholders, with only limited research experience, is a puzzle that may not be easily solved. There are quite a number of hurdles to be overcome that temper the expectations of generating useful, high-quality knowledge through small curriculum-embedded research projects. Yet, while I have been problematising the problem, I see two important leads for the development of curriculum-embedded research projects within baptist education. The first is the performative dimension of collaborating with the field of practice; this experiment has shown that when students and teaching staff engage the field of practice in collaboration, a number of things happen as new situations emerge that offer potential for learning. Some of the 'things that happen' can be designed and discussed in advance through carefully chosen research questions and methods, others have a more serendipitous character — perhaps learning to be attentive to the latter is as important as the former. Thus, I conclude that for baptist educational institutions and churches there is much to gain by experimenting with forms of collaborative research, even if they are small. The other lead is that the skills acquired by students in such fieldwork may very well be exactly the kind of core competences that theologians today need. That is, the ability to initiate processes of *doing theology collaboratively*, creating safe spaces for honest conversation, listening attentively, negotiating relational dynamics, guiding these often messy processes heuristically, and doing so with an interpretative flexibility. Leaders who become skilled in that, might fit well in a baptist tradition, which holds dear the belief that discerning the truth communally is a relational process, of learning to inhabit and embody the ethics of Jesus, in which the outcome is not as important as the way in which it is done.

Growing Grey and Growing Green: Re-narrating Ageing in Baptist Churches in the Netherlands

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Abstract:
In 2016, the Baptist Union initiated a project on the ageing of (and ageing *in*) Baptist churches in the Netherlands. Its aim was to reflect — through a series of dialogical interventions in four 'ageing' congregations — on the consequences of growing grey, especially in light of dominant cultural narratives that tend to relate ageing to loss and decay. This article discusses in retrospect the findings and gains of the project. It shows that although cultural narratives have deeply shaped ecclesial life, there are other perspectives to be found in the everyday wisdom and ordinary theology of church members. It is argued that the project empowered the churches to find alternative readings on ageing, thus finding new perspectives in which to live. Thus, the intervention helped to re-narrate the narrative of ageing and the ageing church.

Keywords:
Theology of ageing; ageing churches; ageing; deficit model; practical wisdom

Where the elderly are not honored, there is no future for the young.
— *Pope Francis*[2]

[1] Wout Huizing was responsible as initiator and project leader of the project 'Groentjes'; the retrospective, academic reflection on the project was a joint effort by Wout Huizing and Hans Riphagen. The 'we' in this article refers to both authors. In some cases, a reference is made to the individual 'I (Wout)' for reflections on Wout's particular role in the project.

[2] This strong statement was delivered by Pope Francis during his weekly General Audience on Wednesday, 4 March 2015. Speaking to the crowds gathered in St Peter's Square, the Pope focused on the role of grandparents and denounced a widespread lack of respect and consideration for the elderly and their dignity (Cindy Wooden, 'Pope Francis: Ignoring, Abandoning the Elderly Is Sinful', *Catholic News Service*, 4 March 2015).

Introduction

> Hello, I am Ellen. I am 84 years old and I have been a member of this Baptist Church since I was 15. Our congregation is ageing and has become small, currently consisting of only 40 members. What a difference from the old days when we were a large and thriving congregation and many people would come worshipping on Sundays! But many have passed away or have gone elsewhere, and no young people have come to us anymore. Nowadays, we merely succeed in settling the weekly worship services and a church small group once a month. In addition, we arrange pastoral care for each other: we call each other and send each other postcards. However, we cannot afford our own pastor. To be honest, I see the church's end nearing. For me the question is whether I will live to see it, as the end of my life is nearing. […] My time is nearing its end, but nevertheless there is much to look back on with gratitude.

Ellen voiced this statement at the first gathering of the project 'Groentjes' in 2016. The project aimed to reflect on the narratives of ageing churches within the Baptist Union of the Netherlands. It was occasioned by the research of two students, who observed that the average age in Baptist Churches is slightly higher than the national average.[3] At the time of their research in 2013, the number of those aged 65 in Baptist Churches was 20 percent,[4] which was predicted to increase to 27 percent in 2025. In small congregations the average percentage was estimated to perhaps be even as high as 37 percent.[5] The students' research concluded with some of the 'negative consequences' ageing churches face: a possible shortage of volunteers and leaders, an increase in pastoral care for the elderly, and a growing gap between generations. Moreover, it was suggested that these greying congregations would be less missional. However, what stood out as the most striking observation was the complete lack of reflection and policy on the topic of ageing and the ageing church. Rather, the process of ageing was met with a sense of acceptance and resignation, a *fait accompli*.

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3 See Gerard Grit and Thomas Steenbergen, 'Het zilveren fundament: Een visie voor een ouder wordende kerk' (unpublished bachelor's dissertation, University of Applied Sciences (CHE) Ede, 2013).

4 Grit and Steenbergen, 'Het zilveren fundament', p. 12. In small churches this percentage is 32.9%. In larger churches (above 400 members) this percentage is much lower: 10.5%.

5 Grit and Steenbergen, 'Het zilveren fundament', p. 13: Small churches are churches with less than 200 members.

Project 'Groentjes', set out to change this passive mindset, and to help Baptist churches reflect on questions of ageing. 'Groentjes' translates literally as 'freshmen', but in this article we propose the translation of 'growing green', reflecting an intended wordplay on Psalm 92:15: 'They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green.' The project was run in collaboration with four participating churches, all small congregations with less than sixty members and an average age above sixty-five years.[6] Through a range of dialogical interventions, questions were raised such as: what does it mean to become an ageing church? how are ageing churches perceived? how do people themselves talk about ageing and what does this mean for their vision for the (ageing) church? and in general, what is the place of the elderly in churches? From the start, it was noted that narratives of ageing in Baptist churches strongly reflected dominant cultural narratives. Ageing — and the process of becoming an ageing church — was primarily seen in terms of a problem, as after all, the 'youth have the future'. Ageing was equated with an inevitable move towards dying. Ageing *churches* therefore tend to be seen as unsuccessful and failing, especially in a church fellowship deeply influenced by Church Growth Theory.[7] From the start of the project, the project team was convinced that the Christian tradition held alternative narrative perspectives on 'ageing' that are relevant to the church today.[8]

This article aims to provide a retrospective evaluation of project 'Groentjes' in order to understand how dialogical interventions may help ageing Baptist churches to counter dominant cultural narratives on

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[6] As such, 'Groentjes' reflects the collaborative approach envisioned in the article of Hans Riphagen elsewhere in this *JEBS* issue, although 'Groentjes' was less research oriented and had a more intuitive character.

[7] See Olof de Vries, *Gelovig gedoopt: 400 jaar baptisme, 150 jaar in Nederland* (Kampen: Kok, 2009) pp. 248–250.

[8] See Liuwe H. Westra, 'Meditatie', *Kerk en theologie*, 64, no. 4 (2013), 295–297; Cees Houtman, 'Ouderdom in bijbels-theologisch perspectief: Een "Schriftgetrouwe" benadering', *Kerk en theologie*, 64, no. 4 (2013), 310–322; Frits de Lange, 'De verantwoordelijke ouderdom', *Kerk en theologie*, 64, no. 4, (2013), 323–332; John S. Sussenbach, 'De betekenis van ouderen voor de gemeenten van Christus, een verkenning' in *De geschiedenis van het Schriftwoord gaat door: Gedachten ter markering van de theologie van dr. O.H. de Vries*, ed. by Henk Bakker, Albrecht Boerrigter, Jeanette van Es, and Winfried Ramaker (Utrecht: Kok, 2014), p. 138.

ageing, and read themselves in a more faithful light. First, two dominant cultural narratives on ageing in the Netherlands are introduced and briefly discussed. This is followed by an overview of the approach taken in 'Groentjes' and by indicatively highlighting some of the voices that were heard. Subsequently, a number of observations and reflections are made on what *occurred* in the project, that is, how narratives of ageing changed. Finally, an overall conclusion is given. Before proceeding, a comment needs be made on the nature of the project described in this article: from the start it was envisioned as a professional 'church development' project, not as an academic research project. Thus, since the suggestion to write an academic article on the project for this journal issue comes some considerable time after the project was undertaken, this article can be characterised as a retrospective evaluation, in which we reflect on the wisdom learned through the process.

Dominant Cultural Narratives of Ageing in the Netherlands

The subject matter of this article is set against the background of the rapidly ageing Dutch population. In the early 1900s, 5 percent of the population was 65 years or over. Today it is 15 percent and around 2040 a peak will be reached of 26 percent. In absolute numbers, a rise is predicted from 2.6 million in 2011 to approximately 4.6 million in 2039.[9] In addition, a substantial increase in the number of people living beyond the age of 80 is to be expected in the coming decades. This phenomenon is known as 'double ageing': the number of elderly people increases, while in addition, people grow older. As a result, provisions are made in areas of medical care, recreation, housing, and pensions. Likewise, new identity narratives emerge for particular age groups, as the typical 'senior' does not exist. So, for instance, a division has become commonplace to mark different groups of seniors: 'young seniors' (aged 60–75), 'old seniors' (aged 75–85) and the 'oldest seniors' (over 85 years old).[10] Indicative of this increasing concern to find distinguishing, new

[9] See Eveline Castelijns, Annick van Kollenburg, and Wine te Meerman, *De vergrijzing voorbij* (Nijmegen: Berenschot, 2013), p. 13.
[10] See Sussenbach, 'De betekenis van ouderen', p. 138.

identity narratives of the elderly, is the rise of the political party 50PLUS in 2010, aiming to give the elderly a voice in Dutch politics.

In the field of gerontology (the study of ageing) two dominant cultural master narratives of ageing are often mentioned, both well established in literature: the *deficit* narrative and the *successful ageing* narrative.[11] The *deficit* narrative is well captured in the cultural expression that everyone wants to *grow* old, while no one wants to *be* old. This expression was already popular in the seventeenth century as a line of poetry illustrates: 'Old age, thou art despised, while each man so desires thee.'[12] From the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, life was symbolically represented in a concatenation of stages from rise to fall (see Figure 1):[13] a human being climbs the stairs, growing in fortitude and strength and reaching the climax at about fifty years of age. This is then followed by an equal number of descending steps where feebleness and decay set in. At age 100, the inevitable ending is represented by the grave (see the figure of death and the grave below the staircase). Cultural representations of old age in art often depicted it as a worn, patched bag, a bare stiff tree, or a ruined building. Drawings and prints during this time period often pointed to the mortality of the (older) human being.[14] In the deficit narrative the meaning of ageing is unambiguous: it entails decay and loss, the loss of social life and of social identity. Hence the warning *memento mori*: remember that you have to die.

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[11] See Frits de Lange, *Eindelijk volwassen: De wijsheid van de tweede levenshelft* (Utrecht: Ten Have, 2021), pp. 10–16; J. W. Rowe, R. L. Kahn, 'Successful Aging', *The Gerontologist,* 37, no. 4 (1997), 433–440; H. Faber, *De zeilen strijken: Over het ouder worden* (Hilversum: Gooi en Sticht, 1980).

[12] F. A. Stoett, *Nederlandsche spreekwoorden, spreekwijzen, uitdrukkingen en gezegden*, 4th ed. (Zutphen: W. J. Thieme, 1923–1925). Translation ours, in Dutch: 'Ouderdom, hoe sijt gij zo veracht, terwijl een elck u zo begeert.'

[13] Artist Unknown, 'De trap des ouderdoms', published by Glenisson en Zonen somewhere between 1856 and 1900, <https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bestand:Trap_des_ouderdoms_19th_century.jpg> [accessed 1 July 2021].

[14] See Anouk Janssen, *Grijsaards in zwart-wit, De verbeelding van de ouderdom in de Nederlandse prentkunst (1550-1650)* (Zutphen: Walburg, 2007), on the 'trap des ouderdoms' see p. 126.

Figure 1: The stages of ageing.

More recently, a different cultural master narrative has emerged, that of *successful ageing*. Because of the longer life expectancy and greater vitality of sixty-five-year-olds today, it seems that the inevitability of decay can be postponed. The suggestion is evoked that it is possible to stay young forever, even in old age: physical markers that suggest the opposite such as wrinkles, grey hair and sagging body parts, may be corrected. Successful ageing entails the prospect of decades of good years ahead — a Third Age[15]— of active, enterprising 'young seniors', enjoying their retirement in freedom, autonomy and financial abundance. Thus, a whole new lifestyle market has emerged that sings new hymns of the good life, expressed in carefree socialising, leisure

[15] The use of Third and Fourth Age is reflected in Anglo-Saxon literature on ageing. The Third Age represents people of 55–64 ('Pre-retirement') and 65–74 ('early retirement'), while the Fourth Age represents the group of 75–84 ('need some support') and over 85 ('increasingly dependent'). The latter group is also referred to as the 'most vulnerable'. See, 'De derde levensfase: het geschenk van de eeuw, Advies 08-01-2020' *Raad Volksgezondheid & Samenleving* <https://www.raadrvs.nl/documenten/publicaties/2020/01/08/samenvatting-advies-de-derde-levensfase> [accessed 6 July 2021].

activities and active holidays.[16] Gerontologist Jan Baars argues that this cult of being young evokes a 'gerontophobia': a fear of growing older.[17] Inevitable questions of life and death are postponed as long as possible.[18] Theologian and ethicist Frits de Lange reflects on this so called Third Age, observing that

> policymakers and visionaries try to shift the burden of ageing as much as possible onto the Fourth Age of life. It is only then that we branch off and die, preferably a little quickly. The ambivalences of old age as both burden and blessing, both profit and loss, both celebration and disaster become neatly divided between the two separate phases of life, and thus made seemingly manageable.[19]

What both cultural master narratives have in common is that they are essentially negative about the process of growing older, while they are somewhat caricaturist in tending either towards a very optimistic or a very pessimistic picture, neglecting the fact that reality itself often involves a more nuanced story that involves both loss and gain.

In contemporary ecclesial and theological sources, there is a wealth of literature on the pastoral care for and spirituality of the elderly, often focusing on their particular needs.[20] Yet, the meaning of old age

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[16] See Frits de Lange, *De armoede van het Zwitserlevengevoel, Pleidooi voor beter ouder worden* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2008).

[17] See Jan Baars, *Het nieuwe ouder worden, Paradoxen en perspectieven van leven in de tijd* (Amsterdam: SWP, 2007), p. 88.

[18] This is called 'compression of morbidity', a term that means reducing the length of time a person spends sick or disabled. The idea is to maximise healthy lifespan and minimise the time spent less than well (morbidity literally means 'being unhealthy'). The term was first coined by Stanford University professor James Fries. See James F. Fries, 'Aging, Natural Death, and the Compression of Morbidity', *New England Journal of Medicine*, 303, no. 3 (1980), 130–135.

[19] Translation ours. In Dutch: 'beleidsmakers en visieontwikkelaars proberen de last van het ouder worden zoveel mogelijk op het conto van de vierde levensfase te schuiven. Dan pas takelen we af en gaan we dood, en het liefst snel een beetje. De ambivalentie van de ouderdom als last en zegen, winst en verlies, feest en ramp wordt netjes verdeeld over de twee gescheiden levensfasen en zo schijnbaar beheersbaar gemaakt.' (Frits de Lange, 'Weg met de mythe van de tweede jeugd', *Trouw*, 6 Januari 2007 <https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/weg-met-de-mythe-van-de-tweede-jeugd~b460593d/> [accessed 11 October 2021].)

