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Editorial

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This volume of the *Journal of European Baptist Studies* includes a range of topics, from ethical discussions to preaching and church history. The first four articles are the fruit of a conference which was held in May 2022, at the International Baptist Theological Study Centre, in Amsterdam. The conference, under the title 'The Heart of Christian Ethics' explored issues, such as sacredness, justice, forgiveness, truthfulness, and love. The launching platform for academic discussions was Professor David Gushee's recent book *Introducing Christian Ethics: Core Convictions for Christians Today*. In the opening presentation, Gushee explained his approach to discussing ethics and underlined his methodological hallmarks. This survey, introducing both the conference and the book, is also an opening text for this *JEBS* issue.

This initial chapter is followed by three responses to Gushee's ideas, promoting further discussion. Gushee's academic conversation partners are Tommaso Manzon, Erica Whitaker, and Lee Spitzer. Manzon engages with the central issue of Gushee's discourse on Christian ethics — that of truth and truthfulness. In what ways is the church a community of truth? Whitaker wrestles with the difficult question of collective forgiveness, especially for white Baptist churches in the United States of America. Whitaker analyses the nature of the challenges met by the ecclesial communities who are ready to repent and seek forgiveness for the past practices of slavery, and what the steps forward might be. Spitzer offers appreciative, yet critical response to Gushee's understanding of the sacredness of life and justice ethics. Spitzer's article 'considers how *personality* as an integral aspect of *imago Dei* impacts the ethical discussion of Christian justice concerns', especially in relation to the Holocaust and racism.

The next five articles, in a way a second part of the journal issue, bring together topics which have been and continue to be important for Baptists in Europe and beyond. Andrew Messmer argues that, in addition to infant baptism, the early church also practised some form of infant dedication which was followed by an enrollment into the catechumenate. This, according to the author, was more widespread than is usually supposed. The article draws some conclusions for the present day, especially for ecumenical relations. Preaching has also been an important aspect of Baptist worship, mission, and theological reflection. Stuart Blythe uses the novel metaphor of graffiti to describe and analyse the practice of preaching, emphasising preaching's performative nature. Blythe also contends that the graffiti metaphor helps to see other aspects of preaching that may go unnoticed when employing more conventional 'images'; aspects such as its artistic, interruptive, and ephemeral nature.

Alistair Cuthbert's contribution can be read together with Whitaker's article. Cuthbert argues for a robust theology of forgiveness and reconciliation lest the reparation of human relationships be degraded to only formal lip service without genuine transformation. The article develops its argument in a conversation with Paul Fiddes' theology of reconciliation which is rooted in a dynamic understanding of the Trinity. In addition, Samuel Davidson, in his treatise 'Toward a Baptist Theology of Creation', offers a discussion about Baptist modes of creation theology, which draws inspiration from Willie Jennings, and engages with Paul Fiddes and Stephen Holmes as conversation partners. The author emphasises that ecclesiology and creation theology are interrelated and inform each other: both doctrines are oriented towards a better understanding of how 'a given place is created and sustained by God in its ecological interdependence'. For a reader interested in eco-theology, it is worth mentioning that *JEBS* has published other articles in a similar vein; for example Helle Liht's article 'Beyond Instrumentalism and Mere Symbolism: Nature as Sacramental' (2020, issue no. 2).

The last article in this volume is like an anchor, fastening the diverse discussion in historical awareness. Ian Randall's article gives an analytical survey of the way in which the General Baptist Missionary Society, established in 1816, worked to develop a mission in Orissa, India between the 1860s and the 1880s. This original historical research is based on primary sources, especially the Society's monthly magazine the *Missionary Observer*, allowing the author to throw light on a number of aspects of this successful Baptist missionary endeavour: developing churches and engaging in social ministry, exploring and strengthening Baptist convictions, and building wider relations.

I also draw readers' attention to the rich variety of book reviews that *JEBS* book editor Dr Dorothy McMillan collates for each issue. These reviews offer a window into what has been recently published by a wide network of scholars — both in Baptist theology and history and beyond — and provide insight into how these publications could be helpful and inspiring in research, teaching, and learning. I thoroughly recommend reading the book review section of *JEBS* together with the articles.

Introducing *Introducing Christian Ethics*

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Prelude

This paper was written to open the May 2022 conference on Christian ethics hosted by the International Baptist Theological Study Centre (IBTS), Amsterdam. The purpose of the conference was to strengthen Christian ethical reflection and practice in the European Baptist Federation (EBF) and global Baptist life. The strategy was to focus on a common text — my new book, *Introducing Christian Ethics: Core Convictions for Christians Today* (henceforth abbreviated as *ICE*).[1] We further narrowed the focus down to five chapters, which focus on truthfulness, sacredness, justice, love, and forgiveness (chapters 8–12).

The specific goals of the conference, from my perspective, were the following:

- To strengthen Christian ethics in our church and academic communities.
- To provide opportunity for Christian fellowship and shared intellectual inquiry.
- To find common ground around five themes that might be seen as 'the heart of Christian ethics' (the title of the conference).
- To bridge divides between scholars, clergy, and laity.
- To seek ways across typical liberal, moderate, and conservative divides.
- To develop a common vocabulary and framework for ethics.

[1] David P. Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics: Core Convictions for Christians Today* (Canton, MI: Front Edge, 2022).

- To prepare for upcoming IBTS/EBF Learning Network initiatives.[2]
- To explore whether the new *Introducing Christian Ethics* text can be effective in cross-cultural EBF church and classroom settings.

My own experience of the rich discussions at the conference was that these goals were met, at least at an initial level, and will now be advanced through future conversations.

Overview of *ICE* Methodology

Lineage

I open *ICE* by situating the discipline of Christian ethics in historical terms. Christian ethics has a historical lineage that can be said to begin (of course) with the moral teachings and example of Jesus Christ. Christian ethics is about following Jesus.

But Jesus does not come from nowhere. He does not just come from God. He also comes from Israel. This means that the Jewish tradition and first-century Palestinian Jewish social realities that formed Jesus, *ipso facto* form a crucial part of the moral lineage of Christian ethics. Christian ethics is a kind of offshoot of Jewish ethics.

Then comes the Greco-Roman background and context that was so crucial to the first-century Mediterranean Basin world in which Christianity was born and spread. In its formative early years, Christian ethics was deeply affected by Greek and Roman ideas, practices, and power. Christian ethics, then, is in some sense a product of the classical world.

Looking further along in history, the entire epic history of Christianity has mattered in the shaping of Christian ethics. In *ICE*, I focus especially on the distorting impact not just of the 'Constantinian turn' and the creation of a Christendom mentality, but the later European colonial project. Christian ethics as it developed is

[2] For the Learning Network and Learning Network courses see the IBTS website, <https://ibts.eu/programmes/learning-network> [accessed 10 October 2022].

inextricably connected to the Roman Empire and its successors, to Europe, to Christendom, and to colonialism.

Equipping the Saints to Follow Jesus

If Christian ethics is defined in normative terms as something like 'the moral convictions and practices that are fitting for and demanded of those who seek to follow Jesus Christ', then this historical lineage of two thousand years of Christian ethics must be understood as containing both successes and failures in the faithful following of Jesus. Nobody had better dare to claim infallibility for the history of Christian theology, ethics, or practice. The churches today in their quest for moral faithfulness to Jesus need to study Jesus above all, the biblical canon in its entire witness, and the historical lineage of Christian moral teaching and practice, knowing that they are not equal in authority but are collectively the tradition which we inherit and the place that we start.

The work of Christian ethics as a discipline can be summarised as the effort to describe, analyse, and propose Christian moral norms. Christian ethicists are simultaneously historians and sociologists in our descriptive work, internal communal critics in our analytical work, and moral leaders in our normative work. Specialists in Christian ethics may have unique training, skills, and calling, but (a) Christian ethicists should emerge from within the Christian community and be devoted followers of Jesus like everyone else, and (b) the work of Christian ethics belongs to pastors, laity, and the whole community of Christ-followers. Christian ethics can be viewed as an equipping ministry like other ministries — equipping the saints for greater moral fidelity to Jesus.

The Ethics Highway

In *ICE*, I use the metaphor of an 'Ethics Highway' to describe the analytical work of Christian ethics. This metaphor seemed to get some 'traction' at the conference.

Imagine yourself getting in a car to begin a long journey. The reason you get in a car is to go somewhere. The 'end' of your journey is to arrive at the destination. Most people do not just drive aimlessly. They are going somewhere. This corresponds to the 'teleological' dimension of Christian ethics, which has to do with analysing the various 'ends'

that Christian people do and should, or do not and should not, strive for. Some of the ends (*teloi*, in Greek) approved in Christian ethics include holiness, love, justice, and the reign of God.

Anyone driving must operate their vehicle according to the established rules of the road. This corresponds to the *deontological*, or rule-focused, dimension of Christian ethics. When we drive, we head toward a destination just like all other drivers. But we are not free to conduct ourselves behind the wheel in just any way we feel like. Our behaviour must conform to the laws that govern driving on each particular stretch of road. Just so, morality is about moral rules — at highest strength these are called moral laws, at weakest strength they are called moral guidelines or aspirations. Many significant moral rules in (Jewish and) Christian ethics are stated as prohibitions, such as bans on idolatry, murder, and adultery. Some moral rules are stated as positive admonitions, such as demands to care for the weak, tell the truth, and keep covenant promises.

The Ethics Highway can be understood to be a community of drivers in a temporary relationship with all nearby drivers. This is a community that cannot succeed unless all members of the community not only adhere to the rules of the road, but also take responsibility for their actions, and are capable of doing so because they are of sound mind, body, and character. These categories correspond to the themes of moral community, relationality, responsibility, and character, which are crucial in most ethical traditions, including Christian ethics.

The full picture of the Ethics Highway connects rather comprehensively to key themes not just in Christian ethics but in all ethical reflection. Good ethics looks like human beings having sound personal character, relating to other human beings by recognising that all are together a community, practising responsibility toward other persons, self-governing according to recognised moral rules that function as needed guardrails in human life, and seeking morally justifiable ends in their journey through life. Christian ethics is distinctive from other ethical systems in that the entire project is undertaken with reference to Jesus Christ. He is the end. He sets the rules. He shows what responsibility requires. He demonstrates the meaning of community. His life sets the paradigm for personal

character. This, at least, is what Christians confess. This sets the course of our temporary sojourn on the Ethics Highway.

Sourcing for Christian Ethics

Christian ethics is about discerning what it means to follow Jesus faithfully. A question which inevitably follows is where Christian ethicists and regular Christians should look to get the information needed to do that discerning. A typical Baptist response would simply be to say, 'the Bible'. And certainly, the Bible, with a focus on materials about Jesus himself, is a central source for Christian ethics.

But *ICE* makes the broader claim that the repertoire of Christian moral sources is quite large. Anywhere we can learn anything helpful for shaping the Christian moral life, we should keep our eyes and ears open. This includes the classic list of Christian sources, including moral tradition, Christian leaders, religious or spiritual experiences, and the voice of the Christian community, local and global. We should be open to learning from the teachings of other religious traditions, especially those most closely kin to us. And we should pay attention to the broad human 'moral quest', available in all kinds of resources, including philosophy, great literature, and the wise cabdriver. I argue for a humble, open-minded spirit of Christian discernment which recognises both the fallibility of our own tradition and the insights of others. The goal is to follow Jesus faithfully. Whatever helps us do that ought to be in play.

ICE does make a significant methodological move in emphasising the perspective 'from below', from 'the margins'. Focusing on the breakthrough insights of twentieth-century Black theologian Howard Thurman, but also influenced by various forms of liberation ethics and by the biblical prophetic tradition and Jesus himself, *ICE* claims that a fundamental commitment of Christian ethics must be to listen to and stand with the 'dispossessed', 'disinherited', those with 'their backs against the wall'. Every moral issue is understood most clearly if it is viewed from the perspective of those who are weakest and most powerless and how they are affected by current or proposed actions. When Jesus himself is understood as emerging from and standing up for those 'below', the authority for attempting to view all

moral issues from this vantage point is made even more incontrovertible.

Kingdom; Sermon on the Mount; Virtue Ethics

Three other methodological hallmarks are worth noting before we turn to the five core moral norms that centred the IBTS conference. These are the kingdom of God, the unique role of the Sermon on the Mount, and virtue ethics. Each receives a chapter in *Introducing Christian Ethics*. Each has been a focus of my earlier work in ethics as well.

In *ICE*, I consider whether the kingdom of God, as proclaimed by Jesus himself, should continue to constitute the central 'narrative frame' for Christian ethics. In *Kingdom Ethics*,[3] Glen Stassen and I indeed made the kingdom of God the central narrative frame for Christian ethics. We argued that Jesus understood the kingdom to be the reclaiming of this world by God through Jesus, with normative content including deliverance, justice, peace, healing, and the restoration or building of restored and inclusive community. We then situated specific teachings of Jesus as, at least much of the time, directing practices and behaviours that would advance these aspects of God's reign. Thus, for example, the reason we are taught to pray for our enemies and forgive them is to break the cycles of retaliatory vengeance that so often lead to violence and warfare. In this way, Jesus's teachings do not just hang out in space as random bits of instruction but instead fit into his (and God's) broader project: reclaiming this rebellious world, not just through belief but through transformation. While I now raise some questions as to some of the limits of kingdom framing for ethics — for example, for everyday domestic moral challenges — I still believe it is true to what Jesus was doing and a powerful, highly motivating frame for Christian moral obligation.

The Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7) is the largest single block of Jesus's teaching that we find in the New Testament. It has been a focal point of Christian ethical instruction since the very earliest days of Christianity. It has a radical, demanding, even absolutist edge, with no space offered for retaliation, unforgiveness, wealth accumulation, lying,

[3] David P. Gushee and Glen Stassen, *Kingdom Ethics*, 2nd edn (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016.)

or sexual immorality. The Sermon on the Mount contains many crucial moral teachings, at least for those parts of the Church that take it as something more than unreachable aspirations and high ideals. *ICE* revisits the *Kingdom Ethics* teaching that much of the Sermon on the Mount offers concrete, doable, 'transforming initiatives' and should *not* be viewed as unreachable high ideals. Jesus never, ever used the language of ideals. *ICE* does acknowledge that several of the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount are extremely hard to coordinate with the exercise of any form of public responsibility; for example, the clash between a totalistic commitment to nonviolence and the security responsibilities of government officials. I conclude that the Sermon on the Mount should remain central in Christian moral instruction, and that through these teachings Jesus offers a way of deliverance from the vicious circles caused by human sin. But it does not stand alone as a teaching resource in Christian ethics.

Virtue ethics is the name given to those strands of ethics (including but not limited to Christian ethics) emphasising not norms for moral practice, or moral rules, but instead the moral character that drives the entire moral self of a person. The central insight of virtue ethics in its Christian form relates to the significance of 'soulcraft', in various forms of community, to create persons of virtue (good character) who will fulfil God's design, find true happiness, be good people in community life, and have the ability to conform ever more fully to the way of being taught and modelled by Jesus. Character is thus both preliminary and essential to human decision-making and action. Specific desirable character qualities (for example, virtue) are taught by Jesus, Paul, and others in the New Testament. The fact that the character of Jesus always stands available as the ultimate paradigm of human character is a powerful and somewhat unique dimension of the Christian version of religious ethics. I do argue, however, that — consider the Ethics Highway image — the moral life must not be reduced to character. We do still need rules of the road, proper goals, and so on. It is reductionistic to argue that the person of good character needs no rules. One reason is because persons of good character remain imperfect in knowledge and fallible in decisions.

The Moral Core: Truthfulness, Sacredness, Justice, Love, Forgiveness

The reader can see that the version of Christian ethics offered in *ICE* contains multiple elements. It is not reducible to the five themes that we called 'the heart of Christian ethics' and that we offered as the theme for the IBTS ethics conference of May 2022. However, those five themes were featured at the conference. They can be understood in various ways: as core *teloi* (goals), as core moral principles, even as core moral practices of the Christian life. At the conference I described them using further directional metaphors — this moral core is like a compass, or a GPS, or a centring device on a map. Whatever we decide, wherever we choose to 'drive' in the Christian moral life, this moral core helps us with our moral mapping. If we want to land somewhere within the land called 'plausible places of Christian faithfulness', we will pay close attention to truthfulness, sacredness, love, justice, and forgiveness. Key elements of my treatment of these five themes follow.

Truthfulness

Truth is, fundamentally, expressing reality in words. Truthfulness is a character quality in which one habitually tells the truth, keeps promises, and holds to covenants undertaken. All serious moral theories recognise a general moral obligation to tell the truth, even if some approaches recognise that there might be emergency exceptions. These rare emergency exceptions do not come close to authorising the systemic lying and government disinformation that dominates private and public life in many lands today. Systemic lying in public life is often linked to tyranny and injustice. Truth needs a comeback both in practice and as a theme in Christian ethics.

Close study of the Hebrew Bible shows a combination of a focus on telling the truth with an emphasis on the character quality, not just of truthfulness in speech, but of *being true* in character — a profound innovation. The recognition here, rooted above all in the character of God, is that being true — solid, sound, integral, whole, faithful — precedes and undergirds the practice of telling the truth, which includes keeping promises and covenants. Thus, it is not enough to teach rules

about truth telling, or even the character quality of truthfulness, but the fundamental significance of *being true*.

Study of the New Testament leads to the conclusion offered in *ICE* that while truth, truth-telling, and being true continue as themes, truth in the New Testament is mystical, participatory, and eschatological. This has much to do with the identification of Jesus as The Truth, and then the identification of the church as the body of Christ. The idea that truth is interpersonal/covenantal is elevated, as this concept is at least implicit in New Testament teachings related to the health and soundness of the body of Christ. Community depends on implicit or explicit 'truth-telling covenants'. This then opens up the theme of lying in public life — for it has become apparent that such truth-telling covenants are as crucial in public life as they are in the churches and in personal and family life. Several papers at the conference reflected on themes associated with truthfulness.