[20] See on ageing and spirituality: J. M. A. Munnichs, *Ouderdom en eindigheid: Een bijdrage aan de psychogerontologie* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1964); Joep Munnichs, 'Ouderen, levensvragen, levenstaken en zingeving', in *In het spoor van het verhaal: Ouderen en pastoraat*, ed. by M. van Knippenerg (Kampen: Kok, 1993), pp. 33–44; Herman Andriessen, *Een eigen weg te gaan: Ouderen en spiritualiteit* (Baarn: Ten Have, 2004). See also: J. W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of*

itself is not so often thematised. In (evangelical) church development literature, the tendency is to underwrite the dominant cultural narratives, as church development itself has been strongly fostered by a narrative of (quantitative) growth, as well as deeply shaped by an orientation towards youth culture.[21] Thus, church development wisdom tends to see an 'ageing church' as a problem that needs solving, for example by investing in youth work or focusing on intergenerational work.[22] It may lead the elderly to feel somewhat obsolete, as it is not they, but the youth who have the future. Other studies acknowledge the particular challenges and opportunities ageing churches face, which do require due consideration and reflection. Thus, for example, Houston and Parker conclude,

> Rather than placing a premium on their older members and what their years of life experience add to the overall faith and growth of their congregation, many of today's churches consider the elderly somewhat of a burden. Such unfortunate thinking results in lost opportunities for volunteerism for older persons, despite the facts that most are healthy, have retirement incomes, are readily available with their time and have the necessary faith and experience to lead. Some of the most rewarding lessons and programs in churches are those taught and overseen by senior members.[23]

Human Development and the Quest for Meaning (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981) and E. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton 1963), and Lumen Lifespan Development, 'Psychosocial Development in Late Adulthood' <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/wmopen-lifespandevelopment/chapter/psychosocial-development-in-late-adulthood-2/> [accessed 25 august 2021]. Another way of thinking about ageing is introduced by Lars Tornstam, *Gerotranscendence – a Developmental Theory of Positive Aging* (New York: Springer, 2005). Interesting in this regard is also the theological reflection of Ralf Dzwiewas, 'Werkstattgespräch – die Lebensphasen und Milieuvielfalt im Alter', Lecture, organised by the Bund Evangelische-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden, 2 October 2020 <https://www.befg.de/angebote-fuer/zielgruppen-der-gemeindearbeit/altere-erwachsene/803/online-werkstattgespraech/#c31428> [accessed 26 August 2021].

[21] See on Church development Stefan Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West: Learning from the European Experience,* The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), pp. 111–180. On the orientation of modern evangelicalism towards youth culture, see in particular Pete Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology: The Gospel and The Church* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 103–124.

[22] So, for example, David O. Moberg, 'Preparing for the Graying of the Church: Challenges from Our Changing Society', *Review and Expositor*, 88, no. 3 (1991), 179–193; James M. Houston and Michael Parker, *A Vision for the Ageing Church, Renewing Ministry for and by Seniors* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011).

[23] Houston and Parker, A*geing Church,* p. 49.

Interestingly, while Houston and Parker are among the few who reflect on the intricate value of old age, they nevertheless seem to subscribe to the *successful ageing* narrative in this particular section. In general, this underscores the point that little is done to challenge cultural readings of 'ageing' and the 'ageing church'. The ageing church continues to be read as problematic, as a church that is slowly passing away; an opposite example of how it should be. Voices that seek to offer alternative, and more positive readings on 'ageing churches', that for example stress the spirituality of ageing or the particular (often long) history of these churches as a story of faithfulness, perseverance and wisdom, are rare.[24]

Project 'Groentjes'

Project 'Groentjes' began in 2016 in four small ageing Baptist churches, two churches from the north of the country and two from the south-west.[25] The churches were selected and invited to join by myself (Wout) in consultation with other staff members of the Dutch Baptist Union. It took no effort to obtain their cooperation as all churches were immediately eager and willing to participate. From a methodological angle the project was inspired by the Appreciative Inquiry approach: an organisational development method that 'seeks to illuminate the positive aspects of an organisation, so as to work from there on processes of change'.[26] It was introduced in the Dutch ecclesial context through the work of church development pioneer Jan Hendriks, and has gained

[24] See Houston and Parker, A*geing Church,* p. 55: 'Contemporary culture emphasizes the physicality of human development rather than the spirituality of aging. The Bible's emphasis, however, is upon the moral and spiritual growth of those seeking to become mature in wisdom. The Midrash Rabbah states: "How welcome is old age! The aged are beloved of God." Such a culture does not see the aged as having outlived their usefulness. Rather it celebrates their age, so whatever was the measurement of life, records of years lived are carefully kept of biblical characters at their death: Isaac, 180; Abraham, 175; Jacob, 147; Ishmael, 137; Sarah, 127; Joseph and Joshua, 110. Abraham Herschel has remarked: "Old age was not a defeat but a victory, not a punishment but a privilege.'"

[25] A Dutch report on 'Groentjes' was published on the website of the Baptist Seminary <https://baptistenseminarium.nl/okbi/empirisch/62-resultaten/832-project-groentjes> [accessed 1 July 2021].

[26] See Eduard Groen, *Geloofwaardige gemeente*, *Uitgangspunten van een baptisten gemeenteopbouw,* Baptistica Reeks (Barneveld: Unie van Baptistengemeenten in Nederland, 2011), pp. 84–87.

wider acceptance since.[27] Appreciative Inquiry focuses on what 'gives life', on what people find essential, valuable and important.[28] Following this approach, project 'Groentjes' aimed at finding the stories of the intrinsic value of ageing congregations. In this section, a brief overview of the steps taken in the project is provided, followed by a few fragments that are indicative for the sort of stories that were told.

Participation in the project required the organisation of three sessions in each church. A first meeting was held in order to shape the focus of the research. Church members were invited to reflect on their own ideas of ageing. This involved open and insightful conversations, and in some cases a renewed acquaintance with each other, around a theme that was not often discussed openly. Personal experiences were shared, and biblical texts on ageing were examined and discussed. Also, an initial exploration was done on how the topic of the ageing church was perceived by its members. The second session revolved around the meaning and relevance of the church community for the life of its members. The conversation focused in particular on the past two years, so as to generate stories about the present situation as much as possible. Through making an inventory of and summarising the stories, an attempt was made to uncover the narratives that underlay the church life.[29] Besides stories of ordinary church life, some impressive accounts were also told about welcoming and hosting refugees, standing side by side during times of illness, encountering new people in the neighbourhood, as well as celebrating life-defining moments during worship. During this session church members were invited to share their

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[27] See in particular, Jan Hendriks, *Goede wijn: Waarderende gemeenteopbouw* (Utrecht: Kok, 2013). The method has been influential among Dutch church development professionals; see e.g., *Met andere ogen* <https://www.met-andere-ogen.nl/ and *Waarderende gemeenteopbouw* <https://www.waarderendegemeenteopbouw.nl/> [both accessed 25 August 2021]. Also in the English-speaking context, Appreciative Inquiry was found to be a helpful method for church development. See, e.g., Mark Lau Branson, *Memories, Hopes and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* (Herndon: Alban Institute, 2004). Appreciative Inquiry can be illustrated by the '5D' model with 5 phases: define, discover, dream, design and deliver. Within the project 'Groentjes' the first three phases were used as interventions.

[28] See Groen, *Geloofwaardige gemeente*, p. 84.

[29] See on the importance of stories in Baptist church life, Groen, *Geloofwaardige gemeente*, p. 70. Groen advocates the use of church development approaches that focus on stories. See also James Wm McClendon, Jr, *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology* (Nashville: Trinity Press, 1974).

dreams, hopes and desires. This almost always entailed the desire for the church to continue to exist, while it was also accompanied by a sense of realism that this continued existence could not be taken for granted (see for instance the quote from Ellen at the start of this article). Towards the end of the project, a final meeting was held in each of the churches, preceded by the voluntary assignment for church members to either write an imaginary picture of their church in ten years' time, or a letter to future generations of Baptists in the Netherlands, recounting the significance of faith and the church and sharing lessons and advice. In practice, only a few church members accepted the invitation to write the assignment. However, when these were discussed during the final meeting, they yielded much material for discussion.

After the first two rounds of sessions in the local churches (thus after eight meetings in total), representatives of the participating churches — which until then had not met each other — gathered for a workshop in Baptist House, Amsterdam. Each church gave a brief presentation about its own situation. Possibilities, limitations and future prospects were shared and discussed. The meeting was experienced as an eye-opening encounter, as the experiences that were narrated created a sense of recognition and solidarity. As a result, a process of exchanging new ideas started, for instance about the shape of the worship service, outreach to neighbours, and the organisation of pastoral care. Finally, after all sessions had been completed, about a year after the project had started, a symposium was organised in which the participating churches as well as delegates from the wider church fellowship came together to exchange ideas and discuss possibilities.[30]

Before moving to a number of observations and reflections, it is helpful to quote a few fragments from the letters that were written before the third session of the project. These are indicative of the sort of topics and conversations that emerged.

Ellen, already introduced at the beginning of this article, wrote her letter to a new generation, which included the following fragment:

[30] Out of the conversations that took place in the final stages of the project, the Baptist Union's youth worker Ronald van den Oever developed material on the topic of inter-generationality. See Ronald van den Oever, 'Toolbox voor een intergeneratieve gemeente' <https://baptisten.nl/images/mgo/jongeren/Toolbox-IG.pdf> [accessed 6 July 2021].

> We do not know each other and while you are at the beginning or in the middle of life, I am at the end. I am still a member of one of our Baptist churches, but more importantly, I am still in connection with Him, whom I call God, whom I have never seen, but who nevertheless plays a role in my life. Do not think that life has been smooth. Many things have happened: good things, difficult things, mistakes, questions, and yet I am reminded of my confession at the age of 15, which consisted of only 5 words: 'I cannot live without God.' Did you really think I understood and lived what I said? No, but I had to say it like that, from the inside. Perhaps you also recognise something of this need? I experience the Spirit of the invisible God as His presence on earth, who can inspire people to trust that, despite everything that is wrong, things will turn out all right, no matter what, and who encourages me to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. […] My challenge for you is that you dare to appropriate this in your own way, just as I did so long ago, and that you can say: 'I cannot live without God.' And that you will show, among others, in the community of your choice, how to live under the care of God and find a place where you will be encouraged and comforted.

Another participant wrote as follows:

> Now that I am at the end of my life, I feel the need to tell something about the church which is dear to me. […] In the first place, it is a place where I am confronted with other people who from a faith perspective have to be accepted by me as they are. I say 'have to' because it does not happen automatically. To me, belief means daring to think for yourself, to make your own choices in life, based on what you experience as God's intention. Including the fact that you can make mistakes and that you dare to face them and make other choices. […] That in meetings within the church all opposites can fall away and that you discover that the other has the same value as you, and that you need each other to make a beautiful world together. I have discovered this in the stories of the Bible, especially of Jesus in the New Testament. And the word that fits in with that is: 'Love'. Not *covering*, but *discovering* love. Where do you learn that? Where can you learn it? Not only at home, in the family, and not even on the street, but in church. That is what church is for! With trial and error. […] Through conversation, where listening is more important than talking. And through meetings in which you feel at home.

Finally, someone notes about their church that

> it feels like family, people you did not choose yourself, or would have, but who have become dear to you. Faith is so precious and important. Especially at a time like this when there are so many uncertainties, God is the only certain thing in this world. […] You may not know it but the elderly are praying for you.

Interpretations and Reflections

In a retrospective evaluation — bearing in mind that no recordings nor detailed fieldnotes were made during the project — we present some reflections concerning the 're-narrations' of ageing that took place. Thus, we reflect on how project 'Groentjes' changed the perspectives of ageing and opened up new frames of reference that challenged the dominant cultural narratives mentioned above.

We start by making two general observations on the way the project itself generated reflections. First, we found that the subjects of 'ageing' and the 'ageing church' were very much under the radar and sometimes even taboo. It is one of those subjects that people are deeply affected by as it shapes their everyday experiences, yet which they do not often talk about. Strikingly, what characterised project 'Groentjes' from the start was the high level of involvement and eagerness from participating churches and church members. The initial response was much higher than was first expected. Simply put, it deeply mattered to these churches! As news about the project spread through the Dutch Baptist Union's newsletter, other churches reached out to enquire whether they could join as well. Thematising 'ageing' created space for an honest, involved, and relevant conversation that deeply concerned all around the table. Thus, it fostered a conscious reflection on the question, in what 'narratives' about ageing do we actually live and believe? As such the whole project can be seen as an empowering process, in order to help older people to find their voice.[31]

A second, related reflection is that I (Wout) was somewhat overwhelmed by the appreciation shown towards me and the church fellowship, for the time and energy invested in this topic: churches felt seen and heard. Moreover, the approach of 'Groentjes', following the Appreciative Inquiry approach, started with the idea that much of worth could be discovered in these churches. This was expressed, for example, in those moments when we explained the title of the project ('Groentjes', that is, those 'growing green') in reference to Psalm 92. It

[31] See Wout Huizing and Thijs Tromp, *Mijn leven in kaart: Met ouderen in gesprek over hun levensverhaal,* 3rd ed. (Voorthuizen: Perspectief, 2020).

proved to be a point of discovery that inspired participants to look at themselves and the congregation with new 'fresh' eyes, and moreover felt as if it were a break in the perception (and perhaps first of all a self-perception) of 'ageing churches' as failing and dying. Rather, a new story emerged: when you are old, it is *not* over, but there is still much of value. Moreover, the project enabled the voicing of this new story within the broader church fellowship, indicating the theological truth that these churches are fully part of the body of Christ.

More particularly, the dialogical interventions of 'Groentjes' — namely, the process of sharing personal stories, sharing stories about the church community, discussing bible passages and theological topics — generated new narratives and perspectives, thus empowering these churches. We will refer to three reflections on such 're-narrations' that occurred through the conversations in the churches. A first reflection is that although the *deficit model*, that is, the way ageing has come to be equivalent with decay, loss and abandonment, had deeply shaped the ecclesial imagination on ageing, the conversations that followed during the project generated much correction and resistance towards a one-sided negative frame. Put differently, the conversations brought to light a lot of wisdom and ordinary theology among church members, mobilised during the sessions, that challenged a one-sided focus on *deficit*. This is reflected, for instance, in Ellen's letter, in which she writes to an imaginary young person about the life experiences she has gained, in which God's faithfulness stands out as a continuing promise, even in her old age. Instead of merely focusing on the shortcomings of old age, many conversations revolved around the possibility of inner growth continuing even in old age (see 2 Cor 4:16). This often related to the theme of grace and thankfulness: even though the end is near, it is possible not to grieve about what has been and has passed, but to be thankful for the value of the life lived. Another theme that perhaps may characterise ageing is that of (self)relativisation and mildness with respect to doctrines and convictions, as well as space for a greater diversity and pluriformity within the church. A strong awareness was expressed that old age brings its own, unique perspectives to life, sometimes referred to as wisdom.[32] Rather than merely a process of loss,

[32] See Frits de Lange, *Eindelijk volwassen,* pp. 151–162.

these themes point us to the gains of old age. Interestingly, personal experiences of 'ageing' were often projected onto stories of the 'ageing church'. Thus, the ageing church was seen as a church with a rich past, in which much wisdom had been acquired (with the task of the elderly in particular to narrate this history). Moreover, the past was not merely seen as loss, but as something to be remembered and be thankful for, as someone remarked:

> When the end comes and we cannot continue as a church, we count our blessings and thank God for all the good things that have been given to us, personally and in the church. Then we do not have to be bitter, but we can be grateful. What beautiful years we have had!

Certainly, these conversations did not negate the challenges of ageing, and the reality of decay, of loneliness and loss. However, they helped to bring in other, more hopeful and graceful narratives to the table.

Another key reflection concerns the discovery through the conversations that even in an 'ageing church' there is much that should be celebrated and reassessed as having importance in the faith and life of the church community. Especially during the second meeting, when through Appreciative Inquiry stories were shared about the present meaning of the church community, an awareness grew that even while 'grey', there were things of value to be cherished in the church community. Examples were shared of how people enjoy 'small' rays of light: beautiful moments together or celebrations that left an impression. The attentiveness to small things itself could be characterised as a fruit of growing older.[33] Likewise, in the participating churches there is the firm conviction that God is at work: the significance of the church for this small group of people is great. People enjoy being together intensely and care for each other in many ways. They found they could look at the church not as a set of activities (then indeed the reduction of capacity through ageing is a problem), but as a community with a high quality of relationships. In this way the community itself is a witness to God's love. In this process of discovery, 'Groentjes' had a performative effect, especially through the process of sharing experiences with other

[33] See, e.g., Wout Huizing, *In de Spiegel: Beelden bij het ouder worden* (Den Haag: Tabitha, 2003), pp. 45–48; see also Wout Huizing, 'Ouder worden in de Nederlandse samenleving en kerk anno 2013: Feiten en visies', *Kerk en theologie*, 64, no. 4 (2013), 298–309.

churches, as ideas were exchanged, cooperation was established and in some instances something 'new' emerged. The following example tellingly shows this.

One of the participating churches had just parted from its retiring pastoral worker, and had decided not to replace him. However, during the group discussions in Amsterdam, the church somewhat coincidentally stumbled across a young student of the Baptist Seminary who had started to develop a particular interest in pastoral care for the elderly. After some conversations, and the experience of a 'match', the church decided to offer this young man a job contract to provide the church with pastoral support and care. As the congregation was rapidly shrinking and had little income, the costs of the contract could only be covered through spending the little financial reserves the church had left, estimated to run out in two years. There was no expectation whatsoever that hiring a young student would attract a new generation to the church. Rather, a desire was expressed to invest in *this* student, giving *him* firsthand experience and a chance to develop.[34] In an email, the chairperson, a seventy-three-year-old woman, wrote, 'after two years the money will be gone, but then a young man has grown in his work and life!' As the church reflected afterwards, project 'Groentjes' had given them the awareness that, although small, they were still of value. It gave them confidence in the significant role the community could still play for those involved.[35] Rather than merely passively waiting for the inevitable end, their newfound perspective allowed them to proactively pursue a different course. The church continues to exist until today.

A third reflection concerns the deliberation that took place on the particular positions and significance of the elderly in respect to the whole church. There was a realisation that church policy tended to move along the 'deficit' model, that is, to see older people mainly as people that require special care, particular activities and an annual Christmas present. Likewise, it became clear that in the worship services, sermons

[34] This is an example of 'generativity', a term Erik Erikson introduced for the 7th stage of life (see Erik H. Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968)).

[35] Interestingly, they said that before 'Groentjes', they would always apologise to guest speakers for the very few people attending church. Gradually, however, they became prouder of who they were: small but beautiful.

and activities, they were not really visible, represented, or given a voice. This raised the question as to the meaning of the older generation. Seeing them as fully contributing to the body of Christ, as indispensable to it and as meaningful, were discussed as important corrections. It was noted that they can be meaningful with their prayers, listening ears, time, wisdom and advice (see, for example, the final quote above). The conversations raised the important theological question of what place the elderly occupy within the body of Christ.[36]

Taken together, what these reflections suggest is that the process of creating space for attentive conversation is a deeply valuable way for communal discernment. 'Groentjes' aimed to do exactly that, finding a voice on the often-neglected subject of 'ageing', and 're-shaping' or 're-narrating' the narratives in which the church — including the 'ageing church' — lives. In that sense, it could be described as a project that aimed for a healing experience, as it sought to address a 'hurt' (that is, something neglected, excluded and negatively framed) which was felt but not brought into the open.[37] A striking observation here was that as facilitator of the sessions, I (Wout) did not introduce much theology or theoretical insights: the wisdom was already there; it only had to be drawn out.

Conclusion: Considerations and Questions

In this article we explored how methodological processes of dialogical intervention, as exemplified in project 'Groentjes', may help ageing Baptist churches challenge dominant cultural narratives on ageing, and read themselves in a more faithful light. Although the exact design and approach of 'Groentjes' was shaped somewhat intuitively, we argue that at its core, it revolves around paying attention to people's lives — and thus, caring and honouring them — by creating open space for sharing, and by addressing an important concern that often remains under the radar. It started from the conviction that although dominant cultural narratives of ageing (the *deficit* model or the *successful ageing* model) have

[36] See Sussenbach, 'De betekenis van ouderen', pp. 135–145.

[37] See Henk P. de Roest, *Collaborative Practical Theology: Engaging Practitioners in Research on Christian Practices* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), p. 174.

deeply shaped ecclesial life, other perspectives are possible. Within the cultural narrative frames, 'ageing churches' tend to be seen as problematic and dying, as churches without a future, a perception that may be there from the 'outside' but that is also experienced from within in the self-perception of these churches. However, thematising this in open conversations, it was found that many different perspectives were already present in Baptist church life, emerging from biblical narrative as well as from decades of ecclesial experience and wisdom. These new perspectives empowered churches to see their predicament differently, to see (some) possibilities and to celebrate both the past and present. A lesson may be learned here for the larger body of Christ, that is, not to negate the value of these 'ageing' churches. Perhaps, they show that church is less about pursuing a vision in order to create a particular kind of attractive church or achieve numeric growth, but rather about persevering in faithfulness and celebrating the (small) things God is doing in their midst.

Project 'Groentjes' also made clear how important it is to have honest reflections on the challenges of ageing in today's culture. It raises questions such as: what does it mean for elderly people to live in a rapidly changing world, in which they are constantly reminded of the *successful ageing* and *deficit* narrative? what kind of pastoral guidance can churches offer to help ageing members find a worthy place in church and society?

Finally, what this article makes clear is that in a sense we all live in the cultural dominant narratives around us that shape our perspectives on the meaning of 'ageing', the importance of remaining ever young, and the fear of death. Here, the church may be a discerning community that learns to look prophetically at dominant cultural narratives, and seeks to live differently. 'Groentjes' sought to pursue that vision, humbly, intuitively but from a strong conviction: that everyone is made into the image of God; that the Body of Christ is a unique community and that there is a place for everyone, including people who are grey. As Nouwen and Gaffney note,

> there are many reasons for thinking that growing older is a sad fate which no one can escape and has to be avoided at all costs. [...] It may well be that we do our utmost to silence those who remind us of our own future fate and

> who, by their mere presence, criticise us poignantly. Therefore, our first and most important task is to ensure that the elderly once more become our teachers and that broken relations between generations may be healed.[38]

This article, following up on this quotation from Nouwen and Gaffney, shows that there is still a lot to learn.

[38] Nouwen and Gaffney, *Levensloop en vervulling,* p. 12. Our translation. In Dutch: 'Er zijn allerlei redenen aan te voeren waarom we denken dat ouder worden het droevige lot is waaraan geen mens ontkomen kan en dat ten koste van alles vermeden moet worden. […] Het zou wel eens zo kunnen zijn dat we ons uiterste best doen diegenen het zwijgen op te leggen die ons aan ons eigen toekomstig lot herinneren en ons louter door hun aanwezigheid het scherpst bekritiseren. Daarom is het onze eerste en belangrijkste opdracht ervoor te zorgen dat de ouderen weer onze *leermeesters* worden en dat de verbroken relatie tussen de generaties wordt hersteld.'

A Conversation about Contemplative Practices

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Abstract:
My observation is that people inside and outside the church are looking for practices of meditation and mindfulness. At the same time, it is not clear whether and in what ways Dutch Baptist pastors experience contemplative practices springing from healthy sources in the Christian tradition. The question arises: what are the contemplative spiritual practices that Baptist pastors recognise, and how are these theologically rooted and at the same time connected with everyday life? This article explores the dialogue between contemplative practices of a few Dutch Baptist pastors, sources of contemplative practices, and connections to baptistic theology. This is done by listening to stories of Baptist pastors regarding their experiences with contemplation. These experiences are brought into dialogue with sources from the contemplative tradition and perspectives from Baptist theologians.

Keywords:
Contemplative practices; contemplation; Dutch Baptists; spirituality

Introduction

One thing I ask from the Lord,

this only do I seek:

that I may dwell in the house of the Lord

all the days of my life,

to gaze on the beauty of the Lord

and to seek him in his temple.

(Psalm 27:4, NIV)

Contemplation is not the first spiritual discipline with which Dutch Baptists identify. Although the main spirituality of Baptists is evangelical, in recent decades there have continuously been small groups of Baptists who have leaned towards more contemplative forms of spirituality. My interest is in exploring to what extent and in what ways contemplation takes shape in the life of Dutch Baptist pastors.

I discovered Renovaré[1] in my early twenties, and as I became involved with the Renovaré working group that started in the Netherlands eighteen years ago, I discovered the 'contemplative stream' as one of the spiritual streams which together could lead us to what Richard Foster in his books *Celebration of Discipline*[2] and later *Streams of Living Water,*[3] called a spiritual equilibrium. The group invited Roy Searle, then chairman of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and involved with Renovaré in the United Kingdom, for a retreat. In that retreat, Searle shared about the Northumbria Community.[4] A few years later, the Northumbria Community ran a student retreat at IBTS in Prague in which I discovered their Daily Prayers. Every morning, the daily prayer cycle opens with the verse in the introduction 'to behold the beauty of the Lord'.

Over the last decade, my observation and experience is that there is a longing among people inside and outside the church for contemplation. We have seen explosive growth in literature that relates

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[1] Renovaré was founded by Richard Foster in 1988. Renovaré has always sought to advocate, resource, and model the with-God life. 'Through personal relationships, conferences and retreats, written and web-based resources, church consultations, and other means, Renovaré models' spiritual formation and spiritual disciplines. See <https://renovare.org/about/ideas> [accessed 20 October 2021].

[2] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

[3] Richard J. Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Essential Practices from the Six Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001).

[4] The 'Northumbria Community is a dispersed network of people from different backgrounds, streams and edges of the Christian faith'. It is based in Northumberland in the UK and has companions from all over the world. See <https://www.northumbriacommunity.org/who-we-are/introducing-the-community/> [accessed 20 October 2021].

to practices of contemplation, spirituality and silence.[5] The popularity of new monasticism among segments of Dutch Protestantism is recognisable, although it remains marginal. Mindfulness is booming.[6] Often this could be understood as a need for silence, stillness, or mindfulness as a counterpart to our 'noisy, crowded, busy, stressed, electrifying, evolving'[7] world, as Peter Traben Haas, Presbyterian pastor, explains in his book *Contemplative Church*.

Simultaneously, in conversation in both the academic realm and in churches, I experience a sense of discomfort and unfamiliarity with contemplation:[8] is it not too much of an inward turn, too much focused on oneself, is God still there in the silence? My experience with contemplative spirituality comes mainly from an ecumenical setting. Because I am working in a Baptist environment, I wondered if and where Baptist pastors recognise contemplative practices in their lives. To begin to assess what the situation might be within Dutch Baptist churches, I decided that a conversational approach would be a useful exploratory framework within which to begin. So, I initiated a conversation on the topic with three Baptist pastors. As a small sample of three, these pastors cannot be representative of the broader Baptist

[5] The books and activities of Mirjam van der Vegt on silence and Jos Douma on contemplation are read and participated in by more and more people. Miriam van der Vegt's, *De kracht van rust* [The Power of Rest] (Utrecht: Ten Have, 2020) was named the best spiritual book of the Netherlands in 2021. An online course by Jos Douma on contemplation and silence, easily attracts 600 participants. The Dutch health insurance brand ProLife, offers *Lectio Divina* in their programme 'Faith and Health'. The newest version of the Prayer Course (Alpha) offers a theme about contemplative prayer.

[6] Centrum voor Mindfulness, Radboud Centrum voor Mindfulness, for example. See 'True Mindfulnesstrainingen en -opleidingen, Maastricht, Ontwikkeling en innovatie van het mindfulnessveld in Nederland', (Amsterdam, Maastricht, Nijmegen, 2019) <https://www.radboudcentrumvoormindfulness.nl/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/ontwikkeling-en-innovatie-van-het-mindfulnessveld.pdf> [accessed 24 May 2021].

[7] Peter Traben Haas, *Contemplative Church: How Meditative Prayer and Monastic Principles Can Help Congregations Flourish* (Austin, TX.: Contemplative Christians, 2018), p. 47.

[8] I experienced this in conversation about contemplative spirituality in teaching in the master's course on Spirituality at the Theological University of Kampen and in workshops I have led on *Lectio Divina* in different Baptist Churches. In the same groups there was also an openness and willingness to bear the discomfort to discover contemplation.

community, but their conversation indicates if and where there is an opening for contemplative spirituality.[9]

In the first part, the stories and conversation about contemplation is shared. In this phase I observe the experience, stories, and interpretation of the pastors. From there on, I explore different dimensions of contemplation connected to their narratives and conversations. Next, I narrow the conversation down to three contemplative practices engaged in by the pastors, and bring this into dialogue with contemplative sources from the broader Christian tradition to reflect on these practices and to see if there are connections with baptistic theology. In the last phase, I bring the conversation to a close and highlight one theme. In this way, the practical theological cycle of experience, exploration, reflection, and reaction[10] is explored in connection to the experience of these three pastors with contemplative practices.

As this enquiry took place within the restrictions of the covid-19 pandemic, it was decided that the conversation would be a group online Zoom meeting, centred on three specific questions:

- What is contemplation, and what are contemplative practices?
- How do you shape contemplation in your own life?
- What are our baptist contemplative roots?

The pastors in this conversation have different backgrounds: one comes from a Baptist background from the northern part of the Netherlands. Another grew up in a Roman Catholic environment in the southern part of the Netherlands. The third one has a reformed background and was raised in the western part of the Netherlands. All three of them have studied at the Dutch Baptist Seminary in the last fifteen years. These pastors represent a small stream within the total population of pastors who exhibit an interest in contemplative

[9] This is not an exhaustive article about different contemplative practices or themes. I decided to focus on the practices shared by the pastors themselves. Themes such as centring prayer, dark night of the soul and Ignatian spiritual exercises where not mentioned.

[10] Laurie Green, *Let's Do Theology: Resources for Contextual Theology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), pp. 17–27.

practices.[11] Still, at the same time, they are interpretative leaders who are experts in reading and connecting our culture to their sources and traditions. In this conversation, they are interpreting the experiences they share from a contemplative perspective. The questions were sent in advance, so everyone had time to ponder on them. This conversation took place by Zoom,[12] and in a sense, it was also a contemplative conversation. Participants first had time to share their response in the chat box and then the chance to read each other's reactions. In the conversation, I sought after experience and depth; the pastors were first invited to share all three of their stories and respond to each other. As a moderator, I chose to intervene as little as possible and let the conversation unfold between the pastors.

What Is Experienced as Contemplation?

In the chat box, the pastors first wrote comments about contemplation. The following represents a number of their definitions in the order that the pastors presented them. Pastor Noa began: 'Contemplation is dwelling on who God is. It requires a reflective attitude and consciously seeking connection with God. It is growling.' Growling in the sense of the way a dog chews on a bone in enjoyment. Pastor Rens: 'Contemplation is watching and beholding; it is a sensory experience, everything in view of God. It is being open, listening, a total experience

[11] I aimed at having a focus group with five pastors, whom I knew or understood were interested in contemplative spirituality. I invited seven pastors — five men, two women — three of them from Baptist Union churches, four of them from ABC churches. In the end I made an appointment with four of them; during the day of the interview one of the pastors canceled because of personal circumstances. I decided to continue the interview with three pastors to see if this conversation would be rich and thick enough. These pastors are not representative for all Baptist Churches in the Netherlands, but shared their experience and wisdom. Two of them were female, one of them male. Besides experience as a pastor in a local church, one of them also has experience as a pioneer, another also as a pastor in an institution. The names of the pastors have been anonymised and general names chosen through which to identify each of their comments in this conversation. Participants signed an informed consent form in which they were informed about the goals and procedures, confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of the interviews. The initial version of this article was shared with them and they gave permission for their comments and quotes to be used in this way.