Sacredness of Life

The sacredness of life, in Christian terms, is the conviction that 'God has consecrated each and every human being […] as a unique, incalculably precious being of elevated status and dignity'.[4] The fitting moral response for those who believe this is to adopt a 'posture of reverence', take responsibility for life, offer respect and care to all, protect human life from harm and destruction, and seek the flourishing of human life. I have argued elsewhere that while all life has an appropriate sacredness, Scripture teaches an especial elevation of the sacredness of human life.

Sifting through a long historical and contemporary discussion of these themes in both secular and Christian ethics, I argue that it is best to understand 'sacredness' (secular cognate: dignity) as a moral status ascribed, and commanded, by God. It is not based on anything intrinsic about human beings or any unique human capacities that set us apart from or 'above' non-humans. Claims to intrinsic human worth founder on the authority for such claims, or the basis of them. Making capacities the basis of sacredness or dignity claims risks the abandonment of sacredness and related treatment norms if persons are viewed as not, or

[4] Gushee, *ICE*, p.107.

no longer, having the requisite capacities — such as consciousness, speech, rationality, and so on.

ICE follows earlier work of mine in reviewing the rather comprehensive, though not univocal, biblical basis for claims to the sacredness of human life. From creation to exodus, from Sinai to the prophets, then into the New Testament in the person and work of Jesus Christ, a bright red sacredness through-line can be identified. Humans as God's creation, God's deliverance of suffering people, God's law as applying to all with special concern for the most vulnerable, God's prophets as calling God's people back to the Law but also projecting forward a vision in which all life is restored, secure, and sacred — these lovely themes take us in the direction of a sacredness-of-life ethic. Jesus's teaching and ministry, his abundant love for all, especially the disinherited and despised, his declaration of God's tender love for all, and the meaning of his incarnation, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension, all add profoundly to the sacredness-of-life biblical trajectory. Sometimes this latter strand is called 'Christian humanism', which means a marriage both of an exalted vision of Christ and an exalted vision of the worth of the human being as declared and revealed in Christ.

Justice

I argue in *ICE* that justice is the central moral (and legal) norm in the Hebrew Bible and Jewish ethics, that it is a central theme in Jesus's ministry, but that it has been strangely neglected in at least popular Christian understanding. The Hebrew Bible's understanding of justice emphasises protecting the rights of the vulnerable and powerless, which involves resisting unjust uses of power in community. Israel is established to be a just covenant community, which requires leaders and people to be committed to all aspects of the work of justice. Justice looks like laws aimed at protecting the weak, judges who attend especially to those vulnerable to mistreatment and who punish those who do injustice, kings who understand their vocation as protecting the poor, and prophets who remind Israel of its covenant obligations and call out those who violate them, whoever they might be. Justice can take many forms, including simple truth-telling about injustice, public moral and legal accountability, processes of restitution, reparation, and

restoration, and structural changes in society to advance incremental progress toward greater justice.

ICE treats at length Luke 18:1–8, the parable of the unjust judge. This astonishing parable is framed by the narrator as calling for perseverance in prayer, which (in passing) Jesus does. But it is also fundamentally a parable about justice, the obligation of judges and other authorities to do justice, the suffering of those vulnerable ones victimised by injustice, the difficulty of finding justice in this unjust world, and the great threat to faith that sustained injustice creates for people. 'When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?' — that is, in a world filled with grotesque injustice, faith in a God of justice is hard. Jesus calls not just for persistent prayer and faith, but also for justice.

Love

Jesus defined love of God and neighbour as the true heart of the law, the greatest commandment, and the path to eternal life (see Matt 22:34–40; Luke 10:25–37). Ever since, Christian ethics has consistently defined love as the ultimate moral core of Christianity — not that Christians have not all too often fallen woefully short in meeting love's requirements. *ICE* explores the difficult questions that emerge once love of neighbour is defined as the moral core: Are all neighbours to be treated with the same type and intensity of love? Are there any legitimate limits to the obligation to love? Does our behaviour toward others properly take into account their behaviour toward us? What is the place of self-love? What do we do when love of self and love of neighbour seem to create conflicting obligations?

These questions help set the framework for the long discussion in the history of Christian ethics of different types or dimensions of love. Mutual love between friends and lovers, sacrificial love where one receives nothing in return, equal-regard love, in which all persons are treated the same, and delivering love, in which one is called to step in to rescue someone in great need — all are aspects of love, applicable in proper contexts and relationships. *ICE* concludes that covenant love may be the best overall understanding of the demands of love in this

sense: what exactly we owe to a person in loving them depends a very great deal on the nature of the covenant that exists between us.

Reinhold Niebuhr famously described love as 'the impossible possibility',[5] and there is great truth to this. In terms of the Ethics Highway image, love is rather like a destination that one never quite reaches as it always recedes just beyond the horizon. This also helps us understand a bit better the relationship between love and justice. One might say, with Niebuhr, that justice is the approximation of love in daily life. Or, justice is the floor, and love is the ceiling. Or, with Cornel West, that justice is love in public.[6]

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a biblical concept that retains currency in everyday life, all over the world. We all know both that there can be no decent human life without plenty of forgiveness, but also that forgiveness is hard — and that there are good reasons not to give it away too easily. And yet there is Jesus, regularly and persistently calling his followers to forgive. He does so with such urgency and frequency that in *ICE* forgiveness becomes part of the moral core, 'the heart of Christian ethics'.

Etymology helps when studying forgiveness. The core concept involves giving up something completely. *ICE* argues that what is given up completely when we forgive is any claim on a person who has wronged us to pay the moral debt that their wrongdoing has created. We cancel that debt rather than demand its repayment. There are good reasons to do this, and also good reasons why this is challenging. In terms of Jesus's teaching, the best reason I should cancel the moral debts incurred by others through their harms to me is that God cancels my debts for the wrongs I do to God. 'Measure for measure' (Matt 7:2), says Jesus — either we forgive as God forgives, or our relationships will be marked by the relentless logic of unforgiveness on all sides, including God's unforgiveness toward us.

ICE explores relational dynamics that include but go beyond forgiveness. For example, when a significant wrong is done by Person

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[5] Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (New York: Harper, 1935), p. 72.

[6] This is something consistently expressed by West. See, for example, Cornel West, *Brother West: Living and Loving Out Loud, a Memoir* (New York: Smiley Books, 2009), p. 232.

A to Person B, Person B suffers harm that requires their own efforts at healing. Person A incurs a moral debt to Person B that must be addressed either through 'payment' or forgiveness. The relationship between A and B is harmed and requires restoration, if possible. And Person A may incur harm to their own well-being that requires restorative work. Forgiveness is only a part of what needs to happen when individuals and relationships are bruised by wrongdoing.

Conclusion

Our experience at the May 2022 IBTS 'Heart of Christian Ethics' conference demonstrated that sustained reflection on core moral themes such as truthfulness, sacredness, justice, love, and forgiveness can indeed be fruitful at multiple levels. The themes themselves have considerable richness that makes them worthy of sustained reflection in their own right. Hopefully such reflection, valuable in itself, can lay the foundation for deploying these themes constructively in cross-cultural Christian engagement with some of the world's most difficult and controversial moral issues.

On Truthfulness and the Nature of Truth in an Ecclesiological Perspective: In Conversation with David Gushee's *Introducing Christian Ethics*

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Abstract
This article comprises a sustained critical engagement with David Gushee's *Introducing Christian Ethics: Core Convictions for Christians Today*. In particular, attention is paid to Gushee's treatment of truth and truthfulness as core elements of Christian living. This is brought into connection with Baptist ecclesiology, arguing for a vision of the church as a community of truth.

Keywords
Protestant theology; Baptist theology; Christian ethics; truth theory; Christology; David Gushee

Opening Remarks on the Church and the Truth

Reflection on the nature of the church of Christ calls for reflection on the nature of truth. The underlying reason for this is that, as per the words of Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, 'the church is the only community formed around the truth, which is Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life'.[1] Therefore, reflecting on the church of Christ implies reflecting on the truth insofar as Christ the Truth dwells at the core of his church.

Such a claim is not meant to underpin any kind of 'ecclesiological Monophysitism',[2] that is, the heretical confusion of the

[1] Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), p. 44.
[2] I consciously appropriate this expression from Yves Congar, but without necessarily employing it in accordance with his thought; see Gabriel Flynn, 'The Role of Affectivity in the Theology of Yves Congar', *New Blackfriars*, 83 (2002), 347–64 (p. 352); I would like to point out though,

truth with the community formed around it, where the divine nature of the truth would subsume and virtually cancel the human nature of the church. In other words, just as in the Christological variant of this heresy, the church's humanity would end up being absorbed into God as a 'drop of wine in the ocean of his deity'.[3] This would cause the church to be incorrectly represented as the Truth itself and as being truthful through and through. Such a distorted ecclesiology would imply nothing less than the confusion of the Creator with the creature, robbing God of God's glory and transferring it to the community of believers. Furthermore, an ecclesiology that portrays the church as the Truth would end up distorting the very message of the gospel, turning it from a message of repentance and submission to God to a message of repentance and submission to the church.

Against such a potential misreading of my opening claim, it is important to underline that, in biblical terms, while Christ is connected to the church as a head is to its body, in his divinity he is nonetheless substantially different from the latter. While there are many members in the body and all are useful in their own way (1 Cor 12:21), no other member can play the role of the head, who is Christ himself (Col 1:18) and under whose authority all things in heaven and earth will be eventually united (Eph 1:10). Therefore, while the church's relationship to Christ the Truth is as intimate and exclusive as it can get, the former's humanity is totally other from the latter's divinity (Christ's humanity operating as a bridge between God and his body); because of this, the church is under the constant necessity of maturing to the full measure of the stature of Christ (Eph 3:18).

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that it would be more precise to speak of 'ecclesiological eutychianism', in that among all varieties of monophysitism it was Eutyches who most thoroughly proclaimed the absorption of Jesus's human nature in his divinity. Accordingly, Eutychianism deserved the label of 'real monophysitism', over against the more common varieties of 'verbal monophysitism' that taught a Christology which, as a matter of fact, was compatible with Chalcedonian orthodoxy, except for their refusal to accept that it made sense to speak of one person as having more than one nature. I keep the label 'ecclesiological monophysitism' only in the light of its usage by Congar, and because of the most widespread parlance of the term 'monophysitism' over against that of 'eutychianism'.

[3] Roger Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Westmont, IL: IVP Press, 2009), p. 226.

Since the church always needs to mature in its Christ-likeness, it follows that its formation around the Truth is always both realised and a work in progress; there is always more Truth to be known, and, because the church's formation into and around the Truth is never fully actualised, there is always the chance of lapsing into falsity — of thoughts, words, and deeds. Such a predicament calls for a common commitment on the part of all members of the church to make the continual effort to grow into the Truth and avoid lapsing back into falsity. It must be stressed that the commonality of such a task is essential to its nature. In this regard, as Vittorio Subilia puts it, the community that confesses Christ as Lord is necessarily bound to be a synodal community, where it should be recalled that the ancient Greek underlying the noun synod is συν-οδός or together-way. Accordingly, Subilia claims that the church is a synodal community insofar as it is a community of brothers and sisters who, under God's sole authority, walk together on the same way 'striving to apply the evangelical word in the different situations where they are called to put their faith into practice'.[4]

One way of describing this character of synodality is precisely as the church being formed around and always growing into Christ the Truth. For this process to succeed, no member of the body of Christ can dispense with the others, and all members of the body need to grow up into Christ the Head and the Truth. What follows is an attempt to clarify the nature of this synodal 'growing up into', in conversation with the work of one of our foremost contemporary Christian ethicists.

David Gushee on Truth and Truthfulness

In his recent book *Introducing Christian Ethics: Core Convictions for Christians Today*,[5] David Gushee devotes an entire chapter to the nature of truth and the virtue of truthfulness, while also addressing the preoccupation that the church can fail to live up to the Truth it is formed around. That

[4] Vittorio Subilia, *'Solus Christus': Il messaggio cristiano nella prospettiva protestante* ['Solus Christus': the Christian Message in a Protestant Perspective] (Torino: Claudiana, 2019), p. 112.

[5] David P. Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics: Core Convictions for Christians Today* (Canton, MI: Front Edge, 2022).

the issue is a burning one for Gushee is clear right from the start: according to him, we live in times so dire that it is appropriate to say that 'truth, truthfulness, and truth-telling need a comeback'. In his own words, 'systemic lying from elected government leaders, torrents of disinformation and misinformation on social media, ideologically fractured accounts of reality, the loss of a social norm of truth-telling, the abandonment of the virtue of truthfulness; this is where we find ourselves in many nations today […] truth itself needs a comeback'.[6] At the same time, Gushee points to a chronic deficiency in treatments of truth and truthfulness by Christian ethicists: '[…] when Glen Stassen and I published the first edition of *Kingdom Ethics* in 2003, we began with a study of over 50 existing Christian ethics textbooks. Only six contained any discussion of the nature of truth, the virtue of truthfulness, or the extent of the moral obligation to tell the truth.'[7] Hence, through his discussion of truth in *Introducing Christian Ethics* Gushee is laying two tasks ahead of him: that of contributing to correct a long-term lack of scholarly attention to the subject, as well as that of helping to start truth's much needed comeback. The very placement of truthfulness within *Introducing Christian Ethics* as the first element among five core values that are indispensable in order to articulate a Christian virtue ethics, clearly shows the weight that Gushee gives to the matter.[8]

The first item of discussion that Gushee deals with is an exposition of the nature of truth according to mainstream philosophical theories. This is followed by an engagement with biblical theology that forms a bridge between the previous theoretical approach to truth and an exploration of the virtue of truthfulness and of its integral place within Christian living.[9] In the light of his worries concerning the crisis in truth-telling in contemporary public life, Gushee chooses to focus precisely on this discussion of truthfulness as truth-telling as an essential component of a Christian character. While this choice is in itself unobjectionable and legitimate, Gushee's spin on the subject of truth and truthfulness leaves open some interesting avenues for development. In particular, I wish to try to expand the scope of Gushee's reflections

[6] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, pp. 94–95.
[7] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 94.
[8] Cf. Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 93.
[9] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, pp. 95–96.

on the nature of truth and its relationship to the body of believers by connecting them to what I have been previously discussing. By doing so, I aim to align with Gushee's own intentions: once again, it is truth itself that 'needs a comeback'[10] and not *just* truth-telling. I understand this to mean that for us to see this comeback happen, it is important that we get a better grasp of what the truth is in itself and why it matters so much to us as Christians. As has been argued above, this means nothing short of getting a better grasp of who Christ is, and how the church, as a synodal community, ought to walk together in his way.

Because of its subject matter and its dealing with philosophical theory, this article is bound to contain an unavoidable element of abstractness. Accordingly, in order to keep my argument as close as possible to actual church practice, in a later section I will intertwine it with some materials taken from a contemporary attempt to spell out the fundamentals of the Baptist understanding of the Christian faith: the Confession of Faith of the Italian Baptist Union (UCEBI[11]). This is the family of churches I belong to, and my argumentation is an attempt to ground my exercise in speculative theology in my own personal life of faith.

Lengthening Shorter Threads: On the Nature of Truth

As it has been already stated, right after discussing the role of truthfulness as a foundational and yet semi-forgotten Christian virtue, Gushee engages in a brief discussion of the nature of truth. Specifically, he does so by referring to a number of philosophical approaches to this subject.[12] I shall not rehearse here the whole of Gushee's examination of philosophical theories of truth; rather, I shall make reference to two options which he mentions, and which I shall employ in order to begin my argument.

The first two philosophical theories of truth introduced by Gushee are the so-called 'correspondence theory of truth', and what is

[10] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 95.
[11] Unione Cristiana Evangelica Battista d'Italia, <https://www.ucebi.it> [accessed 14 October 2022].
[12] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, pp. 95–96.

in fact a whole set of theories that may be collectively labelled 'pragmatic theories of truth'.[13] The latter term covers an entire philosophical paradigm, according to which 'truth is that which is verified when tested and/or put into practice'.[14] Under such a persuasion, 'Truth is not once and for all established, but instead provisionally verified or disconfirmed by constant examination, trial and error, and self-correction'; the provisional condition of the truth achieved at any moment in time makes it 'the hard-won achievement of a community of rigorous inquiry'.[15] Because of their character, pragmatic theories of truth are 'especially relevant in the sciences'.[16] Pragmatic theories of truth are described by Gushee as an alternative to what he claims to be 'the commonsense understanding that truth is *correspondence with reality*', or, 'more formally, [that] truth is the property of being in accord with reality or fact'.[17] This common-sense understanding of truth is at the root of and has been given philosophical form by what has become known as the 'correspondence theory of truth'. According to this philosophical approach, 'if I say x, x is only true if x corresponds with the fact of reality to which x refers'.[18]

Therefore, on the one hand, a naive pragmatist theory of the truth claims that truth is a constructed property. As such, the truth does not exist independently of the same process of testing and verifying that brings it together. Moreover, according to such an epistemological paradigm, truth is not anchored in reality in such a way as to make it something stable and independent of our own inquiry into the nature of what exists. On the other hand, a naive correspondence theory of the truth claims that truth is a stable and independent property that can be permanently and absolutely uncovered as we connect with and properly describe reality.