[12] The Zoom conversation was recorded and relistened to several times. Parts of the conversation are transcribed.

and connecting.' Pastor Anne: 'Contemplation is pondering and seeing in silence. It is observing and dwelling. I also link it to a meditative life, which I understand as an attentive life — meditative prayer is then a practice. It is a moment of reflection, and in Lectio Divina, contemplation happens to you. It is focused on experience. When it comes to practices, there are moments in the liturgy — silence — words. I would also link it to embodiment.' Rens: 'Indeed, it is more than what you do yourself; it happens to you.'

In the conversation that follows, attention to the liturgy's non-verbal and sensory side emerges, for example, in music, in silence or the sharing of bread and wine at the Lord's Table. Here, reference is made in the first instance to experiences in the Roman Catholic liturgy and an experience in a Russian Orthodox monastery. These refer to the experience of being close to God. At the same time, it is mentioned that this closeness was also experienced in large and exuberant Pentecostal services.

A conversation about embodiment and the senses in contemplation ensues. Anne: 'Contemplation is a sensory experience that comes into me. It has to do with my body. I feel it, like a deep experience of happiness and sometimes mixed with pain. It always has to do with the painful sides of life as well.'

Seeking silence to listen to God, to be with God is mentioned. Reading Psalms, walking, and taking pictures are indicated as practices by Noa: 'When I am alone on the road, there is silence. If I look, the images come to me: landscapes, animals, everything from God's creation […] When I come home, I have become a different person.'

For Anne, 'Contemplation moves away from us, towards God, towards Christ. In that movement, we come closer to ourselves; God is coming to us. It is a back-and-forth movement of God and humanity. Because it is focused on God, I also get to know myself better.'

The pastors experience contemplation as a reflective, meditative, sensory experience of connecting with God. It asks for an open, listening, and watching posture. The above remarks call for more conversation and reflection, and the section below elaborates on several of the themes raised.

Perspectives on Contemplation

With Foster, I perceive contemplation as one of six streams in Christian spirituality, next to the holiness, charismatic, social justice, evangelical and incarnational traditions.[13] I would take issue with Foster as to whether this is the full range of streams; the more key point is the way that diverse streams come together to form a holistic and balanced spirituality. This does not mean that the balance in the various spiritualities needs to be the same for everyone; the balance will shift over time and through different stages of life.

It is instructive to see the description of contemplation as it emerges from different sources. As with the Dutch Carmelite Kees Waaijman,[14] Rowan Williams[15] emphasises the image of the birdwatcher; someone who takes time to look attentively, to see, to gaze. In a sense, contemplation is an attitude that can relate to many parts of life. It has to do with looking and observing in general, just as a birdwatcher can look at birds, just as a nature lover can immerse themselves in photography, just as one can observe people's lives. According to Traben Haas, 'to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord' in Psalm 27 is connected with the idea of seeing the beauty of God, being with God himself. It is not only a rational view of God or Scripture but an 'intuitive experience of knowing and being known by Love in silence'.[16]

Contemplative prayer 'is the opening of the mind and heart, body and emotions — our whole being — to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond words, thoughts, and emotions'[17] as Thomas Keating, Cistercian priest and monk, asserts. In his *Conferences*, theologian and

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13 Foster, *Streams of Living Water.*

14 Kees Waaijman, *Spiritualiteit, vormen, grondslagen, methoden* (Kampen: Kok, 2001), pp. 341–343. 'Contemplatie' wordt afgeleid van con (samen) en templum (een door de augur met zijn staf afgebakende ruimte waarbinnen hij de vlucht van vogels observeert). Contemplatie is dienovereenkomstig: zich begeven in een waarnemingsruimte om daar aandachtig de bewegingen van het goddelijke te schouwen.' ['Contemplation' is derived from con (together) and templum (a space delineated by the augur with his staff in which he observes the flight of birds). Contemplation is accordingly: going into a space of observation in order to contemplate attentively the movements of the divine.'] See also Traben Haas, *Contemplative Church,* p. 71.

15 Rowan Williams, *Being Disciples: Essentials of the Christian life* (London: SPCK, 2017), p. 7.

16 Traben Haas, *Contemplative Church,* p. 70.

17 Thomas Keating, *Open Mind Open Heart* (New York, NY: Continuum, 1991), p. 14.

monk Cassian (c.360–c.435 CE) wrote that contemplative prayer was prayer in silence, in which

> the mind enlightened by the infusion of that heavenly light describes in no human and confined language, but pours forth richly as from a copious fountain in an accumulation of thoughts, and ineffably utters to God, expressing in the shortest possible space of time such great things that the mind when it returns to its usual condition cannot easily utter or relate.[18]

Contemplative prayer is a practice that could lead to a deeper experience or mode of contemplation. Contemplation is, according to Traben Haas,

> the timeless draw of humankind toward inwardness. Yet an inwardness connected to an everywhereness […] To be contemplative is to say yes to the inward presence and action of the Spirit of God […] Contemplation is, at its heart, a participation in the presence of love that births wisdom, kindness, mercy and understanding in us.[19]

In this sense, contemplation is more than an activity and more than a practice;[20] it will lead to an inner receptivity to seeing something of God, in which self-forgetfulness is essential.[21]

Elijah's story on Mount Horeb in 1 Kings 19: 8–13 is a biblical example of a contemplative encounter: God passed by, but God was not in the strong gust of wind, God was not in the earthquake, God was not in the fire. And then there is the gentle breeze, unexpected and whispering. God is in the silence of the breeze. Elijah stands with his cloak over his face before the One. And the One speaks.

Before this encounter between Elijah and God on Mount Horeb, there is darkness and suffering in the desert. The desert

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[18] John Cassian, *Conferences of John Cassian*, trans. and notes by Edgar C. S. Gibson, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Kindle Edition (New York: [n. pub.], 1894), p. 186, chapter xxv.

[19] Traben Haas, *Contemplative Church,* p. 66.

[20] As understood by Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 187 and Nancey C. Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg, and Mark Nation, *Virtues & Practices in the Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics After MacIntyre* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), p. 21.

[21] Traben Haas, *Contemplative Church,* p. 77, referring to Josef Sudbrack, 'Contemplation' in the *Encyclopedia Cristianity A-D* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 677–678.

experience or dark night of the soul, as John of the Cross describes it, is an experience familiar to contemplatives that is not addressed in depth in the experiences of the pastors.[22] In contemplation, you do not escape yourself and your situation; you do not join the Las Vegas of distraction, but you enter the depths of your inner turmoil. Thomas Merton says,

> The contemplative is […] simply the one who has risked his mind in the desert beyond language and beyond ideas where God is encountered in the nakedness of pure trust, that is to say in the surrender of our own poverty and incompleteness in order no longer to clench our minds in a cramp upon themselves, as if thinking made us exist.[23]

This is what happens in that contemplative meeting between Elijah and God. Without words, in silence, in the desolation of the desert, at the moment when he cannot but let go and surrender himself. A moment of grace, of transformation.

About that merciful moment of contemplation Michael Casey, a Cistercian monk, says the following:

> It is a change in the consciousness marked by two elements. On the one hand, there is a recession from ordinary sensate and intellectual awareness and all the concerns and programs that depend upon it. At the same time, more subtly, it is being possessed by the reality and mystery of God. Having emptied oneself in imitation of Christ (Philippians 2:7), one is filled with the fullness of God. Of his fullness we have all received, grace for grace (John 1:16).[24]

Contemplation is more than becoming silent; it is more than an encounter experienced or not. Ultimately there is a transformation of the inner self, often through a dark birth canal, through the practice of contemplation, which bears fruit in life.

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[22] 'Along the way the believer will experience the dark night of the senses wherein she will renounce all good things that she desires, as well as the dark night of the Spirit, characterized by alienation and isolation […] Both of these dark nights, however, are gifts from God and are used in a person's life to help bring one to union with God.' (Greg Peters, *The Story of Monasticism: Retrieving an Ancient Tradition for Contemporary Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), p. 222.)

[23] Thomas Merton and Patrick Hart, *The Monastic Journey* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1992), p. 173.

[24] Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* (Liguori, MO: Triumph Books, 1996), p. 39.

Looking back at the conversation with the pastors, the stillness, pondering, observing, and attentiveness that is part of contemplation comes to the fore. And at the same time, the comment is made that 'contemplation happens to you'. This touches on what Traben Haas describes as an 'intuitive experience of knowing and being known by Love in silence'. Most times, it is a two-way movement. Someone opens themselves up to God in a contemplative practice or a contemplative environment, and the intuitive experience of knowing and being known can happen. However, a contemplative practice will not always lead to a contemplative experience. According to Keating, the experience is not the goal; it is the inner transformation and the beholding of the face of God. All three pastors mention the inwardness, mainly as a positive encounter, but at the same time, there is often something from 'outside' that moves them. Even if it is only making space and time to turn inwards, it is interesting to note that in the experience of one of the pastors, it is precisely in mass worship that something of this contemplation, being with God, is experienced.

The changing power of contemplation, mentioned by Traben Haas, Merton and Casey, is implicitly visible in the words from Noa, 'when I come home, I become a different person', and Rens, 'I get to know myself better'.

Contemplative Practices

Heuristically, several themes emerged that might provisionally be categorised as three sorts of practices. I elaborate on one story and two conversations from the interviews because they each illustrate a theme of contemplative practices from the pastors in this conversation. These are sensory and holistic practices or spiritual exercises that could lead to contemplation. In the contemplative tradition, spiritual exercises are an inseparable part of the contemplative path. I connect these practices with contemplative roots in history and identify connections with baptist theology or Baptist theologians.

Scriptural Contemplative Practices

As an example, I explore *Lectio Divina* because this came up in the conversation. Students are introduced to this practice in the module 'Spiritual Liturgical Formation' at the Dutch Baptist Seminary and learn to use it in sermon preparation. *Lectio Divina* seems to be the most accessible form of contemplative practice in Protestant Netherlands because it is closely linked to Scripture.

Creative Contemplative Practices

Noa spoke about taking pictures of God's creation as a contemplative practice. I will explore creativity and arts in contemplative practices. The focus is on visual arts and creativity, which is part of broader art and creative streams.

Bodily Contemplative Practices

Could the body with all its senses be a gateway to contemplation? This is hardly ever discussed or thought about among Baptists in the Netherlands, but at the same time, this theme was introduced as essential by one of the pastors.

Scriptural Contemplative Practices

As mentioned, all three pastors experienced *Lectio Divina*, one more as an individual, the others with groups or in sermon preparation. *Lectio Divina* is an ancient way of meditating on the Bible, which might lead to contemplation. *Lectio Divina* has four phases that can overlap. The first phase is *Lectio*, reading a Bible text, often a small section, and letting it sink in slowly. The second phase is *Meditatio*: pondering what is written; this can go in different directions, more exegetical or more ruminating and reflexive. The third phase is *Oratio*: prayer, bringing what you have received to God. The fourth phase is *Contemplatio*: being with God, beholding God. In the conversation, the pastors shared the following thoughts and questions about *Lectio Divina*.

Anne noted that 'as Baptists, we are communities of believers with a focus on communal hermeneutics. Something like *Lectio Divina* seems to be an individual activity where the experience is that people

are wary: Are we not interpreting God's words too much? Does this fit in a community of believers? Is it not too much of my own voice?' The pastors experienced that *Lectio Divina* with a group has a unifying effect, as Noa noted: 'Even if nothing happens, a lot happens. Sharing something personal can feed the whole group.'

Growling was mentioned at the beginning by one of the pastors as a way to contemplation. Eugene Peterson observes that the Hebrew word usually translated as meditation, also means growling, and connects this idea with Psalm 1: meditation is like a dog growling when chewing on a bone.[25] Noa commented, 'We are invited to do that. You are happy when you are engaged in the contemplation of God's Word. This is not an option; God's Word calls you to do so. Besides sound exegesis, this means feeling and experiencing, ruminating and growling, discovering a tough bone.' Rens observed that 'it is both tasting and enjoying the goodness of the Lord and connecting it to good exegesis; it also requires awe'. Anne stated, 'It is also holy, God's Word that is allowed to come to me, that I can wrestle with, but that also consistently has distance.' Rens stated, 'Precisely because the Word is alive and moving, it has great authority.'

Reflecting on this conversation, I see that the different phases and words around *Lectio Divina* are used interchangeably. I want to separate meditation from contemplation. In *Lectio Divina*, 'meditation' is used for meditating on the Word, as Peterson mentioned. Contemplation is the last phase of *Lectio Divina*, and needs to be considered more broadly in line with what has been discussed on contemplation above.

The Sources of *Lectio Divina* as Related to Practices

Lectio Divina is a prayerful formative practice. In meditating on a Bible text, this text enters the reader's life and shapes the reader. This reverse movement is essential to keep in mind: it is not an individualistic interpretation of a text; the reader chooses to question themselves. In

[25] Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), pp. 1–2.

this way, the question will be asked: how does the Word read or interpret our lives? Guigo the Carthusian (12th Century), writing in *Scala Claustralium* (The Ladder of Monks), puts it this way:

> Reading seeks for the sweetness of a blessed life, meditation perceives it, prayer asks for it, contemplation tastes it. Reading as it were, puts food whole in the mouth, meditation chews it and breaks it up, prayer extracts its flavor, contemplation itself is the sweetness which gladdens and refreshens.[26]

In the Benedictine tradition, before Guigo wrote his *Claustralium*, monks and nuns were encouraged to practise personal *lectio* as an integral part of their lives and vocation, reading a whole book part by part, day by day.[27] Casey explains that *Lectio Divina* is embedded in monastic theology in three ways. First, as mentioned before, *lectio* leads people in prayer, which leads to contemplation. Second, *lectio* is meant to be done in community as learners; this protects people against subjectivism. *Lectio*, which leads to contemplation and union with God, means that it leads to solidarity with humanity. And third that we need each other to understand the truth.[28]

With the Reformation, the Radical Reformation and the suspect status of sixteenth-century monasticism which then arose, *Lectio Divina* as a practice disappeared in the Protestant and Anabaptist traditions.[29] However, as I compare what Casey points out about *Lectio Divina* to the arguments made by James Wm McClendon in his book *Ethics* about communal hermeneutics of the Baptist Vision — 'This is that and then is now'[30]— I see a similarity.

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[26] Janet K. Ruffing, 'Meditation: Christian Perspectives', in *The Encyclopedia of Monasticism*, ed. by William M. Johnston (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2000), p. 849. *Scala Claustrarium* is considered to be the first structured description of *Lectio Divina* in Western spirituality.

[27] Casey, *Sacred Reading*, pp. 4–16.

[28] Casey, pp. 35–47.

[29] There is a lot more to say about this, also in a nuanced way, but it will transcend the theme of this article. For a more in depth treatment of this see Anglican scholar Greg Peters, *The Story of Monasticism: Retrieving an Ancient Tradition for Contemporary Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), chapter 12, 'The Reformers and Counter-reformers', pp. 205 ff. and chapter 13, 'Protestants and Monasticism after the Reformation', p. 224 ff.

[30] James William McClendon, Jr, *Ethics: Systematic Theology, Volume 1* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), pp. 30–34; especially p. 32.

> The Baptist 'is' in 'this is that' is therefore neither developmental nor successionist, but mystical and immediate; it might be better understood by the artist and poet than by the metaphysician or dogmatist.[31]

It is a stimulating question as to where the artists and poets in our churches are. But *Lectio Divina* provides space for these mystical and immediate experiences because it shapes space for a more holistic way of meditating on Scripture. It focuses on a relationship with God and teaches people to read Scripture with new eyes every time, precisely because the Word reads people.