Insofar as he is focusing on the virtue of truthfulness and truth-telling, Gushee does not attempt to solve the tension between these two theories, limiting himself to note that 'for most everyday purposes, the

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13 Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 95.
14 Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 95.
15 Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 95.
16 Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 95.
17 Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 95.
18 Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 95.

correspondence theory of truth offers what we need […] when people's statements routinely do not correspond with the facts to which their words refer, they become liars, embracing a vice that violates the truthfulness upon which community depends'.[19] Hence, Gushee's implicit suggestion seems to be that pragmatic and correspondence theories of truth do not need to be in contrast with one another, but rather that the latter is sufficient in order to discuss everyday 'truth-matters'. At the same time, different approaches to the nature of truth such as the pragmatic one may be implemented as more complicated issues arise.

Following this suggestion, I want to posit here that it is possible to develop a view of truth that contains aspects drawn from both the pragmatic and the correspondentist approaches. As we shall see, under the arrangement that I shall propose, the pragmatic and the common-sense/correspondentist approach come to be seen as two aspects of the same dynamic. This is relevant insofar as I hold that there are other ways in which the church can end up as a community of liars than just by speaking things that do not describe reality correctly. Interestingly, Gushee himself seems to adumbrate such a possibility, when he notices that in the New Testament truth is sometimes treated in its '*mystical*, *participatory*, and *eschatological* dimension [that is, as] an aspect of God's character revealed at this eschatological moment that wills to enter and transform receptive human beings'.[20] It seems justifiable to deduce that it is possible to lie and to be a liar as the result of one's own un-receptiveness to God's transformative truthfulness. However, in order to see how this can be, there is a need to augment the tools that Gushee is offering us and to point them beyond his specific object of interest in *Introducing Christian Ethics*.

First, I shall attempt to solve the tension previously discussed between the two naive understandings of pragmatic and correspondence theories of truth. I shall focus in particular on dismantling the naive perception of correspondence theory, since, as Gushee has noted, correspondentism is close, if not identical to, our common-sense approach to the truth. In this respect, I want to suggest that the incompatibility that we seem to intuitively perceive between the correspondentist and the

[19] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 96.
[20] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 97.

pragmatic epistemological paradigms often depend on the fact that we implicitly load the notion of correspondence with a number of corollaries which are nonetheless unessential to its nature. Here are some examples of such corollaries: facts are always transparent to description; correspondence to reality is an all-or-nothing affair; any truthful description of a certain state of things necessarily exhausts everything that needs/can be said about those same things.

By grafting these corollaries onto our notion of correspondence, we end up attributing to our descriptions of reality an absolutistic outlook, inasmuch as they permanently oscillate between being totally untruthful or totally truthful. Such an absolutistic correspondentism cannot but sit uncomfortably with a pragmatic approach to truth, with its signature emphasis on provisionality, intersubjectivity, and the increase/decrease of the degree of truthfulness of our understanding of reality. This follows insofar as correct descriptions of reality that totally exhaust what they describe have no need to be tested or confirmed: they are simply correct. Moreover, if facts are transparent to descriptions, there is no need to proceed by trial and error. In other words, this means that quite often our common-sense understandings of correspondence theory do not explicitly account for the fact that reality is opaque, and that there is always more being in things that can be expressed through our descriptions. Because of this, our attempts to correspond with reality can have success only in degrees.

However, none of these corollaries is essential in order to uphold a correspondence theory of truth that takes into account and does justice to the opaqueness of reality. Such a theory would make room for and demands the kind of constant inquiry envisioned by pragmatic theories of truth. At the same time, there is no need for the inquiring community postulated by the pragmatic theories of truth to drop the notion that truthfulness involves corresponding to reality. Indeed, how could we test our hard-won truths if these could not express correctly (if partially) the actual fabric of reality? Furthermore, if truth is simply a useful construct that can be redefined at will and based on our need, what prevents it from degenerating into a concept arbitrarily filled with content defined by whoever at the time has the power to do so? (Gushee speaks of 'toying with cynicism about truth's meaning'.) Hence, by

avoiding the opposite extremes of naive correspondence theory and naive pragmatism, it becomes possible to understand qualified correspondence theory and qualified pragmatism as two aspects of the same process. More precisely, the practice of this 'middle way' could be understood to describe a process of growing participation into and expression of the truth, where the degree to which this happens is a function of the truthfulness of our correspondence to reality, and where, at the same time, this correspondence is progressively achieved through a persevering, intersubjective and communal praxis of inquiring into the truth.

One way of condensing this dynamic into one expression, could be that of talking of a correspondence *with* the truth. In other words, rather than evoking the idea of a correspondence of the truth-seeker *to* reality, as if somebody had to somehow go out of themselves in order to grasp and adhere to the bare object of their knowledge, we could turn instead to the image of a *co-respondence*. In other words, we could think of an ongoing dialogue or exchange of the truth-seeker with reality, where the former strives to become more real by getting to know more and by becoming more alike to the latter. In this perspective, thinking of truth and truthfulness in terms of a correspondence *with* reality implies understanding the truth-seeker and its correspondents as partners in a living relationship of exchange. As such, this relationship evolves as its life progresses, and can get more or less accurate as the relationship of correspondence grows more or less intimate. Just as in a verbal correspondence, further degrees of understanding the truth can be understood as the result of an exchange between two active poles engaged in a conversation, rather than as the fruit of an active intellect busy grasping an inert objective reality.[21]

Developing Shorter Threads: The Covenant of Truth

As I discussed in the introduction, the church is the only community formed around Christ, and as such is the only community formed around the Truth. Accordingly, it is called to be involved in a

[21] For a similar point, discussed in connection with the thought of Thomas Aquinas, see Karl Rahner, *Uditori della Parola* [*Hearers of the Word*] (Roma: Borla, 1977), p. 30.

relationship of ever greater correspondence with Christ. At the same time, the church's nature as a synodal community implies that this work of corresponding with Christ the Truth cannot be accomplished individually: while it is undeniable that there are some aspects of this process that belong to the level of personal existence (for example, personal reflection, personal prayer, and other practices), the job of corresponding with the Truth belongs to the whole community formed around it.

It is possible to shed further light on this point by expanding on yet another element of Gushee's treatment of truthfulness in *Introducing Christian Ethics*. This has to do with his engagement with the broader characterisation of the church as the covenant people of God.[22] Commenting on Ephesians 4:25–32, Gushee writes that 'Ephesians 4 bans lies and commands truthfulness because "we are all members of one another." […] A different way to say it is that part of the covenant that binds members of the church with Christ and one another is a shared commitment to nurture truthful character and to tell the truth to one another.'[23] Therefore, under the present terms we could say that Christians have the duty of corresponding with the truth, insofar as falsity and lies in particular 'tear down rather than build up [the body of Christ]' and breach the 'covenantal web' that binds Christians together.[24] Accordingly, this is one way of substantiating Gushee's claim that 'truth […] is a matter of life and death'.[25]

In the light of our previous discussion concerning the nature of the truth, it goes without saying that this covenant of truth is neither automatically enacted nor always respected. If truth is the hard-won achievement of a community that seeks to correspond with it in an ever-increasing measure of intensity and precision, this also implies the

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[22] Arguably, this is the church's most fundamental trait; see, for example, James I. Packer, 'The Nature of the Church', in *Basic Christian Doctrines*, ed. by Carl Henry (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1975), p. 216.

[23] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 99.

[24] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 99; notice that Gushee employs the notion of covenantal web to describe our duty of telling the truth well beyond the borders of the church: we are implicated in a covenantal web of truth each time that we are having a 'conversation between free people who live in dignity'.

[25] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 103.

possibility of backsliding, of failure, and of experiencing a lack of energy towards sustaining such an effort. When this happens, the church fails to be itself, Christians fail to live up to their calling, and collectively they fail to show that truthfulness is 'an aspect both of God's character and of the expected character of God's people'.[26] In other words, when Christians do not correspond with the Truth, they become liars: they may not necessarily be telling verbal lies (of course, that is quite likely), but rather they become living lies, pretences of gospel-living people. In turn, Christians succeed in being themselves when they actively and successfully correspond with the Truth as they properly 'value truth, seek truth, and love truth as a core aspect of being followers of Jesus Christ who is the truth'.[27] As they do so, they strengthen the covenantal web that holds vertically between God and themselves, and horizontally between the believers of all ages, places, and socio-cultural conditions.

I will now seek to be more specific and discuss a number of articles from the confession of faith of a particular group of churches, specifically the confession produced by the Italian Baptist Union in 1990. As it will become evident in the next few pages, these articles represent the result of an historically situated instance of thinking about the church's ongoing effort of corresponding with the Truth. By letting this confession of faith interact with the concepts being presently employed I hope to make the latter less abstract, thereby showing with greater clarity their grounding in the actual experience of living faith. The angle I take is that of interrogating this confession of faith by asking two questions. 1) What means are to be employed in order to further the work of corresponding with the Truth? 2) Within the church of God, who is to do the work of corresponding with the Truth? Of course, given this article's limited scope, I will only be able to discuss what might be the answer to these questions in a very partial way. Accordingly, I shall take a particular focus on the central role of the Bible in our effort of corresponding with the Truth, as well as on the Christians' collective mandate of engaging with Holy Scripture.

Concerning the first question, it is clear that Baptists and Christians in general do share a number of collective and individual

[26] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 103.
[27] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 103.

practices, tools, and rituals that form part of their process of corresponding with the Truth. Examples that easily come to mind are the two ordinances of Baptism and the Holy Supper, communal worship, evangelisation, and so forth. However, primarily among churches steeped in the Protestant tradition, the importance of communal and personal Bible study stands out among the means of corresponding with the Truth. Such a focus placed on biblical meditation springs from the theological principle of *Sola Scriptura*. Article 3 of the Confession of Faith of the Unione Cristiana Evangelica Battista d'Italia (UCEBI) spells out *Sola Scriptura* in the following way:

> *Sola Scriptura*: The Bible is the only authentic and normative witness of the work of God in and through Jesus Christ. Inasmuch as the Holy Spirit makes it the Word of God, the Bible must be studied, honoured, and obeyed.[28]

In the present terms, insofar as the Bible is 'the only authentic and normative witness of the work of God in and through Jesus Christ', Holy Scripture is not only one of the means of nurturing the Church's covenant with God by corresponding with the Truth, but it also stands out as the compass by which Christians can judge the faithfulness of their efforts as they are actualised through other means of correspondence. Hence, in order to grow in their correspondence with Christ the Truth, Christians need to be constantly at work to discern, test and practise the Bible; furthermore, they need to apply Holy Scripture to other means of correspondence with the Truth, asking themselves whether or not these means need to be reformed or even dropped.[29]

The second question is that of who is to do the work of corresponding with the Truth and, specifically, who is to engage with Holy Scripture. While the answer to the first part should be obvious at this point — every Christian is called to correspond with the Truth —

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[28] UCEBI, Art. 3, <https://www.ucebi.it/chi-siamo/confessione-di-fede.html> [accessed 14 October 2022].

[29] As a matter of fact, this was already implied by the separatist doctrine of 'further light' that influenced Baptists from their very beginnings; N. G. Wright, '"Koinonia" and Baptist Ecclesiology: Self-Critical Reflections from Historical and Systematic Perspectives', *Baptist Quarterly*, 35 (1994), 363–75 (p. 366).

the answer to the second is not necessarily so. This is because Christian traditions with different spiritualities and different ecclesiologies may lay different emphasis on who is to engage actively with Holy Scripture. Churches like those in the Baptist tradition have historically framed their answers to these questions in the light of their congregationalist ecclesiology and their emphasis on discipleship and the universal priesthood of believers. Accordingly, I now quote in full Articles 8, 11, and 12 of the UCEBI's Confession of Faith, all of which concern in some way the nature of the church. Article 8, concerning what the Church is:

> The Church: Wherever believers are gathered together by the Word of the Gospel in order to listen always anew to this Word [see article 3], to share the Lord's Supper, to cultivate the bond of love, to make disciples through teaching and baptism, there is the Church of Christ, because He is among them.[30]

Article 11, concerning the universal priesthood of believers:

> The task appointed [to the disciples] by the Lord to share with their contemporaries the Gospel, turns them into authoritative messengers of the Word of the Lord, under the sole authority of Christ and by the efficacious work of the Holy Spirit.[31]

Finally, Article 12, concerning the ministries of the church:

> The Ministries of the Church: In order to equip the Church with the necessary gifts required to be the living body of Christ, the Holy Spirit calls different believers to a variety of ministries. We acknowledge that today these ministries include those necessary to the proclamation of the Gospel, to the impartment of Biblical and theological teachings, to the governance of the Church, to the administration of diaconal service both within and outside the Church. We are open to acknowledge any other gift the Spirit will raise within the church. The different ministries do not stand in a relationship of hierarchical subordination to one another; rather, they exist in an organic bond. All of them, each in its own way, concur to the life of the Church.[32]

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[30] 'Confessione di fede, Art. 8', UCEBI, <https://www.ucebi.it/chi-siamo/confessione-di-fede.html> [accessed 14 October 2022].

[31] 'Confessione di fede, Art 11', UCEBI, <https://www.ucebi.it/chi-siamo/confessione-di-fede.html> [accessed 14 October 2022].

[32] 'Confessione di fede, Art. 12', UCEBI, <https://www.ucebi.it/chi-siamo/confessione-di-fede.html> [accessed 14 October 2022].

From Article 8 we come to understand how discipling through teaching is essential to the nature of the church. This assertion is made with reference to *all* members of the church and, in this sense, Article 8 promotes what has been called an expansionist ecclesiology, as opposed to one that limits teaching and evangelism to ordained ministry.[33] Therefore, just as all believers are called to listen to the Word, they are also called to correspond with the Truth that is this Word, to teach it and to disciple others (and themselves) by doing so. This also means that *all* members of the church are called to nurture truthfulness in obedience to the covenant God has made with them; this is accomplished primarily but not exclusively via scriptural meditation. Article 11 complements this picture by claiming that by Jesus's ordaining intention and by the Holy Spirit's power, believers receive the means to teach the gospel authoritatively. Hence, through the same process by which Christians correspond with the Truth, they become empowered to help others to correspond with the Truth themselves. Finally, Article 12 offers a needed *caveat* to Article 11 by identifying theological and biblical training as just one of the many ministries existing within the Church.

This last detail prevents us from falling into confusing the call to all believers to correspond with the Truth and to teach others do so with a call to all believers to become theologians and academics. As it is expressed by Article 11 of the UCEBI Confession of Faith and is plainly taught by Scriptural *loci* such as 1 Peter 2:9, all Christians are priestly and therefore ministering people, each one of them being equipped and capable of fostering the upbuilding of the body.[34] In this respect, any member of the church, and in particular the vast majority who are not involved in some kind of officially recognised ministry, is responsible to be part of the church's living dynamic of corresponding with the Truth. In other words, each Christian is responsible for nurturing that 'spiritually empowered and deeply felt commitment to Christ' which 'is the foundation of a character that dwells in truth, and a way of life walking in the truth, here at the eschatological moment when the truth Himself has entered human history'.[35]

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[33] See Brian Stanley, 'Planting Self-Governing Churches: British Baptist Ecclesiology in the Missionary Context', *Baptist Quarterly,* 34 (1992), 378–89 (p. 379).
[34] Cf. Packer, 'The Nature of the Church', pp. 219–20.
[35] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 98.

When the church is actively corresponding with Christ the Truth and, as Gushee puts it in the previous quotation, 'walks in the Spirit', the whole life of every disciple speaks of the existential correlation between God and us, thereby standing as a living witness to the gospel.[36] In other words, this means that the life of every single believer establishes an *analogia discipuli*.[37] This expression, borrowed from Raffaele Volpe, means that when the disciples of Christ walk in Christ's Spirit they become a manifest evidence of their relationship and affinity to the Lord: they walk like Jesus did because they walk (in correspondence with) the Truth. At the same time, the very condition that shows forth the affinity between God and God's people also manifests the distance between Christ and Christ's disciples. In this respect, the relationship between Christ and the Truth is a relationship of identity, while that between the disciple and the Truth is one of participation. Subsequently, the dynamic of the *analogia discipuli* respects the infinite difference between Creator and creature, and the disciple never exchanges place and comes to be confused with the Lord.[38] Christians have an affinity to the Truth grounded in their being formed around it in a covenantal relationship, but they themselves are not the Truth. To nurture and show forth this affinity is both the privilege and the duty of every believer.[39]

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[36]Raffaele Volpe, *Lungo la via del Discepolato* [*Along the Way of Discipleship*] (Chieti: GBU Edizioni, 2021). This claim can be seen as a systematic presupposition of James William McClendon's claim that Christian biographies and their controlling images can be read as sources of theological inspiration; James William McClendon, Jr., 'Biography as Theology,' *CrossCurrents,* 4 (1971), 415–31 (p. 418).

[37] Volpe, *Lungo la via del Discepolato*, p. 24.

[38] Volpe, *Lungo la via del Discepolato*, pp. 57–58; when the Church forgets about this distance, it falls into the heresy of ecclesiological monophysitism.

[39] In respect, it should be specified that the universal church is more than just the sum of its parts: rather, as the body of Christ it is the sum of its parts, immersed in the Holy Spirit, who is the Lord and the Giver of Life and who animates and gives organic coherence to the church. Hence, there is a specific quality in the collective and transtemporal life of the church and in its organic and communal effort of corresponding with the Truth that cannot simply be obtained by adding up all the single believers and the local congregations existing through the centuries. Every member of the body has the whole of the body's DNA in it; because of this, every member of the body has the whole Truth and can communicate the gospel efficiently. However, different members have different purposes; because of this, only the totality of the body can show forth the Truth in the wholeness of its manifestations, meaning that there is a particular way in which the universal church exhibits in its own way the *analogia discipuli*. Paraphrasing together Kavin Rowe and Mark Dever, we could say that there is a specific way in which, by

Conclusion: Endlessly Spiralling into the Truth

In this final section, I want to draw my argument to a close by proposing a visual image, which I hope will give the reader a better sense of the dynamic of corresponding with the Truth.

This dynamic can be offered up for further meditation, I suggest, by referring to the image of the 'hermeneutical spiral'. I am taking this concept from Grant Osborne's manual of biblical interpretation that goes under the same title. There, Osborne argues that 'biblical interpretation entails a "spiral" from text to context, from its original meaning to its contextualization or significance for the church today'.[40] In this respect, he further characterises a spiral as 'an open-ended movement from the horizon of the text to the horizon of the reader […] spiraling nearer and nearer to the text's intended meaning as [the reader refines their] hypotheses'; this movement is evident in the fact that 'the spiral is a cone […] moving ever narrower to the meaning of the text and its significance for today'.[41] Hence, if not in words at least in substance, Osborne's description of the hermeneutical spiral implies the dynamic of corresponding with the truth. In this context, this dynamic is expressed as the increasing approximation achieved via a sustained hermeneutical effort to the intended meaning of the biblical text *and* to its proper application.

I hold that, in the light of what has been previously discussed, it is possible to repackage the image of the hermeneutical spiral as a proper visual description of the way in which the church as a whole strives to better correspond with the Truth. In other words, I am claiming that the church's effort to nurture its truthfulness can be depicted as a

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living the life of Truth, the church becomes a revelation of the Lord of All and subsequently 'the lives of Christians together [become able to] display visibly [as a community] the gospel they proclaim audibly'. Once again, this is not to deny that any single believer or limited group of believers can effectively communicate the gospel and live the life of Truth; rather, my claim is that they cannot do so in the same way and with same completeness of manifestations that is only achievable by the universal church (the full gathering of which shall happen only in glory). See Mark Dever, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2012), p. 60; Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 139–41.

[40] Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Westmont, IL: IVP Press, 2006), p. 17.

[41] Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, p. 17.

trajectory endlessly spiralling between the Truth and the community formed around it. An endless process alternating between plunging deeper into the Truth and an application of what is retrieved there, such that this application leads to a strengthening of the *analogia discipuli* displayed by the community of believers. By doing so, by endlessly spiralling into the Truth, the church becomes what it is meant to be, that is, the living 'proof of the Gospel, the appearance of the Gospel [and] what the Gospel looks like when played out in people's lives'.[42]

[42] Dever, *The Church*, p. 166.

Collective Forgiveness, Racism, and Patriarchy: The Challenge for US White Baptist Congregations

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Abstract
In his chapter on forgiveness, David Gushee asks, 'can collective groups forgive?' The difficulty of collective forgiveness is the focus of this article, which asks, 'What aspects of collective forgiveness need to be learned by white Baptist congregations in the process of forgiveness for the past sins of slavery?' The article investigates ecclesial practices and examines the ecclesial challenges needed for the offender in the harmed relationship to practise forgiveness. I first establish why white Baptist churches have not engaged with the notion of collective forgiveness. Second, I propose dismantling soft patriarchy to open the possibility for white churches to become places that can engage in collective forgiveness. In conclusion, I evaluate egalitarian feminism as a way forward for ecclesial communities to practise collective forgiveness. I also offer two first-steps for these Baptist congregations: hiring and electing an equal number of woman in leadership roles and changing theological language.

Keywords
Forgiveness; patriarchy; racism; Baptist

Introduction

In his book, *Introducing Christian Ethics: Core Convictions for Christians Today,* white American David Gushee illuminates the challenges of forgiveness for both the offender and the offended. Gushee focuses on forgiveness mainly in individual relationships while also asking the question 'can collective groups forgive?'.[1] He concludes that it is possible yet very difficult. The difficulty of collective forgiveness is the focus of this article as I seek answers to the question, What aspects of collective

[1] David P. Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics: Core Convictions for Christians Today* (Canton, MI: Front Edge, 2022), p. 151.

forgiveness can be learned by white Baptist congregations for their past sins of slavery in the United States?

In their research, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*, Michael Emerson and Christian Smith investigate the role of white Christians and racial injustice in the United States. They conclude that 'the collective wounds over race run deep. They need to be healed. And for healing to take place, there will have to be forgiveness.'[2] I suggest that the collective wounds of racism can be healed by the practice of collective forgiveness. However, in recognising the different dimensions of difficulty for collective forgiveness, I propose that pre-work, specifically the interrogation of patriarchal power norms, must first be undertaken by the offending group. As a framework for this article, I engage three chapters from Gushee's book: 'Forgiveness', 'Ending Patriarchy Once and For All', and 'Repenting White Christian Supremacism'. The following section briefly defines key terms before I give a short overview of the current racialised climate in the United States of America and the sense of urgency for white Baptist congregations to address this and for restorative work on racism. Next, I introduce and illuminate how soft patriarchy hinders the offender — white Baptist congregations — from practising collective forgiveness. Finally, I offer an egalitarian feminism model as a challenge to soft patriarchy and a way forward for collective forgiveness in white ecclesial communities.

Key Terms

This section offers brief definitions and clarification for key terms used throughout the article. Forgiveness is a relational act practised by humans 'in which we completely give up any claim on one who has wronged us to pay the moral debt they incurred'.[3] *Collective forgiveness* can be learned in ecclesial communities for the purpose of racial reconciliation between white Baptist Congregations and American

[2] Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 170.
[3] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 144.

Descendants of Slavery (ADOS).[4] ADOS is a recent term developed in the United States that describes individuals and communities who identify as predominantly black or African American. *White Baptist congregations* are ecclesial communities considered predominately white even though they may include ADOS and other people of colour. These congregations are classified as white and Baptist because they have roots in Southern Baptist traditions and are led by individuals who self-identify as white or Caucasian.

Forgiveness is a practice of repairing broken social relationships. According to Donald Shriver and his work *An Ethics for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics*, 'forgiveness has to be learned in a community'.[5] Forgiveness is learned in community for both the offender and the offended. The offenders, the white Baptist Church, must do their own restorative work if they want to practise collective forgiveness. This restorative work requires the challenge of collectively acknowledging the communal sins of racism that transcend an individual's lifetime. *Racism* is the dehumanising response to human difference that occurs out of the social construction of identifying people in terms of race and often involves 'a hierarchical classification system based on the invented racial categories'.[6] However, racism is often viewed only as an individualised or interpersonal relationship that comes with prejudice or violence. This view of racism can and still does occur. This article approaches racism in the systemic or structural sense. Over time these collective sinful practices of racism that are part of the legacy of past generations become embedded and fall under a type of category of racism called structural racism. Candis Watts Smith's research on racism emphasises how structural racism is about 'white racial dominance and racial power' found within US politics and religion that 'perpetuate and maintain the hierarchy of a racialized social system'.[7] Structural racism is at the root

[4] The concept and movement of ADOS began as a social media campaign created by Yvette Carnell and Antonio Moore and mainly focuses on reparations for American descendants of slaves. See https://adosfoundation.org [accessed 10 November 2022].

[5] Donald W. Shriver, *An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 35.

[6] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 183.

[7] Candis Watts Smith, *Black Mosaic: The Politics of Black Pan-Ethnic Diversity* (New York: New York University Press 2014), p. 61.

of the sin of slavery. I explain in more detail the connection between the sin of slavery and southern Baptist congregations.

Liberation ethics is an effort to end injustice from below, from outside the power dynamic structure of a community. Liberation ethics is an extension of Christian ethics and connected to communitarian ethics. Communitarian ethics asks, 'how do we develop communities of people, that are morally sound, good, and just?'.[8] Developing a Christian community requires the practice of collective forgiveness that stretches soft patriarchal communities to see beyond their top-down power structure. Many white Baptist churches come out of the Southern Baptist tradition and are historically rooted in patriarchy, the belief that God created the order of the world with a 'systemic male power over females'.[9]

I, like Gushee, utilise the term *soft patriarchy* to describe many white Baptist congregations who are taking an alternative, less intense approach to patriarchal leadership structures and male power. Liberation ethics, like Christian ethics, is a critical foundation for ecclesial communities working to end injustice. I propose that these white congregations can learn how to listen to voices and perspectives of those most mistreated, those pushed to the outside of the power structures. With this said, this article addresses only the work needed from the side of the white church and not the role of ADOS communities in collective forgiveness. I focus on white ecclesial communities in a way that Martin Berger encourages white academics to focus on white people. Berger's concern is that 'white academics who focus on representations of nonwhite peoples […] may use the mantle of "racial justice" as a respectable cover for indulging in our long-standing fascination with the other'.[10] For this reason, as a white academic, I examine my own racial representation by means of the role white Baptist congregations have in collective forgiveness. The following section illuminates the urgency for restorative work on racism in the United States.

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[8] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 9.

[9] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics,* p. 170.

[10]Martin A. Berger, *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 4.

Urgency for Restorative Work

In recent years, Civil Rights and Black Lives Matter movements have ignited an urgent call for the work of forgiveness in ecclesial communities. White churches, particularly those who are Southern Baptist or come from Southern Baptist traditions have a unique responsibility to practise collective forgiveness concerning the past sin of slavery. In his book *White Too Long*, Robert Jones explores the history of Southern Baptists and the sin of slavery, pointing out that 'Southern white Christians, particularly Baptists, played a critical role in justifying a particularly southern way of life, including what they sometimes referred to as the "peculiar institution" of slavery'.[11] Today, white Christians are having challenging conversations concerning their role in racial reconciliation and collective forgiveness in relation to ADOS communities. According to the research conducted by Emerson and Smith in 2020, eighty percent of white Christians believe that the top priority of living out their faith should be solving racism.[12] However, when asked about finding solutions to racism, forgiveness was not considered as part of racial reconciliation. Their research concludes that 'a Christian solution ought adequately to account for the complex factors that generate and perpetuate the problems, and then faithfully, humbly, carefully and cooperatively work against them'.[13]

Finding a Christian solution that does not create additional problems is the current challenge of racial reconciliation. Liberation ethics offers Christian communities a new lens, a process of seeing from the bottom-up new ways of imagining solutions to challenging problems such as racism. Liberation ethics illuminates non-white voices, perspectives that have historically been overlooked and ignored. Willie Jennings, an African American theologian, offers insights into how the problem in finding a solution could be caused by a 'diseased social imagination'.[14] Jennings states with conviction, 'I think most Christians sense that something about Christians' social imaginations is ill, but the

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[11] Robert P. Jones, *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), p 35.
[12] Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, p. 120.
[13] Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, p.172.
[14] Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 2010), p. 6.

analyses of this condition often don't get to the heart of the constellation of generative forces that have rendered people's social performances of the Christian life collectively anemic.'[15] Reimagining how the Christian faith can both help and hinder the restorative work of racial reconciliation is critical. Gushee adds that 'there is no evidence that white U.S Christians as a group have ever repented of their morally damaged faith'.[16] For that matter, Christians have not repented from many communal past sins such as the crusades which opened a gaping window towards Christian nationalism and structural racism. Richard Dyer explores racism in connection to the history of Christianity. Dyer expands upon the way the crusades created a surge of Christian nationalistic practices and beliefs, a 'struggle of Christianity against the non-Christian […] a tradition of black/white moral dualism to bear on the enemy that could itself be perceived as black'.[17] Christianity has a long history of abusing power and creating hierarchal systems that cause communal sinful practices generation after generation.

For the above reasons, I emphasise the importance of white Baptist congregations taking steps towards restorative work to learn how to practice collective forgiveness for the past sin of slavery. The next section addresses the problems of soft patriarchy and how they hinder the process of collective forgiveness.

The Problems of Soft Patriarchy

In the early stages of forgiveness, the offender must do their own work in the process of restoration by first acknowledging the sin 'without evasion'.[18] There are layers of work for the individual person, or in this case the individual congregation, should the offended party be willing to participate in the process of interpersonal restoration. This work includes confessing to God the wrong done and changing attitudes and behaviour. Confession is the acknowledgement of the sin, openly and

[15] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, p. 6.
[16] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 196.
[17] Richard Dyer, *White*, twentieth anniversary edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017) p. 67.
[18] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 148.

honestly with oneself and the community. The act of acknowledgement is the first hurdle that can arise with soft patriarchy.

As stated earlier, patriarchy is a power system where men hold power over woman. Currently there are conversations in US conservative congregations about Christian patriarchy — women submitting to their husbands — being different from pagan patriarchy — women submitting to all men. Allison Beth Barr uncovers how US conservative church leaders, many of whom are Southern Baptists, argue for Christian patriarchy but do not support pagan patriarchy. However, Barr says, 'patriarchy is patriarchy' and rejects this notion that Christian patriarchy can be separate from pagan patriarchy and maintains that it cannot be confined just within Christian homes.[19] The power dynamic of patriarchy is the root of the problem which keeps Baptist congregations from practising collective forgiveness for the sin of slavery. Because there has been a recent movement by conversative congregations to soften the patriarchal approach in their communities, a new term, soft patriarchy, has arisen. Gushee uses this term, even though he agrees with Barr that patriarchy, whether soft or hard, is still patriarchy.[20]

Soft patriarchy is a common practice in white Baptist congregations today. With this in view, I return to the problem of acknowledging the injustice occurring in the ADOS communities. ADOS communities come from generations of enslaved Africans who were told to submit to white male power. Following the Civil War in the United States, these beliefs and practices still existed in white Baptist congregations. Long explains how 'holding racist views is nearly four times as predictive of white evangelical Protestant identity among frequent church attenders as among infrequent church attenders'.[21] Acknowledging the racism that still exists means white Baptist congregations 'own up to white supremacism's religious dimension'.[22] So how can white congregations acknowledge and begin the restorative

[19] Beth Allison Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2021), p. 18.
[20] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 172.
[21] Jones, *White Too Long*, p. 146.
[22] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 184.

work of collective forgiveness? Acknowledging the sinful behaviours of slavery that led to racial injustices today is a very difficult first step that white Baptist congregations need to take towards learning how to practise collective forgiveness. This raises the bigger question of what hinders these white congregations from taking that first step?

Gushee argues that soft patriarchy creates 'moral-perception blind spots' that can hinder the perspective of those at the top of the power structure, in this case the ecclesial leadership, from acknowledging or seeing injustice.[23] The issue of blindness keeps many white Baptist congregations from acknowledging the sin of slavery. Colonial Christianity, upheld by Southern Baptists, is rooted in white male power, and this power dynamic can create problems of blindness in terms of the critical practice of collective forgiveness. Below I indicate in more detail how some of the particular aspects of soft patriarchy prevent white Baptist congregations from seeing the injustice caused by the sin of slavery.

One problem within in these soft patriarchal communities is that their ecclesial leadership is shaped like a pyramid, a top-down decision-making model. At the top of the pyramid sits the pastor, deacons, or elder boards who discern the spiritual direction and ecclesial ministries for the congregation. These are power positions of discernment or 'seeing' on behalf of the ecclesial community. These individuals who hold the 'seeing' positions often self-identify with societal and religious norms, that is as white, heterosexual, and male. These power holders live on the inside of society, existing within the status quo. In their research on racialisation and evangelical religion, Emerson and Smith highlight how the racial practices that create racial divides are invisible to most white people.[24] People who live inside the norms of society, the white, straight men, are often blind to seeing the injustice caused by colonial Christianity. Because these power positions are held by those who naturally fit into the norms of society, the ability of the ecclesial community to acknowledge racial injustice and communal sinful behaviours becomes increasingly difficult, thus hindering the practice of communal repentance and collective forgiveness.

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[23] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 177.
[24] Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, p. 9.

The problem with soft patriarchy and, for that matter, any hierarchal model of community, is naming the power issue that places people in dominant or subordinate positions. Barr addresses the power dynamics of patriarchal systems stating how they 'place power in the hands of men and take power away from women'.[25] Those who exercise this model believe that God designed creation, specifically humanity, to co-exist in this power scarce model. Soft patriarchy creates power distinctions between people based upon gender, sex, and race. Those on top are considered to have the right God-given qualifications, anatomically and racially, to be the head, the dominate figure, the leader and decision maker for the community. Those who are not on the top, namely women, children, and people of colour, fall into many sub-levels within the hierarchal structure. Those in the sub-sections of humanity are considered soft, weaker by design, created to fill a 'helper' role for those on top. Soft patriarchy believes that those who do not qualify to be on top by God's patriarchy are supposed to take a submissive, passive role. Although all people are equal in the eyes of God, this stance is based upon certain beliefs about manhood and womanhood. Because soft patriarchy aligns with a tier system that places people according to a conservative view of masculinity and femininity, individuals and groups of people find themselves disappearing into different tiers within the community.

In the historical US context, anyone who was not considered a white man fell into a subordinate and silent role in society. Women and others deemed weaker or softer, such as people of colour, needed white men to have value and place in society. Women needed a father, older brother, and eventually a husband for financial, social, and spiritual security. Likewise, slaves and Africans needed a white master to have purpose and salvation in society. For centuries, power has been and continues to be at the core of the role that white men assume in the US patriarchal system. According to this theological and ideological belief, white men are supposed to protect, govern, and save, in both the social and spiritual realms, those who were created submissive to them. Whiteness is rooted in patriarchy, placing all power in the hands of white men. This power dynamic causes a bias or obliviousness in the

[25] Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood*, p. 18.

community. In her book, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church,* Mary McClintock Fulkerson unpacks this bias or blindness as a 'form of not-seeing' categorised as 'non-innocent obliviousness […] the power of the visceral […] where fear, anxiety and disgust occur'.[26] White men as a category carry the power of the visceral, white power, which causes blindness in soft patriarchal congregations.