As the pastors mentioned, *Lectio Divina* is mainly practised individually because it is part of their daily spiritual rhythm and sermon preparation. Subjectivity can be avoided in a community of learners. The questions about interpreting the Bible, such as whether people hear their own voice or God's voice, has everything to do with communal discernment. Do churches have a culture of reading and interpreting the Bible together? Can *Lectio Divina* not have its place in this culture?[32] If pastors practice *Lectio Divina* in their sermon preparation, how do they connect with that in their preaching? Traben Haas argues that in their sermon preparation, pastors stop in the stage of *meditatio*. How does this affect preaching itself? Is it not essential to make a mystagogical turn in preaching? I am glad that we stress the importance of *Lectio Divina* in the first phase of sermon preparation in the Dutch Baptist Seminary. But do our students learn to address the mystagogical turn in our preaching? And do they learn to read Scripture with and in community?

Creative Contemplative Practices

Two pastors shared a story about creative contemplative practices[33] or experiences. I will go deeper into one story. Noa offered the following

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[31] McClendon, *Ethics,* p. 32.

[32] Ingeborg Janssen-te Loo, *Shaping a Culture of Communal Discernment* (unpublished master's dissertation, IBTS Prague, 2014). On pp. 50–52, I reflect on the Baptist Vision related to communal discernment, and refer to examples of how *Lectio Divina* can help to read the Bible in community.

[33] Christine Valters Paintner writes about creative contemplative practices, for example in Paintner, *Eyes of the Heart: Photography as a Christian Contemplative Practice* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2013).

account: 'I like to go into nature and take pictures of landscapes, animals, in fact, everything from God's creation. The longer I do this, the more I notice moments of silence in it because sometimes you walk alone. In my mind, I am more and more with God. Then when I come home, I discover: hey, I have become a different person. That has to do with the pictures I have spoken about and things that do not need language but come to me in images. I love macro photography, magnifying the smallest things enormously, and in this, I see the miracle of God's creation. The macro image, things that at first glance seem to be hidden, have a whole world within them. But you have to look carefully.'

Reflection

In this story, the same path can be identified as in *Lectio Divina*: from reading, watching or listening, a meditative movement or posture arises that leads to stillness, wondering or *oratio* (prayer/response), and contemplating, standing on holy ground.

Baptist scholars Graham Sparkes and Richard Kidd write in *God and the Art of Seeing*[34] about arts and experience. They underline the experience of the pastors in our conversation:

> Western Christianity, it seems, has focused so strongly on words, creeds and doctrines that many Christians have forgotten that the visual image is the primary human experience – we 'look and see' long before we 'speak and hear with understanding'.[35]

Seeing and hearing are two of the sensory experiences next to touching, tasting, and smelling. They are a first step to a more embodied spirituality. All our senses connect us with everything which is around us. Sparkes writes a chapter, 'Imagine the Depths'[36] on the paintings of Georgia O'Keeffe, and he describes why she painted flowers. It 'is a

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[34] Richard Kidd and Graham Sparkes, *God and the Art of Seeing: Visual Resources for a Journey of Faith,* Regent's Study Guides, 11 (Oxford and Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2003). More recent articles from Kidd and Sparks about arts and theology can be found in the *Journal of European Baptist Studies,* 19, no. 2 (2019): 'The Art of Seeing' by Kidd, pp. 21–36, and 'Imagine the Infinite' by Sparks, pp. 37–50. They especially address why there is a long-time disconnection between arts and faith and how there needs to be a way forward.

[35] Kidd and Sparkes, 'Preview: Before entering the gallery', in *God and the Art of Seeing,* p. ix.

[36] Kidd and Sparkes, *God and the Art of Seeing*, chapter 4.

spirituality rooted in a loving attention to detail and that leads to an encounter with a deeper reality'.[37] This is what Noa experienced in macro photography; this is a description of contemplation. Creating art, attentive looking at art or nature in its greatness and details, can lead to stillness, even contemplation. 'This commitment to careful and loving attention demands effort and is one that Christian mystics and theologians have often spoken of as the heart of our search for God.'[38]

Even more than *Lectio Divina*, which could lead to an apophatic experience, people experience creative contemplative practices even more as apophatic[39] because no words are used. Ultimately even images are limited, and silence takes over.

Bodily Contemplative Practices

Anne introduced the theme of embodiment[40] and sensing in a bodily way. On the one hand, there was a personal experience of tension during the covid-19 situation due to all the pressure and the desire to feel peace in the body. On the other, the understanding was shared that much of what has to do with bodily contemplation is associated with Eastern religions. Can embodiment simply be linked to contemplation?

In conversations in church, this also comes up, for example, in discussions about mindfulness. Rens shared this: 'Some people work with mindfulness in their jobs. Others ask the question whether practising mindfulness is allowed. Aren't you then treading on territory that is prohibited from a biblical point of view? Simultaneously, it is mainly about being attentive; the Christian tradition has good credentials in this area. It does not have to be connected to other traditions. It is not strange that other traditions have it. At the same time,

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[37] Kidd and Sparkes, *God and the Art of Seeing*, p. 122.
[38] Kidd and Sparkes, *God and the Art of Seeing*, p. 123.
[39] Paul S. Fiddes, Brian Haymes, and Richard L. Kidd, *Communion, Covenant, and Creativity: An Approach to the Communion of Saints through the Arts* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020), p. 63.
[40] I use both the words embodiment and bodily. At the Dutch Baptist Seminary, we learn a lot about embodiment in the sense of people as embodied beings. This has mainly a relational or outward focus, as McClendon addresses in *Ethics*, pp. 85–86, or is related to self-awareness and reflexivity, but it is less focused on our own bodily experiences or awareness.

contemplation is a sensory experience that comes into me that I can feel in my body. I feel it, a deep happiness experience, and sometimes it is mixed with pain because it has something to do with the painful side of life. It is really in me, in my body, and my body is me. That connection is robust. Contemplation moves away from us, towards God, towards Christ. In that movement, we come closer to ourselves, from God to us. Entering God's love also creates space to face my own wounds, sorrows, shortcomings. Contemplation is going through suffering and letting it pass through me.'

Anne asked: 'To what extent can we as a church make room for embodiment, for breath, for being grounded? In church, we are so focused on being filled, while sometimes I long for rest or nothing, or is this too empty? Is there room for the earthly, for finding rest in my body and my mind? Is this our area?' Anne spoke further: 'Meditative prayer requires a different attitude than a speaking attitude. To believe with spirit, soul and body requires space for physicality. The metaphor of breath, of the Spirit, God's breath, can help us in this way. Here lies a treasure of richness that we have much to offer, especially in these times.'

Reflection

> *Six days before Passover, Jesus entered Bethany where Lazarus, so recently raised from the dead, was living. Lazarus and his sisters invited Jesus to dinner at their home. Martha served. Lazarus was one of those sitting at the table with them.*
>
> *Mary came in with a jar of very expensive aromatic oils, anointed and massaged Jesus' feet, and then wiped them with her hair. The fragrance of the oils filled the house. (John 12:1–3, The Message)*

In John 12, we read a story of embodied contemplation. All the senses of touch, smell, and taste are in these three verses. Without words, Mary anointed and massaged the feet of Jesus, was it *meditatio*, *oratio* or *contemplatio*? Maybe it was all three in one. Mary did disturb the people around; if we were around, I presume that it would disturb us as well. Is it too intimate, too vulnerable, too physical? If I reflect on the conversation between the pastors, I see the questions about, and embarrassment with, bodily contemplation. There is a long story of

dualism in the Western Christian tradition. As McClendon and Murphy explain in *Ethics* and *Witness*, our bodies have been treated as enemies of the spirit because of a misperception of *sarx* (flesh).[41] Baptist scholar Brian Haymes argues against dualism and emphasises embodiment because we live in an embodied relationship with the triune God.[42] McClendon highlights that 'at the Lord's table we feed body and soul alike and at once'.[43] Anglican scholar Sarah Coakley argues for a 'théologie totale', which

> puts contemplation at its heart, but spirals out to acknowledge the complexity of the entanglement of the secular and spiritual realms for those who dare to practise it. For there is no escape from such messy entanglement. Théologie totale […] insists on the sweated-out significance of embodied (and thus gendered, and socially located) contemplation, not mere verbal play or abstract thought.[44]

In this way, Coakley shapes embodied contemplation more broadly. She connects it with daily life or 'action'. However, the question remains whether Haymes and Coakley connect embodied contemplation to bodily practices, as was discussed by the pastors. The protestant theologian Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel writes that a theology of embodiment calls for awareness of the human body as a spirited body. A turn to embodiment reminds us that God has become flesh and bones and has thereby affirmed and sanctified the embodiment of us all.[45] With this, she makes a closer connection to contemplative bodily practices. If our bodies are affirmed and sanctified by God, if we live and breathe in Christ and Christ lives and breathes in us, it means that our whole body is involved. So, if we are used to

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41 McClendon, p. 85 ff. Nancey Murphy in James Wm McClendon Jr, *Witness: Systematic Theology, Volume 3* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), p. 124 ff.

42 Fiddes, Haymes, and Kidd, *Communion, Covenant, and Creativity*, pp. 130–31.

43 McClendon, *Ethics,* p. 95.

44 Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 59.

45 Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *Mein Kőrper bin Ich, Neue Wege zur Leiblichkeit* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus, 1994), pp.132–135. The English translation does not stress the human body as 'beseelten Kőrper', and translates 'geheiligt' or sanctified with 'healed'. Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *I Am My Body: A Theology of Embodiment* (London: SCM Press, 1994), pp. 103–105.

reading with our eyes, listening with our ears, and thinking with our minds, why not use our whole body in this? Especially breathing and body awareness exercises could be a start of a pathway to *meditatio*, *oratio* and *contemplatio*.[46]

My first training was in physical therapy; I specialised in psychosomatic, relaxation and breathing therapy. My experience was that people became more inward-focused and closer to themselves if I started a session with breathing exercises. For years, working as a theologian, I did not do anything with it. In these latter years, I have connected it with contemplative practices. When I guide a *Lectio Divina* group or start with a contemplative practice in spiritual direction, I begin with lighting a candle symbolising that Christ is in our midst, and then with a short breathing exercise to focus on his presence. When I guide walks in silence — an embodied experience — I often take the time for meditation, sometimes with body and breathing exercises, other times with a poem. Often, I hear people commenting that they are so used to connecting spirituality to their minds, not to their bodies. I hope that we can create a safe space in churches where an embodied spirituality can transform the lives of people to live and breathe in Christ.

Conclusion

In this article, I started to examine a few contemplative practices used by Dutch Baptist pastors and explored different perspectives on contemplation, concluding that contemplation is actually more than a discipline; it is about inner transformation and the beholding of the face of God. I identified three sorts of practices: scriptural contemplative practices, creative contemplative practices, and bodily contemplative practices. Scriptural contemplative practices such as *Lectio Divina* are reasonably well-known. I contend that although *Lectio Divina* is not a part of our baptist heritage, it fits within the broader idea of the Baptist Vision, and conclude the discussion on that particular theme with questions about how we can embed *Lectio Divina* in our sermon preparation to affect the mystagogical turn in preaching. The Reformed

[46] Christine Valters Paintner, *The Wisdom of the Body: A Contemplative Journey to Wholeness for Women* (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2017), pp. 33–51.

pastor Jos Douma writes about this extensively in the popularised version of his doctoral thesis 'Veni Creator Spiritus'.[47] Creative contemplative practices happen more unconsciously, and in the conversation between the pastors, it came to the fore. It is interesting to see a good connection to the theologies on the arts from Haymes, Kidd and Sparks. This opened a perspective on the apophatic way in contemplation, which could deepen our spiritual lives. Bodily contemplative practices are a more sensitive area. McClendon and Murphy have written extensively about embodied theology, both connected to outwardness and inwardness. From there, I sought to extend this to bodily contemplative practices in which all our senses are involved. I realise that this is a small step, and that more thorough research is needed on such bodily contemplative practices.

A kataphatic spirituality in which truth and revelation are essential is known ground for Dutch Baptists. Contemplative spirituality opens up a way for apophatic spirituality that we, as Dutch Baptists, are less familiar with. McClendon invites us to open ourselves up with the *is* in 'this is that' for a mystical and immediate perspective as a way of interpretation.[48]

> Perhaps great mystics have always recognised that the two [apophatic and kataphatic] need to be held together in mutual tension, the one enriching the other. Our sense that God cannot ultimately be known has to be balanced with our belief that something can be known of the God revealed in creation. Our embodied humanity means that we cannot avoid the use of images, this must be balanced against a recognition that God cannot be reduced to any one image. Both apophatic and cataphatic traditions say something important about the spiritual journey.[49]

Is it a balance that might want to be kept securely, or is it more of a paradox that enriches life? I presume the latter. Openness to the apophatic way in contemplation could teach us to deepen spiritual lives and help us to learn to live with uncertainties.

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[47] Jochem Rein (Jos) Douma, *Veni Creator Spiritus: de meditatie en het preekproces* (Kampen: Kok, 2000).

[48] McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 32.

[49] Fiddes, Haymes and Kidd, *Communion,* p. 144. It is beyond this article to elaborate on the apophatic tradition; for more on this see Fiddes, Haymes and Kidd, pp. 147–149.

Academic Community and the Life of the Mind

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Introduction

The leading question in this closing article is whether from previous contributions a 'state of the art' of contemporary Dutch Baptist academic theology can be distilled. In order to come to a conclusive suggestion, first a recapitulation will be given of the articles that have been presented to collect what can be derived from their content and aims. Prima facie, the foremost interest of Dutch Baptist academic work is with history and primary theology (experiential theology). Its basic concern is with the bi-focal balance between primary theology, the church as the laboratory of theology on the one hand, and the chronicles of these churches on the other. In particular, the Baptist Seminary functions as a counterbalance in reaching equilibrium by invoking and stimulating the qualities of inquisitiveness, sense-making, and above all interpretive leadership.

A Learning Community in Progress, by Henk Bakker

This article offers an overview of the academic theological programme of the Dutch Baptist Seminary throughout the last decade. This overview shows a major concern for a deeply rooted attitude of isolation from and suspicion within the Dutch Baptist movement towards the broad catholic Christian tradition.

In the OKBI programme on Baptist identity, the concern with this so-called flipside of a strong identity and a likewise strong self-understanding of being a discerning community, appears to be a direct object of study. This programme pays attention to Baptist ecclesiology, which lacks self-consciousness and discourse, as the church connects with the reality of its place within a post-Christendom epoch: a church in diaspora, on the margins of power.

The topic of leadership particularly comes to the fore. What kind of leadership is requested from those who are supposed to lead the Baptist community in a different, that is a more open, direction in order to prevent it from further alienation and isolation from the world? In this article this type of leadership is expressed through the term 'interpretative leadership', meaning the ability to make sense of the contemporary world in relation to the Biblical text, with skills to do theology well.

In addition, the Seminary, and especially the James Wm McClendon Chair, makes efforts to open the Baptist view towards the merits of Christian faith in other traditions by partaking in several inquiry programmes that seek interdisciplinary, interdenominational, and even interreligious collaboration. Its aim is to exhort academic inquisitiveness, to take the freedom to explore with an open mind what church history and ancient theological debate has to offer to the (Baptist) church today. The retrieval of sources in the past beyond the birth of the Baptist movement is one of the key tools for making theology enriching for today.

The conclusion of this article breathes the hope that the academic success in surpassing the borders of 'cocooning and forgetting about the vocation for unity and catholicity' will result in a different educational atmosphere for future pastors, and in their slipstream subsequently in the local communities, turning them into the learning communities that Baptists want (or claim) them to be.

Dutch Baptist Identity (1845–2021): A Multi-Coloured Robe, by Teun van der Leer and Arjen Stellingwerf

Taking the concept of Baptist identity as a historical phenomenon, this article aims to discern between the different colours of the Dutch Baptist identity in its specific historical context, showing how diversity, changeability, and variety go along with the maintenance of its fundamental identity markers. The latter being an ordered local community as *the* crystallisation of being church, independence of local churches, combined with supra-local connectedness with sister-churches, and a passion for revival and evangelism.

The article separates four epochs, which had their own historical contexts with which the Baptist movement had to negotiate in going through its process of identity construction. In this process, the swinging back and forth between 'movement' on the one hand and 'institution' on the other comes alternately to the foreground. In the description of the different epochs, typical aspects of Dutch society become also aspects of Dutch Baptist life, such as the development of a Baptist pillar, be it on a more moderate scale than the mainstream Christian traditions. Negotiation with developments in Dutch society could also bring tensions that deeply challenged the unity in diversity of the Baptist Union, as happened, for instance, in the emancipatory aims of the Baptist Seminary in seeking collaboration with and acknowledgement by the academic world.

The last and still ongoing epoch, however, shows how both the Union of Baptist communities and the Seminary did manage to uphold their connection, while in the meantime the academic ambitions of the Seminary did not decline. To the contrary, there is a broadening of academic horizon going on, but along with an effort to strengthen the relationship between academic staff, union staff, and communities. This changed the way of doing theology from 'learned theology' to 'lived theology', with the community as its 'laboratory'.

This article concludes with the trustful declaration that pluralism and fluidity increasingly will become the future shape of Baptist identity, but without the loss of its typical Baptist colours, being 'a combination

of a certain self-evident Reformed orthodoxy, seasoned with a strong evangelical flavour, and a growing ecumenical curiosity and openness'.

Investigations into the Logistics of Ignatius's Itinerary, by Vincent van Altena

This next article presents an investigation into the surrounding historical and geographical context of the letters of Ignatius, a well-known bishop and believed martyr of the early church. The idea behind this investigation is to gain more insight into the quality of the social relationships between Ignatius and representatives of the churches that became involved in his itinerary as a prisoner.

The context that should enlighten these relationships contains the specific modes and possibilities of travelling over long distances within the Roman Empire of the first century as well as its limitations and perils; and besides that, the adjacent means of communication. The article offers a reconstruction of the journey combined with historical data of contacts between Ignatius and representatives of local churches.

The findings of this investigation highlight the dire necessity of the support given by local communities, because of the harsh conditions of travelling while being captured. Second, they show the extremity of the efforts that were made by those who supported Ignatius, in terms of the long distances they travelled themselves to meet and accompany him as their fellow believer. Finally, they stress the high motivation and naturalness of this kind of support as obviously intrinsic to being a Christian community. This gives the reader a compelling impression of the early church.

Rooting Our Systematic Theologies: The Moral Dimension of a Theology of Retrieval, by Jan Martijn Abrahamse

This article discusses the merits and perils of 'theologies of retrieval' by taking James McClendon's treatment of the Schleitheim confession as an example. Theologies of retrieval aim to rehabilitate the historical character of Christianity by making the effort to re-investigate ancient texts and bring them into current theological debate. By doing so,

theologians endeavour to overcome the post-Enlightenment bias that treats pre-Enlightenment sources with the prejudice of critical science. While giving theologies of retrieval their credit, this article presents a warning against a too naive approach to historical narratives. This naivety can come across in two ways. First, it might neglect the fact that historical sources themselves are not free from interpretation. Second, it might overlook the theologian's position, which is not neutral, while approaching the historical text.

In presenting the Schleitheim confession as a historical turning point, namely a restoration of pre-Constantinian Christianity, wrongly overshadowed by the Münster tragedy, McClendon overlooks the normative character of the writings he uses, as well as his own theological agenda, which deprives him from distance to the historical text.

In conclusion this article makes a plea for precaution in treating historical texts in order to bring them into theological debate. It is only when we treat the text as an 'actual other' that we really bring another voice from the past into the current discourse. This asks for 'solid research' of the historical sources and 'reluctance' towards overly grand claims.

Doing Theology Together in a 'Baptist Way'? An Evaluation of the Potential of Curriculum-Embedded Collaborative Research Projects, by Hans Riphagen

This article presents an educational experiment, conducted as a collaboration between first-year Baptist Seminary students, regional coordinators and a number of local churches. This experiment, doing collaborative research as part of a first-year course, was motivated by the aim of the 'valorisation' of education (its relevancy or value for communal life), which intends to prepare students for an ordained ministry in local Baptist churches.

The evaluation of this experiment provided several interesting and promising insights. The theoretical expectations of this experiment were not lived up to. The limits in time and the limited level of knowledge of the first-year students did not give enough input for

theoretical depth. Future experiments require a lower expectation as well as more precise preparation of measures, methods and goals.

Positively, the performative dimension of collaboration with the field of practice has proved its capacity to offer learning possibilities. The encounter between students and church members creates a space where the unexpected happens, which requires several skills to be learnt, such as attentiveness, and interpretative flexibility. Skills that can be viewed as highly relevant for contemporary leaders and theologians.

Growing Grey and Growing Green: Re-narrating Ageing in Baptist Churches in the Netherlands, by Wout Huizing and Hans Riphagen

This article problematises the apparent conformism of Baptist churches to the dominant discourse in the Netherlands concerning old age. Being old is continuously depicted as a problem and is supposed to be a frightening prospect, from the medical as well as the economic or societal perspective.

In 2013, earlier research about the perception of ageing in churches was published in the journal *Baptisten.nu*. This publication provoked discussion and questions to the extent that demanded a follow-up research programme.

The report of the latter research shows how theological reflection on church practices brings about a new and moreover a corrective Scripture-based discourse. Besides that, the decision to conduct this research in collaboration with the church communities involved in the matter (churches with a relatively high average age) appeared to be highly effective in bringing about new thought and insight within the place where it belongs: the church.

The article ends with the remark that a certain courage is needed to enter into a real encounter with the object of research, because its concreteness mirrors the life of the researcher too, with all the questions and fears that come along with it.

A Conversation About Contemplative Practices, by Ingeborg te Loo

The article that closes the sequence shows a theological debate in its very preliminary stage. It starts a conversation in response to the observation that the Baptist movement in its historical development seems to have missed elements that have made the broad Christian tradition as rich as it is. The topic of this conversation is the contemplative dimension of faith.

The proposition of the article is that in Baptist faith practices contemplation rarely occurs, while in the meantime in the surrounding secular world the longing for mindfulness, silence, seclusion from the pressures of daily life increases.

The conversation was held with a small focus group of Baptist pastors, who have personal experience with contemplation due to their denominational background or otherwise. It sought to find connections and obstacles between the apophatic (speechless) make-up of the contemplative dimension of faith and the cataphatic (linguistic) characteristics of Baptist faith.

In reviewing the results of the conversation, the article makes the suggestion for more openness towards both (apophatic and cataphatic) dimensions, in order to enrich and deepen spiritual life.

Reflections and Implications

The historical overview by Teun van der Leer and Arjen Stellingwerf shows a paramount and powerful aspect of the Dutch Baptist movement, namely its capacity to maintain a strong connection between church and academy.

The academic programme resulting from the McClendon Chair at the Vrije Universiteit (VU), being an opportunity to develop a particularised Baptist way of doing theology, has brought this capacity to an even higher level. The articles in this volume can be seen as a result of this development.

Throughout the broad Western Christian tradition, it has turned out to be far from easy to keep the relationship between folk or grassroots believers, church cleric, and academic theology. Many Roman Catholic or Reformed theologians were repudiated or even expelled for their findings, or themselves gradually became alienated from their own church and faith. The free churches have always struggled with tendencies of anti-intellectualism in their process of self-understanding and self-positioning against the mainstream traditions. Among many of these churches, to study academic theology is still seen as equal to losing (the right) faith. From this point of view, the state of the art of Dutch Baptist theology — while belonging to the category of free churches — as it presents itself in this volume, must be valued as a great achievement. Not in the least because in its own environment anti-intellectual voices are heard as well.

With the recognition and appreciation of James McClendon's theological magnum opus in the Netherlands through the installation of the McClendon Chair at the originally Reformed VU University, the Baptist academic world has found a theological playground for its existence and roots. And of course, what is more exciting from an academic point of view than to have fundamental findings of your own to bring into debate with others? And what else can give a Baptist seminary such a firm boost to develop methods for sound and solid education for its future leadership and to endorse love for research among local pastors and even whole communities? This excitement is vibrant in most of the articles presented here.

And yet, besides the enthusiastic approval described above of what Baptist theology in the Netherlands is capable of, there is a main point of reservation and even criticism to bring up for further reflection and debate as well.

Namely, the desire for having a way of doing theology of one's own, the *Baptist* way of doing theology in this respect, creates in itself vulnerability to attitudes of superiority and separatism within the academic realm. In Henk Bakker's description of the inventory by current theologians of worrying aspects within the Baptist movement, it is shown that in the grassroots of the movement this inclination to being discerning and different is already there, deep down in its DNA,

depicted as an existence in 'splendid isolation'. The generally presupposed *dialectic* dynamic between church life and academic theology suggests that the latter would have a corrective influence towards the former in order to prevent it from a gradual turning into isolation. But what happens when the academic theology itself is in a process of discernment from the way of doing theology by other Christian traditions?

It might mean as a consequence that the relationship between church and academy becomes *too* narrow, which, rather than enabling a powerful dialectic dynamic between the two, could become harmful to it. Two examples from the articles might be helpful to unpack this thought.

The three main characteristics of the Baptist way of doing theology as proposed by McClendon are a focus on lived theology, a strong ecclesiastic orientation, and a hermeneutic narrative perspective. This has led to two striking typologies: the idea of the church as *laboratory*, and the strong policy to achieve *valorisation* of the academic work.

Several articles mention the 'church as laboratory' as the main point of departure for Baptist theology. No matter how valuable the vision that theology should start from the midst of church life, the strong normative power that comes from the ideal concept of lived faith, communal convictions and narratives might prevent theological reflection from uneasy observations and questions. Ingeborg te Loo's article on contemplation shows to the contrary that uneasy observations and questions are at the very heart of theological debate. The question is how to find these observations without taking other Christian traditions into account from the beginning, as this article does. The typology of the Baptist community as laboratory carries the pitfall of limiting the operative field with a lens of *ownness*: one's own narratives, one's own practices, one's own convictions as topics for doing theology.

It is certainly a strength of the Baptist Seminary to strive to achieve relevancy for the Baptist field. In this respect, 'valorisation' of the academic work and along with it the educational curriculum cannot be criticised as such. However, in the context of the dialectic dynamic

between theology and church, there is a downside. It is true that theology always must be connected to contemporary reality if it wishes to reach the heart of Christianity. But is it also true that it must always be relevant to the contemporary church? Should theology and academy not also be bothersome, even an annoying opposite, for the church? The article on ageing churches by Wout Huizing and Hans Riphagen is not annoying by tone, but it raises a bothering question: who do our churches follow in their opinion about growing old, God in his revelation or the surrounding western liberal world?

Following up on this, two articles in the volume deserve further discussion because they show the value of moving away from the pivotal dynamic between contemporary Baptist church practices and the academy. The article by Jan Martijn Abrahamse dives into the merits and pitfalls of theologies of retrieval, an approach that aims to involve other voices, in this case from the past, in contemporary theological debate. A daring approach, that is able to bring refreshment, change and modesty in theological views and standpoints. The article by Vincent van Altena is a shining example of a theology of retrieval. Facing the very detailed whereabouts of an old bishop and martyr in the first century, an uneasy distance arises between the contemporary reader and the text, a tension that wants to be solved by interpretation and explanation to the world of today. But the article does no such thing. It leaves us with the uneasiness and otherness. Jan Martijn Abrahamse argues the necessity of this pause of distance and uneasiness in the process of theologies of retrieval. If texts of ancient times are too easily placed in service of a particularised theological agenda, this approach loses its corrective power and becomes a danger instead.

Hence, the Dutch Baptist Seminary has to take care of the 'life of the mind', as has been thematised by Mark Noll in his remarkable book *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind* (2011). Seventeen years before, Noll had published *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (1994), a book in which he, quite negatively, points to the neglect or one-sidedness of evangelical institutions and denominations in being conversant with the world of science and research. The overall picture is that evangelicalism suffers from long-lasting intellectual hypoxia, which is endemic in terms of the systems of mind-control operative within the greater part of the

evangelical world. However, in his book on the life of the mind, Noll demonstrates how in particular the life of Christ, the very incarnation of the Word, invites Christians to study reality as it is ('come and see'), and to use the faculty of the mind to the full.[1] Knowing Christ is not restrictive of the life of the mind, on the contrary, living with Christ in an academic learning community should breathe oxygen into its appetite for sense-making and conducting solid research.

From here, the Seminary, as a baptistic-evangelical institution, can justifiably take an ecclesiocentric approach, as Stanley Grenz suggests, but only so by renewing its centre as it opens its horizons to other denominations and ecclesial strands, so within its historical and theological interrelatedness with the worldwide church whenever and wherever.[2] The church, and the academy of service to the church, is not pre-committed to a God who estranges himself from the hurts and hoaxes of life, and who distracts and separates his followers accordingly, because life is not a hoax. By no means should a seminary let itself be confined or restricted to study merely internal voices. There is no truth in isolation. Any Christian seminary living up to its name should always (1) approach reality, despite its complexities and delusions, as one reality, (2) consider the world to be God's, and henceforth as a world grounded on truth, (3) be committed to the premise that every truth is God's, that no truth is forbidden, and that (4) the Triune God allows for truth being explored and debated by different people, even wide varieties of people, because God created humanity in God's image, which is irreversibly relational and social.[3]

Finally, with regard to the state of the art of academic work generated by the Dutch Baptist Seminary, and the concomitant query into its potential own 'habitus', or as we might call it 'proprium' or finger-prints, the answer must be that legacies never lie, because, in a

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[1] Mark Noll, *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), p. 38: 'The *personality* of the incarnation justifies the study of human personality.' See also pp. 46, 83, 121.

[2] Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), pp. 287–324, 336–351.

[3] See Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei,* The Matrix of Christian Theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), pp. 98–137, and *The Named God and the Question of Being: A Trinitarian Theo-Ontology,* The Matrix of Christian Theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), pp. 342–373.

long run, history will tell. At this moment it would be too hazardous an effort, and all too presumptuous, to attempt even an educated guess, and perhaps better to keep to simple (and scant) impressions. In light of the initial remarks made in this final paragraph, the state of the art of Dutch Baptist academic work should be depicted as lacking proper coherent vision on the early Christian confession of *una, sancta, catholica et apostolica ecclesia*.[4] Yet, it is a strange fact of life, a paradox of church life, to see Baptists who wholeheartedly espouse and recognise the authority of early Christian texts and most of the confessions the early fathers were committed to, believe and behave as if these church fathers were wrong in their struggle for unity and catholicity.[5]

For example, James Leo Garrett, in his *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study,* offers a broad survey of the history and dynamics of Baptist Theologies, however, the book does not start as a 'four century study' (1600–2000), because the very first paragraph is on 'the Councils, the Creeds, and the Fathers'. After all, even though Baptists consider themselves more as Bible-believing people than creedal people, they owe much to the early creeds, the early Latin Fathers, and the testimonies of early Christians that survived times of suppression.[6] It seems that in doing theology Baptists have the inclination of cherry-picking. For example, in discussions on the Trinity, or on Jesus's divinity, Baptists use the church fathers, but on unity and catholicity they dispose of them, because their associations with the early Roman Catholic Church seem all too obvious. This is bad science, or to use some of Noll's wording: this is a scandal of the Baptist mind.

Nevertheless, on the positive side, it can be stated that the qualities of inquisitiveness and sense-making, with a focus on interpretive leadership, do pay off at the Dutch Baptist Seminary. The

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[4] H. Denzinger and A. Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum,* 36th ed. (Rome: Herder, 1976), §150: (Greek) *mian hagian katholikèn kai apostolikèn ekklèsian* (Symbolum Constantinopolitanum).

[5] See Steven R. Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future: Story, Tradition, and the Recovery of Community* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016), pp. 55–132, and *Towards Baptist Catholicity: Essays on Tradition and the Baptist Vision,* Studies in Baptist History and Thought, 27 (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), pp. 70–128, 151–177.