In his research, 'Whiteness Made Visible: A Theo-Critical Ethnography in Acoliland', Todd Whitmore examines the invisible nature of white power as a white man in Africa. Whitmore states that his task is 'not making the invisible visible to myself and other whites, but to make what is already visible intelligible'.[27] For white Baptist congregations, seeing racial injustice is the act of making intelligible or making sense of what is already visible to those who are mistreated and on the margins. White power and privilege are an embedded disability of not seeing what is visible. It is a 'perceptual blindness' that keeps white Baptist congregations from seeing the oppression against ADOS communities.[28] The following section offers a way to see and address the power dynamics of soft patriarchal congregations.

A Way Forward

Gushee offers egalitarian feminism as a counter position to soft patriarchy. Gushee says that the difference between these two positions comes down to the notion of power: 'Soft patriarchy preserves male power […] egalitarian feminism rejects exclusive male power and calls for power-sharing between women and men.'[29] Soft patriarchy promotes individual power and in this case for only a few male individuals in the community. However, egalitarian feminism offers a power-sharing model that moves power from individuals to the entire community. Egalitarian feminism offers another option for ecclesial

[26] Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007), p. 19.
[27] Todd Whitmore, 'Whiteness Made Visible: A Theo-Critical Ethnography in Acoliland', in *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics,* ed. by Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 180.
[28] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 185.
[29] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 177.

communities wanting to do restorative racial justice work. I suggest that this important aspect of power sharing can move an ecclesial community beyond individualism. The power dynamics of patriarchal communities faces two challenges: acknowledging the injustice, and moving beyond individualism. Egalitarian feminism is a way forward for white Baptist congregations to practise collective forgiveness.

For many white Baptist congregations, individualism is rooted in the theological and ideological beliefs that expect the individual person to make spiritual decisions about salvation as well as living as a self-sustaining citizen in society. In patriarchal churches, Biblical interpretations often focus on the individualised experiences concerning salvation, discipleship, and relationship with God. In the United States, society places a high value on individualism and self-sufficiency. Willie Jennings uses the term 'white self-sufficient masculinity' as a way of describing an ideological way of organising life that distorts how people live in and see the world.[30] White self-sufficient masculinity is rooted in 'whiteness' and is a way that individualism organises itself in institutions and communities in the United States. Individualism is a white privilege that distorts white Christian perceptions on racism in America.

White Christians often view individualism as the only possible approach to racial reconciliation. Emerson and Smith highlight three individualistic beliefs of white Christians who want to address the problem of racism. They found that white Christians 'view the race problem as (1) prejudiced individuals, resulting in poor relationships and sin, (2) others trying to make it a group or systemic issue when it is not, or (3) a fabrication of the self-interested'.[31] These perspectives are due to a lack of communal vision, of not seeing the collective wounds and how collective sin impacts the community at large. The very notion of communal sin that transcends an individual's lifetime seems beyond the comprehension or imagination of many white Christians. Practising collective forgiveness comes with acknowledging collective wounds that have been caused by structural racism and communal sinfulness over several generations. Egalitarian feminism offers an alternative approach

[30] Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2020), p. 3.
[31] Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, p. 117.

to destructive male power dynamics by approaching power communally, allowing the entire community to share in the restorative process of collective forgiveness. This approach, rooted in liberation ethics, creates spaces of discernment and decision-making that involve the entire community, especially those who have been pushed to the margins.

Conclusion

I acknowledge that fixing soft patriarchy does not mean solving racism in the white church. I also acknowledge that the egalitarian feminism structure can prioritise white women over black women. With this said, white Baptist congregations can acknowledge the past sins of slavery by taking steps away from soft patriarchy and towards egalitarian feminism. These steps are not quick nor easy moves for ecclesial communities embedded with centuries of patriarchal beliefs and practices. I offer two steps that will need further exploration in future research and writings. First, patriarchal Baptist congregations must hire and elect an equal or a number of women as pastors and leaders of their communities. Second, these communities can change theological language such as only referring to God as male. These two foundational changes can open a path for ecclesial communities to practise restorative work and collective forgiveness between white Baptist congregations and ADOS communities.

Sacredness of Life and the Ethics of Justice: An Appreciative Evangelical Response to David Gushee's Post-Evangelical Approach

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Abstract
In his new book, *Introducing Christian Ethics: Core Convictions for Christians Today*, Gushee revisits theological positions he and Glen H. Stassen originally articulated in *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Correlated with Gushee's move toward a post-evangelical perspective, the new publication reframes his earlier evangelical positions and proposes post-evangelical positions for conversation by the church. This article offers an appreciative yet critical response to Gushee's evolving understanding of sacredness of life and justice ethics, in light of selected traditional evangelical and Baptist core convictions and justice concerns. Three specific areas of conversational concern are highlighted. First, the implications of Gushee's rejection of *capacity* to frame a definition of the image of God in human beings and replacement of it with an allegiance to God's command. Second, the article considers Gushee's concept of the moral status of human worth and introduces the theme of *personality* into the discussion of *imago Dei*. Third, that sacredness of life convictions inevitably influence justice ethics. Gushee's earlier work centred on Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust. The article considers how *personality* as an integral aspect of *imago Dei* impacts the ethical discussion of Christian justice concerns in relation to the Holocaust and racism.

Keywords
Ethics; justice; *imago Dei*; personality; personhood; sacredness of life

Dialogue between Evangelical and Post-Evangelical Perspectives

In his recently published book, *Introducing Christian Ethics: Core Convictions for Christians Today* (2022), distinguished Christian ethicist David P. Gushee reconsiders key theological perspectives and ethical stances that he and Glen H. Stassen originally articulated in *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (2003).[1] In recent years, Gushee has

[1] David P. Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics: Core Convictions for Christians Today* (Canton, MI:

transitioned toward a post-evangelical perspective, and *Introducing Christian Ethics* reframes his earlier evangelical positions and proposes post-evangelical arguments for conversation. This article offers an appreciative yet critical response to Gushee's evolving understanding of sacredness of life and justice ethics, in light of selected traditional evangelical and Baptist core convictions and justice concerns.

Three specific areas of conversational concern will be discussed. First, this article will reflect on the implications of Gushee's rejection of *capacity* to frame a definition of the image of God in human beings and its replacement with an allegiance to God's command (chapter 9 of *Introducing Christian Ethics*). Second, this paper will consider Gushee's concept of the moral status of human worth and introduces the theme of *personality* into the discussion of *imago Dei*. Third, that sacredness of life convictions inevitably influence justice ethics (chapter 10 of *Introducing Christian Ethics*). Gushee's earlier work centred on Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust. This article will consider how personality as an integral aspect of *imago Dei* impacts the ethical discussion of Christian justice concerns in relation to the Holocaust and racism.

Although Gushee presently self-identifies as a post-evangelical Baptist and I speak from an evangelical Baptist perspective, there remains much we share in common regarding ethics. Like Gushee, I would assert that Christians must not forget that Christian ethics has been 'transformed from a prophetic-populist Jewish resistance ethic to the moral code of the dominant, and dominating, European gentile civilizations'. The diminishment of the Jewish influence on the church across the centuries has been a great loss, and so contemporary Christian ethicists should 'retrieve the very Jewish-prophetic-populist resistance ethic that Jesus himself embraced and that imperial churches had obscured or reversed'.[2]

Furthermore, as an evangelical I believe, as Gushee does, that 'Christian ethics is ultimately the effort to know and do God's will as we have met God in Jesus Christ'.[3] Accordingly, with Gushee I find much

Front Edge, 2022); David P. Gushee and Glen H. Stassen, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 2003).

[2] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 2.

[3] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 11.

wisdom in the *teleological ethics* approach to addressing moral concerns, recognising that Jesus was a 'deeply goal-driven person' who 'offered a laser-focus on doing God's will as his stated goal'.[4]

Nevertheless, Gushee and I find ourselves in different theological homes. As a post-evangelical, he 'can no longer claim that just reading the Bible resolves all questions related to the Christian moral life'.[5] As a non-fundamentalist evangelical, I have never felt limited to consulting only biblical texts while seeking wisdom on contemporary ethical, political, scientific, or social issues.

In his introduction to the theme of *sacredness* (chapter 9), Gushee distances himself from 'sacredness-of-life language' that has been 'discredited by conservative hypocrisy'. He condemns 'American Christian conservatives' who 'express opposition to abortion but in relation to no other issue in which human life is at stake'.[6] I read these charges and agree in part with Gushee, but he does not seem to leave room for evangelical Baptists, conservative (but not fundamentalist) in theology and doctrine, who do not recognise themselves in his broad and negative characterisation of evangelicalism. My evangelical compatriots and I have consistently, and for decades, articulated an ethically consistent *whole life* approach to the sacredness of human life, covering the entire life cycle.[7] We apply a comprehensive pro-life ethic to the panoply of life: affirming the sacredness of humans in the womb, honouring the life of mothers, seeking the welfare and growth of all children, opposing social injustice and inequality, racism and poverty, promoting the participation of marginalised people in society (including people with disabilities, immigrants, and refugees), opposing unjust warfare (though not all of us are pacifists), and protecting people at the conclusion of their lives. We extend this pro-life ethic to the environment, advocating for ecological care and justice.

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[4] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, pp. 17, 26. My application of teleology is spiritual journey based. See Lee. B. Spitzer, *Endless Possibilities* ([n.p.]: Spiritual Journey Press, 1997).

[5] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 32.

[6] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, pp. 32, 107.

[7] Tish Harrison Warren, 'How the "Whole Life" Movement Challenges the Politics of Left vs. Right', *New York Times*, 20 March 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/20/opinion/whole-life-movement-charlie-camosy.html> [accessed 30 April 2022].

As far as I know, most of my circle of evangelical colleagues were opposed to white Christian nationalism and the January 6 2021 attempted takeover of American democracy. In agreement with Baptist historian Thomas S. Kidd, 'I am a NeverTrump evangelical' who will continue to be as 'committed as ever to historic evangelical beliefs and practices' while rejecting unbiblical and idolatrous errors promoted by other American evangelicals.[8] Gushee would surely stand with us on many of these ethical and justice issues.

Sacredness of Life and Moral Status by Command

The soul can split the sky in two,
And let the face of God shine through.[9]
—Edna St. Vincent Millay

'Sacredness' of human life is a 'critically important ethical norm'[10] in Gushee's ethical system. As in all Christian ethical systems, the sacred nature of human life rests upon the doctrine of '*imago Dei*, the image of God (Gen 1:27-28)'.[11] Gushee points out that *imago Dei* is often interpreted as a set of *capacities* humans possess.[12] In an earlier chapter, capacity is described in terms of 'components of character' such as attitudes, dispositions, emotions, conscience, habits, and practices.[13] Gushee expresses reservations about this way of describing the *imago Dei* because some capacities 'are not present in utero, they develop slowly during childhood, they never fully develop for some, and they often erode to near nonexistence at the end of life'.[14]

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[8] Thomas S. Kidd, *Who is an Evangelical?: The History of a Movement in Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), p. 3. In 2019, as General Secretary of the American Baptist Churches USA, I published a pastoral letter condemning Christian nationalism, antisemitism, and other forms of intolerance; see Lee Spitzer, 'The Collective Conscience of Our Country', American Baptist Churches USA, <https://www.abc-usa.org/2019/08/the-collective-conscience-of-our-country-a-pastoral-letter-from-abcusa-general-secretary-lee-spitzer/> [accessed 22 August 2022].

[9] 'Renascence,' in *Edna St. Vincent Millay: Selected Poems,* ed. by Colin Falck (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), p. 10.

[10] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 108.

[11] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 109.

[12] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*.

[13] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 85.

[14] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 109.

The philosophical problems associated with defining the sacred image of God within human beings in terms of character capacities are noted by utilitarian ethical systems that devalue human life based on the lack of such capabilities. For example, Peter Singer rejects John Rawls's justice model 'that equality can be founded on the natural characteristics of human beings' because there is no way to prove that all human beings possess the capacity to be 'moral persons, even in the most minimal sense'. He cites the cases of those who lack such a key ability, which undergirds equality — 'infants and small children, along with the mentally defective, lack the required sense of justice' that a 'moral person' should possess. Singer concludes, 'So the possession of "moral personality" [defined as the ability to enter into mutually beneficial agreements] does not provide a satisfactory basis for the principle that all humans are equal. I doubt that any natural characteristic (…) can fulfill this function, for I doubt there is any morally significant property which all humans possess equally.'[15] The only philosophically secure basis for justice and human equality, from a utilitarian point of view, is 'the principle of equal consideration of interests'.[16] Furthermore, Singer rejects the Christian core conviction that human life is uniquely sacred because we are made in the divine image, or that human life has more intrinsic value than that of other species, some of which may be considered 'persons'.[17]

Perhaps in response to this objection by Singer and others, Gushee makes a significant tactical shift — he redefines the sacredness of human life as having 'moral status' because 'God has ascribed such sacred worth to life'. Accordingly, we are called to 'treat all persons with reverence, respect, and responsibility because God has revealed that this is what we must do'. God's *command* confers moral status that must be respected and observed if one wishes to be ethical and just:

> In Christian terms, human life is sacred not merely on its own, because of something intrinsic to it, but because of its connection with the God who created it and who values it as such. We love human beings, we reverence and respect and seek to care for each person, not because of who they are but because of who

[15] Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 16–17.
[16] Singer, *Practical Ethics*, p. 48.
[17] Singer, *Practical Ethics*, pp. 48–105. See Gushee and Stassen, *Kingdom Ethics*, pp. 221–23.

> God is and what God has commanded. This is by far the surest basis for a sacredness-of-life ethic.[18]

This raises two key questions for conversation. First, has Gushee worked out the inherent tensions concerning how command theology creates philosophical and practical problems for Christian, and specifically Baptist, conceptions of conscience? Jewish philosopher Michael Wyschogrod explores these issues in a provocative essay published in 1981. Succinctly stated, he argues that Judaism is founded on 'obedience to God', whereas 'in conscience it is not after all God who is being heard but man. The Jew, however, is required to listen to God and not to man.'[19] Accordingly, although the rabbinic tradition knew of the concept of conscience, 'they did not develop conscience into a doctrine'.[20] Yet, for Baptists, conscience is an ethical cornerstone. Gushee does agree with Wyschogrod on at least one major point — Wyschogrod warns that 'it is our responsibility to have a conscience in good working order',[21] and Gushee states that 'even moral conscience can go wrong because it can be damaged, suppressed, or malformed'.[22]

Second, does Gushee intend to assert that the sacredness of life and *imago Dei* is an *ideological argument*, in which God's command should be honoured and obeyed merely because it has been proclaimed? Is a divine conferral of status a sufficient basis upon which to protect life and proclaim justice in a world where many deny God's existence or the Christian understanding of Jesus's authority?

Submission to divine command may satisfy some believers (if we could only agree on what has been commanded!), but the divine voice may not necessarily be recognised or observed by others. This is the argument presented by Anat Biletzki, professor of philosophy at

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[18] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 109. For a more detailed statement of this conviction, see Gushee, *The Sacredness of Human Life: Why an Ancient Biblical Vision Is Key to the World's Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), p. 33.

[19] Michael Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise: Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. by R. Kendall Soulen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 81–82. The original chapter was published as 'Judaism and Conscience', in *Standing Before God: Studies on Prayer in Scripture and in Tradition with Essays in Honor of John M. Oesterreicher*, ed. by Asher Finked and Lawrence Frizzell (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1981), pp. 313–28.

[20] Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise*, p. 76.

[21] Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise*, p. 90.

[22] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 21; see also p. 86.

Quinnipiac and Tel Aviv Universities, in a 2011 essay. She rejects all religiously-based human rights defences that focus on the sacredness of human life as inadequate when faced with secular political and ethical challenges — 'dignity and inviolability certainly do not need to be tied down to the sacred'. In particular, she rejects 'command' theology: 'Who commands us? The question boils down to who or what is the source of moral authority — God or the human being, religion or ethics?' Biletzki rejects command ethics because it is not grounded in human rights per se but rather in 'the human status of sacredness' based on humanity's having 'been created in God's image' — which has 'nothing to do with human rights'.[23]

Other philosophers take a different tack. Writing from a phenomenological perspective, French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas posits the primacy of ethics over being. Since ethics serve as 'the spiritual optic', there 'can be no knowledge of God separated from the relationship with men' (humanity), for the 'face' of the 'Other' is the 'very locus of metaphysical truths and is indispensable for my relation with God'.[24] Ethical relations are conducted though language — conversation — that seeks justice.[25] Accordingly, 'truth is founded on my relationship with the other, or justice'.[26] For Levinas, the discourse flowing from 'face to face' discourse necessarily embodies moral and ethical 'responsibility' and 'obligation' that flow from 'command'.[27] This is not the Biblical 'command' Gushee describes from a singular God relating to a particular people, but rather a universalised call to ethical responsibility imposed by human interaction and relationship, 'the presence of the third party, the whole of humanity, in the eyes that look at me'.[28] As Levinas states, 'The Other who dominates me in his transcendence is thus the stranger, the widow, and the orphan, to whom I am obligated.'[29]

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[23] Anat Biletzki, 'The Sacred and the Humane', in *Modern Ethics in 77 Arguments*, ed. by Peter Catapano and Simon Critchley (New York: W. W. Norton, 2017), pp. 162–67.
[24] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 78.
[25] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 88.
[26] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 99.
[27] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 200–01.
[28] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 213.
[29] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 215.

In contrast to Levinas, Wyschogrod is unimpressed with the results of ethics as a foundation for Jewish existence and life, preferring instead an emphasis on Jews' identification as the chosen people through covenant. Rejecting Gushee's dependence on command as primary, Wyschogrod asks, 'Why does God relate to Israel in covenant with its implication of equality rather than in a relationship of command with the expectation of obedience?' His answer is revealing:

> A community of faith can be commanded because it consists exclusively of persons who stand in a relationship of faith to the source of the commands. But it is otherwise with a natural family […] The covenant cannot be shed as easily as a faith can […] By relating to the Jewish people in the context of covenant, the human integrity of the Jewish people is recognized and it is not turned into a community of faith alone.[30]

Of course, Gushee is well aware that the Christian community's relationship with God is centred around a covenant that provides the theological context for commands, but Wyschogrod is correct in noting that it is not biologically but rather faith based. He relativises the scope, power, and authority of commands, and it remains for Gushee, I believe, to reflect on how this impacts his reliance on commands as an ethical focus for disciples of Jesus in particular, and humanity in general.

Personhood and Personality

Furthermore, I would add a third question: Is there a corresponding act of creation that provides a more *existential* or *ontological* basis for the image of God and the resulting sacredness human beings might enjoy? How does Gushee's understanding of the sacredness of life as a moral status declared by God relate to the *imago Dei*? I am not clear as to exactly what the *imago Dei* means in Gushee's argument. He admits that 'theologians have often disagreed about the precise meaning of the *imago Dei*'.[31] In what way are humans made in the very image of God? Gushee provides a Christo-centric answer:

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[30] Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise*, pp. 50–51. I am indebted to Wyschogrod's editor Soulen for his reference to Levinas in his introduction, which alerted me to the link between Levinas and Wyschogrod (see pp. 3–4).

[31] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p, 111.

> The concept of the image of God takes on profound new possibilities when it is reframed as the *imago Christi*, the image of Christ. Christ embodied what it means to be fully human. We are invited to participate in his life and come into conformity with it (Rom 12:1-2). Here sacredness becomes *moral sanctity*, or *holiness*, as a human life begins to show forth the moral goodness that God intended for all of us.[32]

But what about God's children who do not choose the way of Jesus Christ? Gushee states, 'To take the God-given sacredness of human life seriously is to learn to see each human being as a kind of royalty, a person of high dignity and ineffable worth. It demands a spirit of reverence toward all persons, respecting each in the uniqueness of their own personality and life story.'[33] This last phrase — 'uniqueness of their own personality and life story' — is most interesting and not to be overlooked. Does Gushee understand 'personality' in a psychological sense (as in the psychological characteristics of a person), or in a spiritual sense (referring to the *imago Dei,* human soul, or spirit)?[34]

'Personality' in relation to *imago Dei* is used once by Gushee in his earlier work, *The Sacredness of Human Life*. It is Gushee's aim to affirm 'the sacred worth of each and every human person'.[35] He approvingly quotes Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, who ties the ethical understanding of the sacredness of the person to social justice:

> The person is the clearest reflection of the presence of God among us. To lay violent hands on the person is to come as close as we can to laying violent hands on God. To diminish the human person is to come as close as we can to diminishing God […] From our recognition of the worth of all people under God flow the responsibilities of a social morality.[36]

Gushee then offers a set of questions designed to further explore this line of reasoning which reintroduces 'personality' into the discussion:

> (Puzzle #2) Is the focus of 'the sacredness of human life' on the human individual, the human community, or the human species? Or is it perhaps even some aspect of the individual, such as the human body, the human spirit, or even the human

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[32] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 113.
[33] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p. 115.
[34] In chapter 7 of *Introducing Christian Ethics*, Gushee refers to 'inherent personality traits' in the context of a child's maturation; see p. 80.
[35] Gushee, *The Sacredness of Human Life*, p. 2; see also pp. 5, 9, 92, 229.
[36] Gushee, *The Sacredness of Human Life*, pp. 16, 31.

> 'personality' or human 'potential'? Might there ever be conflicts of interest and vision between those seeking to defend human worth and well-being at these various levels?[37]

Gushee's puzzle does not present a precise definition of personality, and it may be simply a synonym for person or personhood, the two terms used extensively throughout both the original *Kingdom Ethics* and especially in *The Sacredness of Human Life*. In the former, Gushee embraced a 'full-personhood' view of human beings, from conception.[38] In the latter, person and personhood may be interpreted to incorporate both ontological and status meanings.[39]

In contemporary culture, the very definition of personhood has been at issue in American courts. The overturning of Roe versus Wade in the recent Dobbs versus Jackson Women's Health Organization by the United States Supreme Court[40] provided an occasion for conservative legal scholar Erika Bachiochi to inquire, 'What makes a Fetus a Person?' in a piece for the *New York Times*. Her main concern is whether there is an 'equivalence between a *human being* and a *human person*'.[41] The goal of establishing that a foetus enjoys full personhood is a significant feature of the anti-abortion, pro-life movement.[42] Although this present article does not provide a critique of Gushee's chapter on abortion, it is worth noting that he omits a discussion of the personhood of the foetus in this most recent argument, preferring instead to focus on technology (birth control), patriarchy, and the rights of women in modern culture.[43] The difference of approach to abortion as a moral

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[37] Gushee, *The Sacredness of Human Life*, pp. 34, 460.

[38] Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, pp. 222–24.

[39] See, for example, Gushee, *The Sacredness of Human Life*, pp. 219, 222, 224, 229.

[40] For the case that led to the decision of the Supreme Court in the US to overturn the constitutional right to abortion won in the Roe versus Wade case in 1973, see Supreme Court of the United States, Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, No. 19-1392. Decided June 24, 2022, <https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/.19-1392_6j37.pdf> [accessed 10 October 2022].

[41] Erika Bachiochi, 'What Makes a Fetus a Person?', *New York Times*, 2 June 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/01/opinion/fetal-personhood-constitution.html> [accessed 22 August 2022], Section A, p. 23.

[42] 'Is the Fetus a Person? An Anti-Abortion Strategy Says Yes', *New York Times,* 22 August 2002, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/21/us/abortion-anti-fetus-person.html> [accessed 22 August 2022], Section A, 1.

[43] Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics,* chapter 17, pp. 213–24.

challenge for Christians represents an important dividing line between evangelical and post-evangelical ethics.

Another interesting case has received less public exposure. The New York State Court of Appeals ruled in June 2022 that an elephant at the Bronx Zoo could not 'be considered a person who was being confined illegally'.[44] Legal rights accorded to humans do not necessarily apply to animals, the court held.

In her recent book, *The Person in Psychology and Christianity*, developmental psychologist Marjorie Lindner Gunnoe offers summaries of five paradigms or descriptions of 'personhood',[45] and scrutinises them according to the biblical worldview she outlines. The theories of development (Erikson's lifespan, Bowlby's attachment theory, Skinner's behaviourism, Bandura's social cognitive model, and evolutionary psychology) are not necessarily religious, but are relevant to the concerns Gushee raises in the ethical sphere. Likewise, Gunnoe's spiritual perspective expresses itself by paying homage to the importance of *imago Dei,* which leads her to present 'a working model of personhood' based on human essence, purpose, moral-ethical tendencies, agency, and accountability.[46] There would be profit in creating a conversation space between Gushee's ethical position and Gunnoe's psychological perspective on personhood.

A Case in Point: The Holocaust

As a Jewish disciple of Jesus, I deeply appreciate David Gushee's concern for the Jewish people, as expressed in his research on Christian rescuers during the Holocaust. As a Christian ethicist, he reveals that his goal is to 'challenge' readers to encourage 'moral change through encounter' with the stories of Christians who assisted Jewish people during the Holocaust, to 'help Christians conduct themselves better

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[44] 'Happy the elephant is not a person, a court rules', NPR/WHYY, 14 June 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/06/14/1105031075/bronx-zoo-elephant-not-person-court-rules> [accessed 22 August 2022].

[45] Marjorie Lindner Gunnoe, *The Person in Psychology and Christianity: A Faith-Based critique of Five Theories of Social Development* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2022), pp. 4–5.

[46] Gunnoe, *The Person in Psychology and Christianity*, pp. 3–39.

today and in the future than most of our forebears did during that terrible European tragedy'.[47]

In the first half of the twentieth century, Baptists and other Christians regularly and with deep conviction employed *personality* as a key term to affirm the sacred worth of all human beings because they were created in the image of God, as manifested in their having a soul or spirit that was intended to relate to God. Since all human beings possessed this spiritual core of being, freedom of conscience and religion, human rights and dignity, and social justice were outstanding among the ethical imperatives that were to guide Christians and be expressed in the socio-political order. This understanding of *personality* was shared by both evangelical and modernists/liberals, and constituted the major ethical weapon employed by Christians against the rise of totalitarianism (in both its communistic and fascist forms) and the antisemitic agenda of Hitler and German Nazism.[48]

Embedded within the Holocaust-era narratives are manifold stories of how Baptists (and evangelicals) responded to the challenges posed by Nazi antisemitism and their attempt to exterminate the Jewish people of Europe.[49] Gushee's work ably explores why individual Christians became rescuers, even at the risk of their own lives.[50] My purpose here is to briefly note that the ethical application of the conviction of *personality* played a significant role in how Baptists (and others) responded to Hitler, antisemitism, and the persecution of the Jewish people. Due to space considerations, representative examples will have to suffice.

At its World Congress in Berlin in 1934, the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) passed an historic and prophetic resolution on racialism.[51] Under the watchful eyes of the Nazi authorities, Baptists went beyond the

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[47] David P. Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust: A Christian Interpretation* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 1994), p. xiii. See also Gushee and Stassen, *Kingdom Ethics*, pp. 72, 77.

[48] See Lee B. Spitzer, *Baptists, Jews, and the Holocaust*: *The Hand of Sincere Friendship* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2017), for an exploration of this thesis for Northern, Southern, and National Baptists in America, as well as for the Baptist World Alliance.

[49] I share several of these stories in my new book, *Sympathy, Solidarity, and Silence: Three European Baptist Responses to the Holocaust* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2022).

[50] See Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust*, pp. 91–148.

[51] See Spitzer, *Baptists, Jews, and the Holocaust,* pp. 400–08.

Barmen Declaration in condemning racial discrimination against the Jews, as well as Blacks and Asians. It was the only international public protest against Nazi antisemitism lodged in Germany during the Nazi period, and its ethical foundation rested on the universality of 'human personality' — that people of all races and nations equally possessed personality, were of infinite worth to the Creator God, and thus were deserving of life and political justice. It declared,

> This Congress representing the world-wide, inter-racial fellowship of Baptists, rejoices to know that despite all differences of race, there is in Christ an all-embracing unity, so that in Him it can be claimed with deepest truth there is 'neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all in all.'
>
> This Congress deplores and condemns as a violation of the law of God the Heavenly Father, all racial animosity, and every form of oppression or unfair discrimination toward the Jews, toward coloured people, or toward subject races in any part of the world.
>
> This Congress urges the promotion of Christian teaching concerning respect for human personality regardless of race, and as the surest means of advancing the true brotherhood of all people, urges the active propagation of the Gospel of Christ throughout the World.[52]

Personality was such a common term that it was usually employed without a clarifying definition, but my research indicates it was normatively understood as an ontological assertion, often serving as a substitute for soul or spirit. In a philosophical argument, F. Townley Lord affirms that the Christian understanding of personality comes from Hebraic thought, which sees a vital connection between soul and body, and so Baptists 'correctly apprehend the main teaching of the New Testament when we regard the personality of man as a unity of soul-body. The whole man is to be consecrated to the service of God."[53]

John Cournos was a Jewish writer who endeavoured to convince Jews to ally with Christians against Hitlerism. In 1938, he asserted, 'Hitler's rejection of Christ can therefore be easily understood: Christ,

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[52] Baptist World Alliance World Congress Resolution 1934.7 'Racialism', in *Fifth Baptist World Congress: Berlin, August 4–10, 1934*, ed. by J. H. Rushbrooke (London: Baptist World Alliance, 1934), p. 17.

[53] F. Townley Lord, 'The Achievement of Personality in a Material World', *Baptist Quarterly* 8, no. 5 (1937), 227–35 (p. 231). See also F. Townley Lord, 'Some Modern Views of the Soul', *Baptist Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (1930), 66–73.

whose appeal is to personality and for the creation of personality, is the only stumbling-block in the way of his acquisition of totalitarian power.'[54] For Cournos, personality was not a status, but rather an existential entity with attributes that could mature through time. Likewise, it was common for the maturation of personality to be expressed by Baptists of the era in Christian education or in spiritual formation terms.

For Baptists during the mid-twentieth century, personality called forth ethical responsibility, especially in regards to racism. At the Seventh Baptist World Congress in Copenhagen in 1947, the BWA condemned the Holocaust in specific terms,[55] and also applied its understanding of personality to race relations in general. The Congress's second resolution made the following declaration:

> Race relations is one of the perplexing problems which the Christian Church must face in the world today. There are many conditions and attitudes which strain and impair human relations and cause great concern; but we cannot solve the problem unless we face it forthrightly as Christians. We have tried to ignore, evade, and attempt by platitudes to solve this most grave problem. It cannot be solved in this way. We must insist in human relations and intercourse of all people that the Christian approach be made in the matter of race relations. Appreciation for the ideals, aspirations, and personalities of all races must be insisted upon by Christians.[56]

Howard Thurman and Personality

One of the gifts I have received from reading David Gushee's newest work is his recommendation of Howard Thurman's *Jesus and the Disinherited*. Writing in 1949, just after the Holocaust had ended, Thurman often spoke of personality in a manner consistent with other twentieth-century Black Baptist clergy; they elucidated an understanding of personality that was informed by the experience of slavery and racial oppression.

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[54] John Cournos, *An Open Letter to Jews and Christians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 11.

[55] BWA World Congress Resolution 1947.3 'Resolution concerning the Jews', in *Seventh Baptist World Congress, Copenhagen, Denmark, July 29–August 3, 1947*, ed. by Walter O. Lewis (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press, 1948), p. 99.

[56] BWA World Congress Resolution 1947.2 'Resolution on Race Relations', in *Seventh Baptist World Congress,* ed. by Lewis, pp. 98–99.

For Thurman, 'personal worth' and 'personal dignity' are grounded in 'one's own integrity of personality'[57] as a child of God in response to unjust suffering. Dignity is gained when humans treat one another as equals, but when the strong oppress the weak, there can be no 'healing and reinforcement of personality'.[58] Thurman is well aware that personality (of an individual or a group of people) can be manipulated by hatred, causing 'something radical to happen to their personality and their over-all outlook to render them more effective tools of destruction'.[59] Hatred brings 'death to the spirit and disintegration of ethical and moral values', and the 'urgent needs of the personality for creative expression are starved to death'.[60] In contrast, Thurman notes that when we see one another, across racial divides, as equals, 'the attitude of respect for personality'[61] (i.e. the personality possessed by each other) may serve as a technique to bring about reconciliation and possibly even friendship.

Accordingly, Thurman asserts that the 'attitude of respect for personality presupposes that all the individuals are within what may be called the ethical field'.[62] This corresponds to Jesus's attitude toward all people, based on his fundamental 'reverence for personality'.[63] In Jesus, we encounter 'a personality whose story is available and whose reach extends far'[64] and who serves as the guide humanity needs to negotiate all the ethical challenges of this life.

Echoing Thurman, during both his previous evangelical and current post-evangelical vantage points, David Gushee's kingdom-centred ethical outlook has consistently encouraged disciples of Jesus Christ to appreciate the sacredness of life and its impact on justice issues, such as the Holocaust and racism. Ethical thinkers from both movements owe him a debt of gratitude for honestly and clearly raising issues and concerns, even when we may disagree on the applications or

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57 Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), pp. 40–41, 43.
58 Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, pp. 63, 66–67.
59 Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, pp. 71–73.
60 Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, p. 77.
61 Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, p. 91.
62 Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, p. 92.
63 Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, pp. 94–96.
64 Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, p. 101.

conclusions he draws from the ethical controversies he explores. As Gushee states, 'It is far past time for Christians to care as much about justice as did Jesus, the prophets, and Jewish Law — and many of our most civic-minded neighbors, who do not call on the name of Jesus but do fight hard for justice.'

Infant Dedication in the Early Church: Texts, Commentary, and Present-Day Application

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Abstract:
This article argues that, in addition to infant baptism, the early Church practised infant dedication and subsequent enrolment into the catechumenate as a way of incorporating children who were born to Christian parents into the church. The first section presents cases of children who were born to Christian parents and yet who were not baptised as infants. The second section provides texts and commentary regarding infant dedication and/or enrolment into the catechumenate. The third section discusses how this evidence might be applied to our current church setting.

Keywords:
Infant dedication; catechumenate; baptism; paedobaptism; credobaptism; ecumenism

Introduction

Beginning with Balthasar Hübmaier in the early sixteenth century, and stretching down to the present with Everett Ferguson, credobaptists have been keen to show that their view of the correct recipients of baptism — believers as opposed to babies — can be justified on historical grounds by early church practice and theology.[1] What has received much less attention, however, is what the early church did regarding their unbaptised infants. In fact, aside from David Wright's brief chapter on the topic, I can find no other work that has addressed the issue straightforwardly.[2] The purpose of this article, therefore, is to

[1] Balthasar Hübmaier, 'Old and New Teachers on Believers Baptism', in *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism,* ed. and trans. by H. Wayne Pipkin and John Yoder (Walden, NY: Plough, 2019), pp. 245–274; from Everett Ferguson's many works on the topic, see e.g., *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), pp. 362–379.

[2] David Wright, 'Infant Dedication in the Early Church', in *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church*, ed. by Stanley Porter and Anthony Cross (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999),

show how unbaptised children born to Christian parents were incorporated into the church during the patristic era through infant dedication and subsequent enrolment into the catechumenate. To achieve this, I will first provide evidence of babies born to Christian parents who were not baptised at birth but rather later in life, then evidence of Christian parents who dedicated their children and/or enrolled them into the catechumenate, and finally I will indicate how this historical study may be applied to the church's current situation and ecumenical dialogue.