[6] James Leo Garrett, *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2009), pp. 1–5.

bi-focal disposition (history/texts and practices/beliefs) gradually materialise into a shared awareness of a 'life of the mind' oriented toward critical hermeneutical self-understanding, inasmuch as identity, communally and personally, is a construction of how people grasp themselves in light of the interplay between their history and texts, and their practices and beliefs. The Dutch Baptist Seminary critically evaluates how Baptist communities and individuals, throughout history, comprehend themselves, and in doing so studies their texts and history, their beliefs and practices, together with Scripture. Moreover, its steely resolve is to deem this an interdisciplinary as well as a catholic enterprise, so as to truly esteem and extend the 'life of the mind'.

In sum, in their well-earned joyful self-esteem, granted by the academic invitation to develop a Baptist way of doing theology, the Seminary and its theologians meanwhile do face a major challenge if they wish to overcome the inner inclination to self-isolation from the broad Christian tradition and the surrounding world. It needs more openness towards external voices, such as the past, the pluralistic Christian tradition, other scientific disciplines, and the surrounding world. The rich diversity of the articles presented and the critical voices allowed therein, gives hope for the capacity to do so.

And since the Baptist community is becoming more and more pluralistic in terms of cultural and ecclesial background, its theology in the future will need more than ever the ability to hold positions of tension. Only a theological environment that is multi-layered, with on the one hand a firm practical discipline, close to the church, and on the other hand a more fundamental discipline that is able to involve all the necessary otherness and uneasiness will have enough bridging force.

Book Reviews

Andy Goodliff, *Renewing a Modern Denomination: A Study of Baptist Institutional Life in the 1990s* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021), 252 pages. ISBN: 9781725279827.

Reviewed by Helen Dare

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In *Renewing a Modern Denomination*, the publication of his doctoral research, Andy Goodliff tells the story of a decade in the institutional life of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB). He does so through a careful examination and analysis of sources from a critical time in the denomination's history, as it undertook a period of listening, review, and consultation. Goodliff's account identifies and explores two streams in evidence during that time: 'denominational renewal' and 'theological renewal'. The former was concerned with the future of the church and the restructuring of the Union for mission, and the latter with an emphasis on the need for the denomination to reflect more theologically on its nature and purpose.

The book tells the story of the 1990s, which Goodliff does in the first two chapters, as he introduces the personalities, context, and streams within the denomination that are the focus of his work. These streams are presented in greater detail in the next four chapters. Chapter three explores the way the different streams engaged with tradition, while chapter four analyses in detail the two key concepts of mission and covenant. Chapters five and six are concerned with ecumenism and the operation of the Union in Superintendency and Association, both of which generated considerable difference of opinion within the denomination. Finally, Goodliff concludes in chapter seven with the identification of tensions during the period concerning the identity of the Union, the relationship between Associations and the Union, and the role of theology versus pragmatism.

The coverage of primary sources, both published and unpublished, is extensive and the bibliography alone would be useful to anyone researching British Baptist life and practice today. From a potentially bewildering amount of material and names, Goodliff presents a clear and engaging account of the time. His argument is always in focus, but the reader unfamiliar with the time and personalities is helped by the addition of biographical footnotes. Clarity is created by the early identification of a structure (the two streams) with which to assess the period, which is further distilled in the detailed examination of the work of the primary representatives of the streams, such as Paul Fiddes and Nigel Wright. Goodliff, however, resists the temptation of oversimplification and demonstrates that the concerns of the different streams were not mutually exclusive, but a matter of emphasis.

This book is a welcome addition to the growing collection of volumes reflecting critically on British Baptist theology and practice. The decade considered is within recent memory for many, and it may be that, as time passes, more themes and critical questions will emerge from this period. However, Goodliff's work raises a rich set of questions for the current leaders and theologians of the denomination to consider. As a minister in both the BUGB and the Baptist Union of Wales, I believe that this book should also be widely read by those in other Unions, as it offers a helpful prism through which we could assess our own denominational practice in context.

Erich Geldbach, ed., *Baptisten weltweit: Ursprünge, Entwicklungen, Theologische Identitäten*, Die Kirchen der Gegenwart, Vol. 7, Heft 118 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2021), 475 pages. ISBN: 9783525565001.

Reviewed by Uwe Swarat

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Professor Emeritus Erich Geldbach (born 1939), an outstanding Baptist theologian from Germany with a prominent and long-time involvement

in ecumenical theology, serving in commissions of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) for decades, has edited an omnibus volume on *Baptisten weltweit* (Baptists around the World). The volume includes no fewer than 30 essays written by 32 authors with a total extent of 475 pages. Apart from Geldbach's own essay (on the first hundred years of the BWA), probably all contributions were not written in German but have been translated. The collection is part of the series 'Die Kirchen der Gegenwart' (The Contemporary Churches), published in German by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht in Göttingen. The subtitle of Geldbach's volume means in English: Origins, Developments, Theological Identities.

The 30 essays are grouped in five chapters: origin and development of the Baptist movement; Baptist missionary efforts; Baptist doctrines; Baptist women; Baptists in all continents. The last chapter is the largest: it includes two essays on the BWA; four on North America; three on Latin America; three on Africa; three on Europe; and four on Asia (including Australia and New Zealand).

Because I am mostly interested in Baptist doctrines, I would like to draw the readers' special attention to Steven R. Harmon's text on 'Das kirchliche Amt' (Ministry in the Church). He bases the ministry in the church on the threefold ministry of Jesus Christ as prophet, priest, and king. Christ's ministry as king is communicated to all believers as the ministry of oversight (*episcopé*). This ministry is exercised communally as well as personally, locally as well as trans-locally. Nearly everything in this essay meets with my approval — including the sentence that Baptist churches are not only independent, but interdependent too. However, what Harmon depicts as Baptist practice, is in two points not true for Baptists in Germany: our local churches have the threefold ministry of pastor, elders, and deacons and not the twofold ministry of pastor and deacons that Harmon considers as a typically Baptist order. And ordination is among German Baptists the prerogative of the Union, not of the local church.

Baptists who cannot speak German may be unhappy that this broad presentation of Baptists around the world is published in this language. But I can comfort them: Geldbach told me that an English

version is in preparation (by Wipf and Stock Publishers). Baptists in German-speaking countries may be unhappy that this collection, published in the German language through a German publishing house, does not include any essay on Baptists in Germany. Unfortunately, I have no real consolation for them. They must be content that the German-speaking audience will learn a lot about the Baptists outside of Central Europe. It is to be hoped that readers with a non-Baptist background will not be given the notion that Baptists in German-speaking countries are a negligible group — even in their own eyes.

Beth Allison Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women became Gospel Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2021), 256 pages. ISBN: 9781587435348.

Reviewed by Laura Dijkhuizen

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'A biblical Woman is a submissive woman. This was my world for more than forty years. Until, one day, it wasn't.' (p. 2)

Professor Dr Beth Allison Barr specialises in the history of women in Europe, medieval and early modern England, and church history. Besides lecturing and supervising students in universities, she was a youth minister alongside her husband. He was a pastor in a Southern Baptist Church until he was fired over Beth's 'not staying silent' (pp. 4–10) anymore regarding her view on complementarianism.

Although the occasion to write this book might be the loss of the job, the ministry, a church family, and a life she knew, it is not the motive. Barr has been teaching about women in church history for a long time and her motive is to remind her evangelical students who were mostly brought up in complementarian homes, of their historical heritage in which women have always played a significant role.

Barr challenges the claim of complementarianism as an important identity marker of 'being a biblical church'. Through the lens of history, starting at the Roman time giving context to Paul's writing about men and women, she unfolds the history of Christians throughout the ages. She reveals that societal changes have an important impact on church life and affect the way we interpret Scripture. This contrasts strongly with the contemporary teachings of 'Biblical Man- and Womanhood' in which different gender roles are brought forth as coming from biblical passages and in that matter have their origin in God's perfect creation.

According to Barr, the way complementarianism is constructed is in contrast with the gospel and is contrary to good news for all creation. So how could this way of framing biblical womanhood become gospel truth?

While I thought I knew all the arguments for and against women in leadership, Barr opens a history I was not aware of, and I expect many European evangelicals are similar to me. The way she includes personal experiences, both in her family and in her professional environment as a university lecturer, enriches the book and connects with the challenges people (men and women) face within complementarian churches nowadays. In this way it resonates with my personal story and made me realise that the evangelical church and organisation I attended during the 1980s/90s, was very much influenced by leaders of the Southern Baptists in the United States of America. Reading this book was both a confronting as well as a healing experience for me and, as Twitter shows, for many others too. I highly recommend this book.

Darren Carlson, *Christianity and Conversion Among Migrants: Moving Faith and Faith Movement in a Transit Area* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 308 pages. ISBN: 9789004443440.

Reviewed by Will Cumbia

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As the migrant crisis continues to unfold across Europe, the make-up and faith expression of the Church in Europe changes along with it. While many studies have examined the church practices and faith expressions of migrants settled in destination countries, Darren Carlson is one of the few to undertake a study of migrants' faith practices while they are still in transit. Carlson's study examines 'the faith, beliefs, and practices of evangelical and Pentecostal migrants and refugees as well as the evangelical Christian organizations serving them between 2014-2018 in Athens, Greece' (p. 1). His work gives an enlightening view of the evangelical movement within the ever-shifting context of migrants and dives deeply into the stories of those who have encountered Christ unexpectedly on the move.

Carlson begins by describing his methodological approach and does his best to define the nuances of terminology when talking about refugees and migrants and the blurred interplay between Christian mission and humanitarian aid. He then places his research within the larger landscape of diaspora missions over the past century and gives context to the refugee crisis of 2015, including Greece's role as a transition country in migrant journeys. The bulk of his work is dedicated to profiling the migrants he interviewed, detailing their journeys and conversion stories. He then profiles the evangelical refugee centres serving refugees and migrant faith communities operating on the fringes of Orthodox-dominated Greece. Finally, he closes with pastoral and theological reflections on the positive impact of welcoming refugees.

Carlson is the founder of *Training Leaders International*, an organisation aimed at partnering with local leaders and providing theological education where it is not easily accessible. His book showcases his extensive experience with locally driven and contextual ministry and his research is successful because of the relationships he has built both with on-the-ground leaders and migrants themselves. Carlson notes how these relationships may have affected his research, recognising the power dynamics at play as a Westerner coming in to conduct research. Still, he does his best to give an objective summary of the practices of those living and working in Athens. For the majority of the work, he resists centring himself or his own interpretation of events, instead elevating the narratives of migrants themselves and how their

experience with refugee ministries and churches impacted their conversion to Christianity.

However, I found some of Carlson's critique quite thin. Perhaps this is because of his close proximity to the work in Athens and his desire to strengthen projects, rather than cause conflict within the small, already fractured evangelical community of Greece. A deeper analysis of spiritual abuse, trauma amongst refugees, and the somewhat blurry ethics of blending proselytisation, church, and humanitarian efforts would have strengthened his work. Still, his thorough research and methodology grounded in migrant narratives makes his work compelling and an important addition to the conversation on how migration and refugees are changing the religious landscape of modern Europe. It is an excellent primer for those seeking a better understanding of migrant faith, as well as an encouragement to the Western church, showing the positive impact of a theology of welcome towards those displaced.

Sergey Sannikov, *Знаки присутствия. Крещение в контексте баптистской сакраментологии.* [Signs of the Presence: Baptism in the Context of Baptist Sacramental Theology] (Kiyv: Duh i Litera, 2019), 619 pages. ISBN: 9789663786681.

Reviewed by Lina Toth

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'Baptist sacramentalism' is a contested term, particularly so among Slavic evangelicals. Published in Russian, *Signs of the Presence* argues that Baptist sacramentalism arises out of its ecclesiology rather than sacramentology *per se*. Whilst it may be negated or ignored on the theological level, it is operative in terms of the actual practice.

Sergey Sannikov is a Ukrainian church historian and theologian, as well as a Baptist minister, renowned among Slavic evangelicals in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and beyond. The focus of his book is the Slavic

evangelical context, which includes such denominations as Baptists, evangelical Christians, and Mennonites. However, Sannikov is also impressively conversant with Western sacramental theology, both in its ecumenical breadth and its specifically Baptist contributions.

Sannikov identifies and critiques seven theological paradigms of baptism: 1) symbol; 2) initiation; 3) promise or covenant; 4) unification with Christ in his death and resurrection; 5) sign of grace; 6) the candidate's confession of faith; and 7) obedience. Each of these, he argues, is present in the Eastern Slavic context as well as in Western Baptist thought, but is insufficient on its own.

Signs of the Presence is the publication of Sannikov's doctoral dissertation submitted at the National Pedagogical Dromanov University (Ukraine). As such, it possesses the typical features of a doctoral project, allocating considerable space to questions of methodology, interdisciplinarity, and ecumenical dialogue. It surveys methods and insights from a variety of disciplines ranging from philosophy and religious studies to semiotics and performance studies. In its theological approach, the book touches upon a number of theological disciplines, including biblical studies, hermeneutics, church history, systematic theology, liturgical studies, as well as comparative and practical theology. Sannikov seeks to apply what he terms a 'holistic', rather than systematic, approach, looking at baptism in conjunction with other instances of *encountering the Presence of Christ*. The author frequently (though not systematically) sticks with the transliteration of the English term *encounter* as his main criterion for defining sacrament; this feels rather odd, as there would be a few alternatives in Russian that at least should be discussed.

The author's engagement with different academic and theological disciplines has a varying degree of success: it could be argued, for instance, that in its exegesis and biblical hermeneutics the project does not quite reach its full potential. There are a number of minor mistakes and inaccuracies, such as missing words, bibliographical details, and misspelled names. Some repetition could have been avoided by a better organisation of the material.

That said, this is a monumental work and an important contribution not only to Slavic evangelical thought on baptism and sacramentalism, but also to the wider Baptist theology, particularly in the author's use of the prism of baptismal theology for reviewing and critiquing broader theological viewpoints.

Martha Frederiks and Dorottya Nagy, eds, *World Christianity: Methodological Considerations*, Theology and Mission in World Christianity, Vol. 19 (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 315 pages. ISBN: 9789004441668.

Reviewed by Henk Bakker

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Can the domain of 'World Christianity' still be the subject matter of investigation without raising confusion and reviving old sentiments from colonial and ethnocentric times? And if so, how should the idea of World Christianity be approached and explored, and can the multidisciplinary outline of such an inquiry be translated into basic methodological considerations and ramifications? This is the purport of the nineteenth volume of the Theology and Mission in World Christianity series under the auspices of Martha Frederiks, Professor for the Study of World Christianity at Utrecht University (The Netherlands), and Dorottya Nagy, Professor of Missiology at the Protestant Theological University Amsterdam (The Netherlands). Besides these authors, eleven other scholars from various cultures, countries, and academic disciplines contributed to the profundity of the volume. This compilation of articles is one of the few publications exploring the 'world-Christian turn' from a methodology point of view.

Frederiks and Nagy 'problematize trends that conceptualize World Christianity as a subject matter or a field of study', and reserve the term for 'a particular, multidisciplinary approach to study Christianity/ies' (p. 2). Hence the heterogeneous character of the

compilation of chapters and input. For example, Raimundo Barreto writes on World Christianity's theoretical underpinnings from a critical Latin American liberationist perspective and uses liberationist hermeneutics and de-colonial theory to develop a comprehensive theoretical approach. The chapters dealing with historiography (Emma Wild-Wood on Uganda, Joseph Lee and Christie Chow on China) demonstrate the complexities of overcoming established binaries of local versus global, indigenous versus missionary, and national Christianity versus popular Christianity.