Before proceeding, a few clarifications are in order. First, regarding terminology, I will use 'infant baptism' (which I will treat as synonymous with paedobaptism) to refer to the baptism of a newly born infant (usually a few days or weeks old); 'emergency baptism' to refer to the baptism of an individual, normally an infant or small child, due to the threat or reality of imminent death; 'toddler baptism' to refer to the baptism of small children (usually a few years old) who are brought forward by their parents; and 'believer's baptism' (which I will treat as synonymous with credobaptism) to refer to the baptism of a child or adult who believes the gospel and presents themselves for baptism. Second, this article is dedicated primarily to a historical discussion of baptism and infant dedication during the patristic period, and only at the end do I attempt to apply this precedent to the modern church. Thus, readers should not conflate my description of patristic practice and theology with Reformation and modern practice and theology. Third, in the second major section of this article, I discuss infant dedication and enrolment into the catechumenate. Although they are distinct, early Christians seem to have understood the former to naturally lead to the latter, although it is not clear how much time elapsed between the two.

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pp. 352–378. Wright himself states, 'no one to my knowledge has addressed the question what if anything was done during at least half a century to the offspring of Christian parents who were not given baptism. […] I have found no more than the occasional footnote or paragraph' ('Infant Dedication', p. 352). Brian Najapfour's book on infant dedication only treats the phenomenon from the seventeenth century onward and within the Baptist tradition (Najapfour, *Child Dedication: Considered Historically, Theologically, and Pastorally* (Calcedonia, MI: Biblical Spirituality Press, 2014), esp. ch. 2).

Specific Cases in Which Babies Born to Christian Parents Were Not Baptised at Birth

Although Joachim Jeremias, David Wright, and Everett Ferguson list the names of individuals who were born to Christian parents and yet were not baptised until much later in life, they do not provide documentation to support their claims.[3] This section provides the information regarding these individuals' dates of birth and baptism, and the footnotes provide primary and secondary literature in support.[4] Previous treatments have mixed together clear examples of the phenomenon with merely possible ones, but I have placed them in separate categories below. Additionally, previous treatments have also incorrectly listed examples of this phenomenon, which I have corrected in a third and final category.

Certain and Probable Cases of Babies Born to Christian Parents Who Were Not Baptised at Birth

Novatian (200–258). According to a letter written by Cornelius, bishop of Rome, to Fabius, of the church of Antioch, Novatian was raised in a Christian home and brought up in the church, but not baptised until later in life when he thought he was going to die from a certain sickness (emergency baptism).[5]

Children born in Tertullian's church in Carthage (early third century). Tertullian counselled parents regarding their children in the following way: 'deferment of baptism is more profitable, […] especially so as

[3] Joachim Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), p. 88; Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, p. 627 (Ferguson says he is dependent on Jeremias, *Infant Baptism*, p. 88, but his list is more extensive); Wright, 'Infant Dedication', pp. 361–362 (Wright cites Jean Daniélou and Henri Marrou, *The First Six Hundred Years*, trans. by Vincent Cronin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 303, but this must be combined with p. 306); David Wright, 'At What Ages were People Baptized in the Early Centuries?' *Studia Patristica*, 30 (1997), 389–394 (esp. p. 393; Wright is dependent on Jeremias, *Infant Baptism*, and Dölger, 'Die Taufe Konstantins und ihre Probleme', in Konstantin der Grosse und seine Zeit, ed. by Franz Joseph Dölger (Freiburg: Herder'sche Verlagshandlung, 1913), pp. 377–447).

[4] Unless otherwise indicated, all translations in this article come from the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (*ANF*), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1 and 2 (*NPNF*[1] and *NPNF*[2]).

[5] Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 6.43.13–17.

regards children'.[6] It seems safe to assume that at least one family followed his advice.[7]

Ephraem the Syrian (306–373). The few scattered autobiographical references that Ephraem has left in his writings suggest that he was born in a Christian home, but according to Sebastian Brock he 'was probably baptised as a young man'.[8]

Boys in the church of Alexandria (c. early fourth century). According to Rufinus, several boys were baptised by Athanasius while playing in the sea, which was considered valid by the bishop, Alexander.[9] Although their parental background is unknown, they are referred to as 'catechumens', which means that all of the boys were actively involved in the church. It seems safe to assume that at least one of their parents were Christians when they were born.[10]

Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329–390). Gregory was born to Christian parents, but he was not baptised until he was around thirty years old, that is, circa 359/360.[11] Gregory's father, Gregory the Elder, was bishop of Nazianzus (328–374),[12] and thus it is possible — even likely — that

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6 Tertullian, *On Baptism* 18. For Latin text and English translation, see Ernest Evans, *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism* (London: SPCK, 1964; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), pp. 38–39.

7 Ferguson writes, 'His opposition [to infant baptism] is an indication that the practice was neither long established nor generally accepted. Tertullian, however, never states that he is opposing a novel practice; rather, it was unnecessary (the innocence of children) and carried risks of the child later developing an evil disposition' (*Baptism in the Early Church*, p. 366). If true, this would place the phenomenon of Christian parents not baptising their children at least back into second-century Carthage.

8 *Hymns against Heresies* 3.13 and 26.10; *Hymns on Virginity* 37.10; *Carmina Nisibena* 16:16–22; Sebastian Brock, *The Harp of the Spirit: Poems of Saint Ephrem the Syrian*, 3rd edn (Cambridge: Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies, 2013), p. 8; St. Ephrem the Syrian, *The Hymns on Faith*, trans. by Jeffrey Wickes (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), p. 8.

9 Rufinus, *Church History* 10.15 (see below for text and discussion).

10 After all, does it seem likely that all of the boys were born to non-Christian parents who converted sometime shortly after their births and then enrolled them as catechumens? This may have been the case with some, but surely not all.

11 John McGuckin, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), p. 55; Brian Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 3, 8.

12 Volker Menze, 'Episcopal Nepotism in the Later Roman Empire', in *Episcopal Networks in Late Antiquity: Connection and Communication Across Boundaries*, ed. by Carmen Angela Cvetković and Peter Gemeinhardt (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2019), pp. 19–43 (p. 26).

of Nazianzus (328–374),[13] and thus it is possible — even likely — that this practice extended throughout his diocese as well.

Basil of Caesarea (330–379) and Gregory of Nyssa (335–395). Basil and Gregory were brothers born to Christian parents, but Basil was not baptised until approximately 357, that is, when he was about twenty-seven years old,[14] and Gregory was not baptised until around 358–363, that is, when he was somewhere between twenty-three and twenty-eight years old.[15]

Ambrose (340–397). Ambrose was born to Christian parents, but he was not baptised until after his name was put forward for the bishopric in 374, that is, when he was about thirty-four years old.[16]

Rufinus of Aquileia (345–411). Rufinus was born to Christian parents, but he was not baptised until circa 369–370, that is, when he was about twenty-four to twenty-five years old.[17]

John Chrysostom (347–407). John was born to Christian parents (at least his mother), but according to J. N. D. Kelly he was not baptised until he was a 'young man approaching twenty', that is, circa 368 (Easter day).[18]

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13 Volker Menze, 'Episcopal Nepotism in the Later Roman Empire', in *Episcopal Networks in Late Antiquity: Connection and Communication Across Boundaries*, ed. by Carmen Angela Cvetković and Peter Gemeinhardt (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2019), pp. 19–43 (p. 26).

14 Stephen Hildebrand, *Basil of Caesarea* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), pp. 2, 9.

15 Anna Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters. Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 9.

16 Paulinus of Milan, *Life of Ambrose*, §7–8; Rufinus, *Church History* 11.11; cf. Mary Simplicia Kaniecka, *The Life of Saint Ambrose: A Translation of the* Vita Sancti Ambrosii *by Paulinus of Milan* (Merchantville, NJ: Evolution, 2019); Philip Amidon, trans., *The Church History of Rufinus Aquileia, Books 10 and 11* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 74. In addition, it appears that Ambrose's brother Satyrus and sister Marcellina shared a similar story (Wright, 'At What Ages', p. 393).

17 Francis Xavier Murphy, *Rufinus of Aquileia (345–451): His Life and Works* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1945), pp. 6, 23; J. N. D. Kelly, trans., *Rufinus: A Commentary on the Apostles' Creed* (New York: Newman Press, 1978), p. 3.

18 Palladius, *Dialogue*, 5; Chrysostomus Baur, *John Chrysostom and His Time*, vol. 1, trans. by M. Gonzaga (London: Sants, 1959), p. 85; J. N. D. Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom — Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 5, 17.

Jerome (347–420). Jerome was born to Christian parents in Stridon, but he was not baptised until 366 in Rome, that is, when he was nineteen years old.[19]

Augustine (354–430). According to Augustine himself, his mother Monica was a devout Christian, but she did not have him baptised as an infant, and only considered baptising him in his youth when she thought he was about to die due to sickness (emergency baptism).[20] Augustine was baptised by Ambrose of Milan on Easter day 387, that is, when he was about thirty-three years old.[21]

Children born in Gregory of Nazianzus's church (c. 380). While preaching from his pulpit in Constantinople in about 380, Gregory advised parents that they should 'wait for the third year, or a little more or a little less' before bringing their children forward for baptism.[22] It seems safe to assume that at least one family followed his advice.[23]

Some children born in Tarragona (385). In Siricius of Rome's letter to Himerius, bishop of Tarragona (Spain), he says that 'anyone who has vowed himself to the service of the church from infancy must be baptised before the years of puberty and join the ministry of the lectors' (*Ep.* 1.9.13, written in 385).[24] Their involvement in the church from

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[19] Jerome, *Ep.* 16.2.1; Stefan Rebenich, *Jerome* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 4.

[20] Augustine, *Confessions* 1.11.17.

[21] Apparently, unbaptised children in the church were a common phenomenon in Augustine's experience. When relating his own experience of baptism, he writes, 'After all, why is it that even now, the words resound in our ears concerning someone or other, "Leave him be, let him do it — he's not yet been baptized!"' (*Confessions* 1.11.18; for translation, see Augustine, *Confessions: Books 1–8*, ed. and trans. by Carolyn Hammond, Loeb Classical Library 26 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), p. 33). While this may apply to a baptised person of any age, the surrounding context is of the 'delay' of baptism for infants (although it is important to note that, in light of this and other studies, the phrase 'delayed baptism' already prejudices the discussion in favour of paedobaptism, as much as the phrase 'anticipated baptism' would prejudice the discussion in favour of credobaptism).

[22] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations* 40.28; for translation, see St Gregory of Nazianzus, *Festal Orations*, trans. by Nonna Verna Harrison (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), p. 124.

[23] Ferguson writes of Nazianzus's posture, 'Gregory's proposal of baptism after three years of age makes more sense as a response to a recent practice of infant baptism in nonemergency situations than as an effort to modify a long-established custom' (*Baptism in the Early Church*, p. 596). If true, then toddler baptism in Constantinople would have predated Nazianzus's sermon on the topic in 380.

[24] Cited in Wright, 'Infant Dedication', pp. 374–375.

'infancy' (*infantia*) means that their parents were Christian at the time of their birth (or shortly thereafter). The fact that the bishop of Rome did not rebuke the bishop of Tarragona implies that he did not oppose such a practice, and possibly that he even approved of it. This would certainly fit with the fourth-century setting in which this letter was written.

Some children born in Cyril of Alexandria's church (c. 425–428). In his commentary on John, Cyril wrote that a newborn infant can be brought 'either to receive the chrism of the catechumenate or the [chrism] at the consummation of holy baptism'.[25] Cyril discusses two possibilities for infants born to Christian parents. Although it is unclear whether, in the second option, Cyril is saying that the parents who are presenting their children for baptism are doing so for the purposes of infant or emergency baptism, the first option assumes that not all parents are presenting their infants for baptism of any kind.[26] It seems likely that at least one family opted for the first option.

Uncertain Cases of Babies Born to Christian Parents Who Were Not Baptised at Birth

Perpetua's son (c. 203). Although Perpetua was baptised in prison just days before her martyrdom, there is no mention of her infant son being baptised. Nevertheless, there are too few details to know if his lack of mention was intentional or unintentional.[27]

Anthony the Monk (c. 251–356). Although he was raised in a Christian home, no mention is made of his baptism.[28] However, it is uncertain whether this lacuna is significant or not.

Athanasius (c. 295–373). Athanasius did not discuss his childhood, and the only two ancient sources — Rufinus, *Church History* 10.15 and the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* — give conflicting stories: the former

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[25] Cyril of Alexandria, *Comm. John* on 11:26; for translation, see Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John*, trans. by David Maxwell, Ancient Christian Texts (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), p. 88; also cf. Wright, 'Infant Dedication', p. 375.

[26] In *Sermo Dolbeau* 14, Augustine says that catechumens are 'marked by some sacrament of faith' (*aliquo sacramento fidei signarentur*). This may help explain Cyril's allusion to a 'chrism' of the catechumenate.

[27] See *Passion of Perpetua* §2–3. Neither is there mention of Felicity's infant being baptised in prison, but again, many details are lacking (*Passion*, §15).

[28] See Athanasius, *Life of Anthony* 1.

implies that he was raised in the church (baptism not mentioned) and the latter states that he was born to a pagan mother (and baptised as a boy).[29] The first account may imply that he was not baptised as an infant, while the second would invalidate him for consideration for such an option.

Theodore of Mopsuestia (350–428). Theodore was baptised in his late teenage years, but it is not known if he was born into a Christian family.[30]

Other uncertain cases. David Wright says that 'quite possibly' others such as Ulfilas and John Cassian were born to Christian parents but not baptised until later in life, but does not cite primary sources to substantiate his claim.[31] Additionally, it may be that John Cassian claims that Nestorius had been born to Christian parents, catechised, and subsequently baptised in the church of Antioch, but the text is too ambiguous to allow for certainty.[32]

Mistaken Cases of Babies Born to Christian Parents Who Were Not Baptised at Birth

Paulinus of Nola (354–341). Joachim Jeremias and David Wright include Paulinus in their list of babies born to Christian parents who

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[29] See David Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria: Bishop, Theologian, Ascetic, Father* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 1–3; John Tyson, *The Great Athanasius: An Introduction to His Life and Work* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), p. 5. Rufinus continues his account by saying that after Athanasius baptised the other boys in the sea, he was educated by a scribe and received instruction from a teacher of literature, and then his parents gave him back to the church where he was later ordained into the clergy. Thus, it appears that Athanasius was relatively young when he baptised the others. In order for the bishop to consider Athanasius's baptism as valid, it seems necessary for him to have been baptised first, thus suggesting that Athanasius was baptised at an early age. Unfortunately, the evidence does not allow us to be more precise than this.

[30] L. Patterson, *Theodore of Mopsuestia and Modern Thought* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1926), pp. 1–2. Dimitri Zaharopoulos says that 'probably his parents were Christians', but apparently is relying on circumstantial, as opposed to concrete, evidence (*Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Bible: A Study of His Old Testament Exegesis* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), p. 9).

[31] Wright, 'Infant Dedication', 362, and 'At What Age', p. 393.

[32] John Cassian, *Against Nestorius* 6.5: 'And what then if I were to deal with you in this way? What would you say? What would you answer? Would it not, I adjure you, be this: viz., that you had not been trained up and taught in this way: that something different had been delivered to you by your parents, and masters, and teachers. That you did not hear this in the meeting place of your father's teaching, nor in the Church of your Baptism: finally that the text and words of the Creed delivered and taught to you contained something different. That in it you were baptized and regenerated.'

were not baptised at birth.[33] However, although according to Dennis Trout he was baptised 'probably not long before his departure for Spain in 389', that is, when he was around thirty-five years old, it does not appear that his parents were Christian when he was born, but rather became so later.[34]

Some Conclusions

If we take into account only the certain examples of babies born to Christian parents who were not baptised as infants, then there are fourteen documented examples of this phenomenon in the early church. While this number may appear small, some observations help us see its significance. First, the number is much greater than fourteen when we include these individuals' brothers and sisters, the families who followed their pastors' advice to not baptise their babies, and the funeral inscriptions (not discussed here) which attest to babies who, at least in some cases, were born to Christian parents but who were only baptised shortly before death (emergency baptisms).[35] Second, the phenomenon is not isolated to the preference of individual families, but rather was preached and/or practised by bishops and church leaders at some of Christendom's most important centres: Carthage (Tertullian), Tarragona (Himerius), Alexandria (Alexander and Cyril), Nazianzus (Gregory the Elder[36]), and Constantinople (Gregory of Nazianzus). This would have had the effect of increasing the phenomenon's number, visibility, and legitimacy.[37] Additionally, despite the many biographies and

[33] Jeremias, *Infant Baptism*, p. 88; Wright, 'At What Age', p. 393.

[34] Dennis Trout, *Paulinus of Nola: Life, Letters, and Poems* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 31, 65–66.

[35] For a list of names of brothers, sisters, and friends, see Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, p. 627. For the evidence from funeral inscriptions, see Ferguson, 'Inscriptions and the Origin of Infant Baptism', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 30 (1979), 37–46; and *Baptism in the Early Church*, pp. 372–377. However, in the case of the inscriptions, it is nearly impossible to know if the parents were Christians at the time of the birth of their (now deceased) children.

[36] Gregory the Elder was bishop of Nazianzus (328–374) when his son Gregory was born (329), and thus those under his care would have seen the bishop not baptise his infant son. Surely this would have influenced others to do the same.