Chapters six to twelve focus primarily on plurality and interfaith relations and advocate a mixed method approach that cultivates and sustains a wider ecumenism in developing public theology for the cause of the welfare of all people (Wesley Ariarajah). Five case-studies illustrate the 'mixed method' outcome of the book and reflect on the role of comparative theology (Kari Storstein Haug on Thailand), the effects of interreligious existence (Douglas Pratt on the Vatican and WCC), discourse analysis and memory studies (Lucien van Liere on the ISIS video of the beheading of migrant workers in Libya, January 2015), multiple religious belonging (Corey Williams on Nigeria), and changing conceptualisations of heresy (Paul van Geest on the church father Augustine).

On the whole, this volume is a fine and instructive introduction to the rapidly changing field of World Christianity studies.

Martin Accad and Jonathan Andrews, eds, *The Religious Other: A Biblical Understanding of Islam, the Qur'an and Muhammad* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham, 2020), 552 pages. ISBN: 9781783687909.

Reviewed by Yuriy Skurydin

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This book is a serious attempt to make a healthy contribution to the relationship between Christianity and Islam. It involves more than 30

authors, specialists in the field of Islam, united by the Arab Baptist Theology Seminary (ABTS) in the framework of Middle East consultations that took place in 2018 and 2019. The chief editors of this project are Martin Accad (Chief Academic Officer of ABTS) and Jonathan Andrews (researcher and writer in the area of life of Christians in the Middle East). The main purpose of this work is to encourage Christians 'toward a biblical understanding of Islam, The Qur'an and Muhammad', recognising that the path to new territory requires human courage but also divine grace and mercy (xvii).

The team of authors all avoid either demonising or idealising Islam. They take a *kerygmatic* approach, involving respect and love toward Muslims. Kerygmatic means 'proclamation […] of the values, character and model of Jesus Christ as the heart of the gospel' (p. 25). The centre of this approach is Christ, not Christianity, since the latter for Muslims has negative political, cultural, and civilisational connotations. Thus, the authors include not only scientific articles but also testimonies, interviews, and discussions between participants with different points of view.

The content of the book is conveyed in two main parts. Part one has three chapters and provides an in-depth study of the Bible and modern reality that encourages Christians and Muslims not only to tolerate each other but to work their way through the stereotypes, to accept and love 'others'. I found it interesting that both the Old Testament (the stories of Jonah and Naaman) and the New Testament (the parable of the Good Samaritan and the meeting of the Apostle Paul with the Greeks in Athens) teach us that God cares not only about His people, but also about their enemies. This perspective helps us not to treat Muslims as competitors but to view them as objects of God's work and love.

Part two consists of six chapters and the issues of the origin of Islam, the biblical view of the Qur'an, Muhammad, soteriology, and the spiritual world are discussed here. I was interested to note how different hermeneutical premises of Christians and Muslims lead to mutual misunderstanding of each other, and hence to incorrect apologetics. For example, Christian apologists often pay attention to the 'aggressive' texts

of the Qur'an, but in reality most Muslims are kind and hospitable people. Understanding hermeneutic differences will help Christians look at the Qur'an and its teachings in a new way. Another question is: how should Christians regard Muhammad — as a false prophet or an Antichrist? Muhammad was convinced that his message was naturally associated with Judaism and Christianity. Despite all the complexity, Muhammad became an outstanding leader (Moses) for the scattered pagan tribes inhabiting Arabia, bringing them the law and monotheism. Why do we quote and learn from the works of Plato and Shakespeare, even though they are not Christians, and ignore the Qur'an and Muhammad? The authors advise treating the Qur'an as classical literature and thus overcoming unnecessary stereotypes.

Taking on such a complex project, it was difficult to avoid drawbacks. In particular, I draw attention to the issue of soteriology. In Christianity, salvation is exclusively associated with faith in Jesus Christ. The author in section 8.4 suggests seeing Muslims from the perspective of Romans 1:18–23, concluding that ultimately only those who understand the gospel and proudly reject it will be condemned. Thus, the author has brought sincere Muslims out of condemnation. However, this reasoning is not enough and the question remains open.

This book is undoubtedly very significant and should be translated into many languages so that Christians can develop 'as positive as possible' a view of the Qur'an, Muhammad, and Muslims to have dialogue, understanding, trust, and communication about God and salvation. It is a useful source for pastors, teachers and students of theological educational institutions, and anyone interested in the dialogue between Christians, Jews, and Muslims.

Gregory A. Ryan, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine in a Learning Church: The Dynamics of Receptive Integrity,* Studies in Systematic Theology, Vol. 23 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 286 pages. ISBN: 9789004436398.

Reviewed by Henk Bakker

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This book by Gregory A. Ryan, Catholic theologian, began as a doctoral thesis at Durham University and was supervised by Paul Murray. The research explores the 'dynamics of receptive integrity' of Catholic theology as it is received, understood, and processed by local Catholic communities. The aim of the book is to delineate a model of receptive integrity by bringing selected hermeneutical and methodological resources into a multi-dimensional conversation. The predominant method is one of coherence in multiple dimensions, not one of deduction from fixed foundations. In doing this, Ryan is conversant with (1) Anthony C. Thiselton's hermeneutics; (2) selected responses to Pope John XXIII's opening address at the Second Vatican Council; (3) Francis Schüssler Fiorenza's use of 'broad reflective equilibrium'; (4) Ormond Rush's appropriation of Hans Robert Jauss; and finally (5) a concrete context in contemporary church life. In addition, Ryan analyses methodological principles underpinning the recent ecumenical approach of Receptive Ecumenism, which he highly esteems.

The thesis of the book is captured in the argument that, 'to be sure, in Catholic theology, too, the significance of the dynamics of multiple perspectives involved in ecclesial interpretation is properly recognized'. Among others, Pope Francis, in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, warns against the mere imposition of a plethora of doctrines by disjointed transmission. Churches need to 'receive with integrity', in order to process their doctrinal tradition within the hermeneutical frame of *sensus fidei* [or *fidelium*]. As such, the dialogue envisaged is characterised as a matter of the church's active interest in its own synodality. Hereby the church enables itself to authenticate its own legacy.

Ryan's book is a scholarly treatment of the Catholic Church's conciliarity (synodality) as it relates to the dynamics of local theology, within the Catholic community and beyond. Withal, conciliarity is a way of doing ecumenical theology, and the main strength of this book is that

it opens a constructive discussion on receptivity and integrity of the lived tradition of the Church in its entirety, that is the church catholic.

For Baptists this feels like coming home, because this is what congregationalism is about. Baptist ecclesiology is about communal discernment of our heritage, starting with the Bible and our treasured chronicles, and about passing these on in transformed, and oftentimes readdressed and rephrased, ways, to the present and the next generations. I wholly recommend taking Gregory Ryan's book on hermeneutics and dynamics into account.

William H. Brackney, *Historical Dictionary of the Baptists*, 3rd edition, Historical Dictionaries of Religions, Philosophies and Movements Series (Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 722 pages. ISBN: 9781538122518.

Reviewed by Toivo Pilli

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When a dictionary runs to the third edition it is usually a sign that it has established itself as a helpful tool and source of information among students and scholars. This volume, the third edition of the *Historical Dictionary of the Baptists* by William Brackney, expands on the second edition (2009) and the first edition (1999). Brackney acknowledges that he has indirectly depended on both previous sources as well as a group of people for assembling details. However, it is his scholarly expertise that brings it all together.

William Brackney is a prolific writer and a well-known Baptist historian. He has held key positions in several academic institutions, including Baylor University and Acadia University. He has been actively involved in the work of the commissions of the Baptist World Alliance. To have first-hand experience of the world-wide family of Baptists is — no doubt — an advantage for a scholar preparing an overarching volume like the present one. There is no need to emphasise that bringing

a Baptist story into one volume, even if a 722-page volume, is a mammoth undertaking. The Baptist World Alliance unites about 47 million Baptist believers in 126 countries and in 241 conventions and unions. In addition, there are Baptists who are not members of the World Alliance, thus taking the total Baptist statistics up to 110 million, according to some estimations.

This recent edition has benefitted from the time factor, as the information has had time to 'settle' over years, and the new version of the Dictionary has been updated with a number of cross-referenced entries, and enriched by a 33-page, thematically structured bibliography. The entries and bibliography are a good introduction for students and scholars. Nevertheless, I expected to have at least some references to sources after every entry. Certainly, a massive and laudable project like this has always also its flipsides. There is limited opportunity to deal with details that from a local perspective are crucially important. For example, the Chronology mentions that the first recorded baptism by immersion in tsarist Russia took place in 1864; however, the entry 'Russia' correctly says it happened in 1867. Establishment of the Baptist Theological Seminary in Rüschlikon is mentioned in the Chronology; however, the International Baptist Theological Seminary — later Study Centre — and its significant development in Prague and in Amsterdam is not in the Chronology, though a brief reference to it can be found under the entry 'European Baptist Federation'. Baptist theological and educational institutions seem not to have separate entries, though this work is crucially important for the whole movement. Some clear indication of the criteria for including or not including entries might support a reader.

These examples are not intended to diminish the value of the volume, but rather to point out what one should expect from this reference book: it is a source of helpful initial information, broader rather than deeper, and it invites readers to continue to research and evaluate the given data against more specific evidence. It is commendable that a significant attempt has been made to bring into this volume a better awareness of Baptists beyond Western Europe and North America: there is rich Baptist life in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. For somebody who is interested in Baptist events,

institutions, unions, and historical persons in detail, the book is a solid stepping stone, a sign which shows the way but invites to pursue further on a research journey.

Dumitru Sevastian, *Dostoevsky's Convictional Theology Expressed in His Life and Literature* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Monographs, 2021), 298 pages. ISBN: 9781839732027.

Reviewed by Mary Raber

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Who could encourage deeper reflection among post-Soviet evangelicals, refreshing their vision for living 'Christ's Way' in a society beset with corruption, poverty, and social dislocation? As both a concerned pastor (Moldavian Evangelical Christian Baptist Union) and an academic dean (University Divitia Gratiae in Chisinau, Moldova), Dumitru Sevastian proposes the Russian novelist F. M. Dostoevsky (1821–1881) as someone who can inspire twenty-first century Christians.

Since the time his works were first published, many critics have tried to assess Dostoevsky depending on whether or not they agree with him, determining whether he is 'one of us' or 'foreign'. In contrast, based on the 'biography-as-theology' method of theologian James Wm McClendon, Sevastian allows Dostoevsky to speak for himself.

The structure of his study separates the writer's experience into three parts: chapter two, the formative years (1821–1849); chapter three, his arrest, near-execution, and imprisonment in Siberia (1849–1859); chapter four, Dostoevsky's 'post-Siberia' life (1859-1881). Detailed biographical material is paired with analysis of the theological themes in three novels produced during the period being examined: *The Poor Folk* (pre-Siberia), *The House of the Dead* (Siberia), and *The Brothers Karamazov* (post-Siberia), although other literary works are not neglected. Sevastian

presents an absorbing narrative of Dostoevsky's maturing as a Christian thinker, including helpful background on the social movements of his time.

Chapter five summarises the novelist's theology, which is distinctly experiential rather than abstract. Ultimately, Dostoevsky concluded that the only hope for humanity is humbly to repent and turn to Christ. The way of human beings must be transformed into 'Christ's Way', not mere assent to abstract beliefs, but an active life of forgiveness and concrete acts of love.

Chapter six discusses Dostoevsky's influence on society. Sevastian presents some of the controversy that his writing evoked, along with background information on the social/political positions of his day (Slavophils, Westernisers, Populists). Unfortunately, Sevastian neglects to do the same concerning Dostoevsky's influence on religious groups. He reports that the Bruderhof acknowledged the gospel in Dostoevsky's work, but fails to identify the Bruderhof itself (except that it is 'baptistic') — an inconvenient omission for uninitiated readers.

Finally, chapter seven examines Dostoevsky's lessons for the benefit of believers in Moldova, although clearly his conclusions apply to Christians everywhere. The process of reflecting on Dostoevsky's vision of Christlike forgiveness and love overcoming evil, both in the lives of his characters and in his own biography, could inspire a powerful moral example to offset the pain, sorrow, and cynicism of the twenty-first century.

Sevastian's book would make an excellent text for a course on Dostoevsky. He has translated material that may be new to the English-speaking world, including excerpts from critical works by Soviet-era Dostoevsky scholars, making this study additionally valuable. This book would have benefitted from additional editing (inconsistent transliterations, incomplete bibliography, etc.), but these are details. More importantly, Dumitru Sevastian has made this reviewer want to re-read Dostoevsky's novels.

Henk de Roest, *Collaborative Practical Theology: Engaging Practitioners in Research on Christian Practices* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2020), 371 pages. ISBN: 9789004413238.

Reviewed by Mike Pears

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In *Collaborative Practical Theology*, Henk de Roest sets out to investigate and analyse 'research on Christian practices conducted by academic practical theologians in *collaboration* with practitioners' (p. 1). The book is divided into two main parts: Part 1 'The Valorisation of Practical Theology' (chapters 1 to 4) and Part 2 'Collaborative Research Approaches and Methods in Practical Theology' (chapters 5 to 9). The current strong emphasis in university settings on the need for research to have 'impact' and 'societal relevance' is experienced in theological research as much as in other fields. Whilst De Roest acknowledges this (pp. 19–26), the heart of his argument is that by its very nature, practical theology ought to be an effective valorising approach. This is reflected in the title of the book which presents Collaborative Practical Theology as focusing on Christian 'practices' and in 'engaging practitioners' who, according to De Roest, for a more meaningful valorisation that does not come late in the research project (pp. 31–33), or even only as an afterthought (p. 18), should be included at the earliest stages of the research project — even being involved at the design phase (p. 22). This leads to the substance of the discussion in part one — a thorough investigation of the characteristics and challenges of collaboration within a practical theological context.

Having established a rationale for collaboration, part two discusses key issues in both methodology and methods that arise as a consequence. Appropriately, the discussion begins by considering the situation of practitioners and professionals before discussing the implications for academic researchers. For professionals, De Roest argues that a dominant experience is of a 'crisis of routines' precipitated by the speed of societal change, where 'tacit knowledge' embedded in such routine practices, 'falls short' (pp. 133–143). In light of this, De Roest's question is, 'How might practical theology be engaged to help

in this prevailing situation?' (p. 134) in order for 'explicit knowledge and skills' to be identified so that we might apply 'new remedies and develop new strategies' (p. 134). Addressing this question (chapter 6), De Roest sets out six rationales 'to encourage practitioners, everyday believers and possibly other societal actors […] to get involved with the research *process* itself' (p. 158). This approach situates the methodological question not in the academy (where such questions are routinely located), but in the lived experience of the practitioner. This is, in my view, a creative decentring of the usual methodological questions which helpfully sets the scene for further in-depth consideration of research strategies and methods (chapter 7), including discussion of the limitations of such approaches (chapter 8), and ultimately the value of 'communities of practice becoming research communities' (chapter 9).

De Roest has made an important contribution towards the understanding of practical theology as an essential discipline for practitioners and researchers alike. He 'envisages a relational turn in theology' (p. 2) — in my view one of the outstanding contributions of the book. By placing relationship, or collaboration, at the heart of the argument, he has helpfully navigated some of the key tensions routinely experienced by those in practical theological research, such as those between the motivation of the researcher to engage in research that is both contextually relevant and socially impactful on the one hand and regarded as properly theological and academically rigorous on the other. The complexity of these issues can seem overwhelming for students, especially for those who are less familiar with empirical and interdisciplinary research within theology. By using the frame of collaboration, De Roest has succeeded in providing us with a strong rationale for a practical theological approach which is theologically robust yet conversant with the lived experience of the practitioner. Furthermore, he has laid out a range of research strategies and methods, alongside numerous examples from the field, which will be of immense assistance to those who wish to find practical and impactful ways of carrying out theological research in their own context.

To draw on a cliché — this is a 'must read' for research students and those in the leadership of seminaries. However, as the title suggests, an even more fruitful reading might be experienced in an

interdisciplinary group of academics and practitioners who would be open to explore the implications for theological reflection in their own contexts; a truly collaborative reading.