[37] Although they did not know it at the time, today we can see that of the original eight doctors of the early church — Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Athanasius, Gregory of Basil, Gregory Nazianzus, and John Chrysostom — six (possibly seven) were not baptised as babies. Many of them praised their parents for their upbringing, which at least implied issues relating to baptism.

autobiographies that we have of early church figures, the first person known by name to have been born to Christian parents and baptised as a baby in a non-emergency situation is Emperor Julian in around 331.[38] Third, the time frame of this phenomenon is not isolated to the period between the years 329 and 354 as Joachim Jeremias claimed,[39] but rather begins at least as early as Novatian and Tertullian in the opening years of the third century and extends at least to approximately 425–428 with Cyril of Alexandria's commentary on John. This is a time frame not of some 25 years, but rather of some 225 years.[40] Fourth, the geographic diversity must be appreciated, since it extends throughout the Roman Empire and beyond: Rome, Carthage, Syria, Alexandria, Cappadocia, Milan, Stridon, and Constantinople.

In summary, Christian parents not baptising their babies was not a momentary crisis of the mid-fourth century,[41] nor was it a fringe movement led by unknown or otherwise insignificant leaders and laymen, but rather was a well-established practice throughout Christendom during at least the early third through early fifth centuries and involved some of the most important figures of the church during that time period. Whatever the framers of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed may have meant by the phrase 'We confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins', they certainly did not mean exclusively paedobaptism.

Infant Dedication and the Catechumenate

The previous section demonstrated that not all children who were born to Christian parents were baptised as infants and concluded by

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38 Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, p. 628 (if he had not been baptised as an infant, perhaps he would not have been known as an 'apostate'). Also notable is the silence regarding paedobaptism in treatises dedicated to how Christian parents ought to raise their children; for example, John Chrysostom, *On Vainglory and the Right Way for Parents to Bring up their Children*.

39 Jeremias, *Infant baptism*, p. 89.

40 Similarly, Jeremias's assertion that 'the earliest case known to me in which Christian parents postponed the baptism of their children is in the year 329/30 (Gregory of Nazianzus)' can no longer be sustained (*Infant Baptism*, p. 89; italics original). The examples mentioned above, combined with the funeral inscriptions, demonstrate earlier examples.

41 For an articulation of the 'crisis interpretation' of the phenomenon, see Jeremias, *Infant Baptism*, pp. 87–91; Daniélou and Marrou, *The First Six Hundred Years*, p. 161.

suggesting that this phenomenon was more widespread than the documented examples could confirm. This leads to an important question: What, if anything, did these parents and churches do regarding their unbaptised infants? The answer is that some churches at least had a well-developed theology and practice for incorporating children into the church through infant dedication, enrolment into the catechumenate, and toddler/believer's baptism. Thus, for those such as the individuals mentioned above, baptism was but the last step in a comprehensive process of Christian initiation for children born to Christian parents. Since the early church's theology and practice of infant dedication and enrolment into the catechumenate is relatively unknown, in what follows I have provided extended quotations of the pertinent texts, italicised important phrases, commented on important words and issues, and provided the evaluation of other scholars. Some of the following texts refer either only to infant dedication or early enrolment into the catechumenate, while others refer to both.

Tertullian

> It follows that *deferment of baptism is more profitable*, in accordance with each person's character and attitude, and even age: and especially so as regards *children*. For what need is there, if there really is no need, for even their *sponsors* to be brought into peril, seeing they may possibly themselves fail of their promises by death, or be deceived by the subsequent development of an evil disposition? It is true our Lord says, 'Forbid them not to come to me.' *So let them come, when they are growing up, when they are learning, when they are being taught what they are coming to: let them be made Christians when they have become competent to know Christ*. Why should innocent infancy come with haste to the remission of sins? Shall we take less cautious action in this than we take in worldly matters? Shall one who is not trusted with earthly property be entrusted with heavenly? *Let them first learn how to ask for salvation, so that you may be seen to have given to one that asketh*. (*On Baptism* 18)[42]

Tertullian thinks that 'children' (*parvulos*) of Christian parents should be taught about Christ before being baptised: he counsels that they be baptised after 'growing up' (*adolescunt*), 'learning' (*discunt*), and 'being taught' (*docentur*), and they must 'have become competent to know Christ' (*cum Christum nosse potuerint*), all of which implies some kind of intentional teaching process. Perhaps the 'sponsors' (*sponsores*) were

[42] Evans, *Tertullian's Homily*, p. 39.

somehow involved in the process, but the point is clear: pre-baptismal teaching was involved.

Tertullian's remarks that the little children themselves are the ones who are to 'ask' (*petere*) for salvation implies that he is arguing for believer's baptism, as opposed to toddler baptism, and says that this kind of baptism is 'more profitable' (*utilior*). Thus, while he does not prefer infant baptism, neither does he see it as invalid, an important point which I will revisit in the final section.

Loren Kerns concludes regarding Tertullian and the catechumenate, 'When we encounter the catechumenate in third century North Africa, we discover an institution that was deeply enmeshed in the matrix of ecclesiastical life. Its existence was taken for granted, and its utilization was already standard. […] Tertullian opted for a delay in baptism, and the development of the catechumenate.'[43]

It seems safe to conclude that at least some children born to Christian parents in Tertullian's church were not baptised as infants, but rather enrolled into the catechumenate from an early age and later baptised when they asked for this.

The Youth at Alexandria (Early Fourth Century)

Here we turn to Rufinus, *Church History* 10.15,[44] noting that the author is speaking about Athanasius and other boys in the church at Alexandria.

> Once when Bishop Alexander was celebrating the day of Peter Martyr in Alexandria, he was waiting in a place by the sea after the ceremonies were over for his clergy to gather for a banquet. There he saw from a distance some boys on the seashore playing a game in which, as they often do, *they were mimicking a bishop and the things customarily done in church*. Now when he had gazed intently for a while at the boys, he saw that they were *performing some of the more secret and sacramental things*. He was disturbed and immediately ordered the clergy to be called to him and showed them what he was watching from a distance. Then he commanded them to go and get all the boys and bring

[43] Loren Kerns, 'Tertullian and the Catechumenate: An Inquiry into Tertullian's Justification for the North African Catechumenate in the Early Third Century' (Master of Arts in Theological Studies thesis, George Fox University, 2000), p. 83.

[44] Amidon, *The* Church History *of Rufinus of Aquileia*, pp. 26–27. Latin text: Eduard Schwartz and Theodor Mommsen, *Eusebius Werke: Zweiter Band: Die Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 2, Die grieschischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1908), p. 981.

> them to him. When they arrived, he asked them what game they were playing and what they had done and how. At first they were afraid, as is usual at that age, and refused, but then *they disclosed in due order what they had done, admitting that some catechumens had been baptized by them at the hand of Athanasius*, who had played the part of bishop in their childish game. Then he carefully inquired of those who were said to have been baptized *what they had been asked and what they had answered, and the same of him who had put the questions, and when he saw that everything was according to the manner of our religion*, he conferred with a council of clerics and then ruled, so it is reported, that *those on whom water had been poured after the questions had been asked and answered correctly need not repeat the baptism*, but those things should be completed which are customarily done by priests.

While it is possible that some boys had been born to non-Christian parents who became Christians shortly thereafter and then enrolled the children into the catechumenate, surely this could not have been the case with all of them. Rather, it seems more likely that at least some of them had been born to Christian parents.[45]

Although they had not been 'baptised' (*baptizati*), the boys were part of the Christian community and had been enrolled as 'catechumens' (*catechumenos*). Their knowledge of 'some of the more secret and sacramental things' (*quaedam etiam secretiora et mystica*) and of things 'according to the manner of our religion' (*secundum religionis nostrae ritum*) suggests that they had been instructed in at least the basics of the Christian faith.

Gregory of Nazianzus (329–390)

> That which concerns myself is perhaps undeserving of mention, since I have proved unworthy of the hope cherished in regard to me: yet it was on her part [Gregory's mother] a great undertaking to promise me to God before my birth, with no fear of the future, and *to dedicate me immediately after I was born*. (*Oration* 18.11)[46]

> So be it, some will say, for those seeking baptism. But what would you say about those who are still infants and perceive neither the damage nor the grace? *Should we baptize them also? Absolutely, if indeed there is some immediate danger*. For it is better to be sanctified without perceiving it than to depart unsealed

[45] From this passage, there were at least three boys playing this game: Athanasius and 'those' (*quibus*) on whom the water was poured. However, the text implies that there were more: the bishop just happened to see the boys playing this game, and it is unlikely that he would have seen, understood, and stopped the whole process during the window of time it takes to baptise two people.

[46] Greek text: *PG* 35:997.

> and uninitiated. […] But as for the rest *I give my recommendation to wait for the third year, or a little more or a little less, when they can also hear something of the mystery and respond, so even if they do not understand completely, at any rate they are imprinted.* (Oration 40.28)[47]

In *Oration* 18.11, Gregory states that he was 'dedicated' (ἀνέθηκε) immediately after birth. Even though the Greek word may have a spectrum of meanings, it does indicate something other than baptism. As noted above, Gregory of Nazianzus was baptised when he was around thirty years old, and thus this must refer to some kind of infant dedication, in whatever form it appeared.

In *Oration* 40.28, although Gregory affirms emergency baptism 'if indeed there is some immediate danger', in normal cases he advises that the toddler's baptism should take place when they are about three years old.[48] The reason given, that 'they can also hear something of the mystery and respond', implies some level of previous catechetical instruction.

Gregory seems to favour toddler baptism, which goes against his own experience as a child, since he was not baptised until he was about thirty years old. Thus, it may be that Gregory is making a concession to the current state of the church in Constantinople, rather than voicing his true beliefs on the matter.[49]

Basil of Caesarea (330–379)

Gregory of Nazianzus, in *Oration* 43.73*,* speaks of Basil the Great thus:

> Further, to run over the Judges, or the most illustrious of the Judges, there is 'Samuel among those that call upon His Name', who was given to God before his birth, and sanctified immediately after his birth, and the anointer with his horn of kings and priests. *But was not Basil as an infant consecrated to God from the womb, and offered with a coat at the altar*, and was he not a seer of heavenly

[47] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Festal Orations*, pp. 123–124.

[48] Interestingly, earlier in the *Oration*, Gregory says that parents should bring their children forward for baptism: 'Have you an infant child? Do not let sin get any opportunity, but let him be sanctified from his childhood; from his very tenderest age let him be consecrated by the Spirit' (§17).

[49] Nevertheless, the fact that Gregory says toddlers should 'know the outlines' of baptism suggests that the line between toddler and believer's baptism is not always a clear one.

> things, and anointed of the Lord, and the anointer of those who are perfected by the Spirit? [50]

Basil himself makes this declaration in *Homily* 13.1:

> On this account the Church with a loud voice calls from afar *her catechumens, that as she already has conceived them, she may at length usher them into life*, and weaning them from the milk of catechetical instruction, give them to taste of the solid food of her dogmas. […] you, I say, tarry, and hesitate, and put off. Although *instructed in the divine word from your infancy*, have you still not yet yielded to truth? always learning, have you not yet attained to knowledge? through life an inquirer, a seeker even to old age, when will you become a Christian? when shall we recognize you as our own? Last year you awaited the present time, and now again you put off to a future season. Take care that your promises extend not beyond the term of your life. You know not what the morrow will bring forth. Do not make promises concerning things not subject to your control. We call you, O man, to life: why do you shun the call? We invite you to partake of blessings: why do you disregard the gift? The kingdom of heaven lies open to you: he that invites you cannot deceive: the path is easy: there is no need of length of time, of expense, of toil: why do you delay? why do you refuse? why do you fear the yoke, as a heifer that never has borne it? It is sweet: it is light: it does not hurt the neck; but it ornaments it: *it is not a yoke put on forcibly: it must be cheerfully assumed*. [51]

In *Oration* 43.73, Gregory of Nazianzus is drawing several parallels between the prophet Samuel and his friend, Basil. He makes a parallel between Samuel, 'who was given (δοτός) to God before his birth, and sanctified (ἱερός) immediately after his birth' and Basil who was 'as an infant consecrated (καθιερωμένος) to God from the womb, and offered (ἐπιδεδομένος) with a coat at the altar' (cf. 1 Sam 2:18–19). As was seen above, Basil was baptised when he was about twenty-seven years old, and thus this likely refers to some other liturgical event, such as an infant dedication. The use of language such as 'consecration' and 'offering' suggests that the dedication was one of consecration, and not merely thanksgiving (see below).[52]

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[50] Greek text: *PG* 36:596.

[51] Basil, *Exhortation to Baptism;* for an English translation, see The Tertullian Project, <https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/basil_sermon_13_baptism_02_trans.htm> [accessed 6 September 2021]; Greek text: *PG* 31:425.

[52] Unless Gregory understands Samuel's sanctification to refer to his being named Samuel ('I have asked for him from the LORD'), it must refer to his being given to the temple after he was weaned (cf. 1 Sam 1:21–28), perhaps at the age of two or three years old (cf. 2 Macc 7:27). Was there any connection between weaning and enrolment in the catechumenate (cf. *Oration* 40.28)?

In *Homily* 13.1, Basil is speaking to people who had been 'instructed' (κατηχούμενος) in the Scriptures from 'infancy' (νηπίου), but who still had not been baptised. Thus, they must have been enrolled in the catechumenate from birth, or shortly thereafter. He uses the imagery of catechumens being 'conceived' (πάλαι ᾤδινεν), but not yet 'ushered into life' (ἀποκυήσῃ) to refer to infant dedication and baptism, respectively (Augustine uses the same metaphor; see below).[53] At the end of the quotation, he says that baptism must be 'assumed' (ἐπιζητεῖ), and not 'put on forcibly' (δεσμεῖται), which implies credobaptism.

In her work on Basil's ecclesiology, after studying the pertinent passages related to infants and children, Olga Druzhinina concludes as follows:

> On the basis of discussed arguments, we can come to several conclusions concerning infants and children in the church: First, St. Basil considers children and infants worthy to be present during the liturgy; second, they were part of the communal life and received 'the word' or instructions from an early age; third, St. Basil does insist on early baptism and on this ground children could be allowed to receive baptism at the age when they are able to follow the ceremony; fourth, since baptism on death-bed was an accepted practice, the same could be provided for a very sick infant.[54]

Ambrose (340–397)

In the context of the appointment of the next bishop of Milan, Rufinus in *Ecclesiastical History* 11.11,[55] makes the following remark concerning Ambrose:

> [T]here suddenly arose from the people fighting and quarrelling with each other a single voice which shouted that it would have Ambrose as bishop; *they cried that he should be baptized forthwith, for he was a catechumen*, and given to them as bishop, nor could there be one people and one faith otherwise, unless Ambrose was given to them as priest.

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[53] Although not discussed here, Gregory Nazianzus has a similar two-part process in mind when he wrote, 'As long as you are a catechumen, you are on the front porch of piety. You must come inside, cross the court, observe the Holy Things, look into the Holy of Holies, be with the Trinity' (*Oration* 40.16; cf. *Festal Orations*, p. 111). As did Augustine when he evoked the imagery of the household: 'And as the catechumens have the sign of the cross on their forehead, they are already of the great house; but from servants let them become sons' (*Tract. John* 11.4).

[54] Olga Druzhinina, *The Ecclesiology of St. Basil the Great: A Trinitarian Approach to the Life of the Church* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016), p. 105.

[55] Translation: Amidon, *Church History of Rufinus Aquileia*, p. 74.

As observed above, Ambrose was born into a Christian family, but not baptised until this event, when he was about thirty-four years old. While it is possible that his parents did not enrol him into the catechumenate but Ambrose did so himself sometime after leaving his parents' authority and before being chosen to be the bishop,[56] in light of the well-established fourth-century practice it seems more likely that he was enrolled in the catechumenate sometime while under his parents' authority, perhaps while in Trier.[57]

Jerome (347–420)

> I, a Christian, born of Christian parents, and who *carry the standard of the cross on my brow*. (*Preface to Job*)
>
> *From my very cradle*, I may say, *I have been reared on Catholic milk*. (*Epistle* 82.2)

As noted above, Jerome was not baptised as an infant but rather when he was around nineteen years old. Signing with the cross was performed during baptisms, infant dedications, and the catechumenate. Thus, the reference to carrying the standard of the cross on his brow (which he states immediately after referring to his Christian birth) appears to refer to infant dedication (or the catechumenate), and his having been 'reared on Catholic milk' appears to refer to the catechumenate.

Augustine of Hippo (354–430)

> *Even when I was just a boy I had heard how we are promised eternal life through the lowliness of our Lord God descending to the level of our human pride; and I was signed with the sign of his cross, and seasoned with his salt from the moment I left my mother's womb*. My mother trusted in you completely. You saw, Lord, when I was still a boy and developed a sudden fever one day, and stomach pain, and was almost at death's door; you saw, my God (for you were my protector), with what anxiety and what faith I pleaded for baptism into your Christ, my Lord

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56 Actually, it is more likely that he would have done so two or three years prior, since it was normal for someone to be part of the catechumenate for at least two or three years before receiving baptism.

57 His experience could have been similar to Augustine's: enrolled in the catechumenate as a child, then left the church, then returned to the church and re-enrolled in the catechumenate with the intent of seeking baptism (*Confessions* 5.14.25; see below). Otherwise, it may have been that growing up in a political family, and himself becoming governor in 372 (two years before his unexpected baptism), he would have been expected to sentence people to death, and thus it would have been better to wait until his retirement to be baptised. In the first case, his baptism would not have been 'delayed'; in the second case, it would have been, but not necessarily delayed from any expected infant baptism.

> and my God, and pleaded that it was the duty of my mother and of your Church, which is the mother of us all. My earthly mother was in great distress. By the purity of her heart's faith in you, she was giving birth — at an even higher cost — to my eternal salvation. *Now she was in a hurry to ensure that I was initiated into the life-giving sacraments, and was baptized, declaring belief in you, Lord Jesus, for the forgiveness of my sins — but then I suddenly recovered.* So my baptismal cleansing was postponed, because it was inevitable that I would go on being defiled by sin if I survived — and it is certain that after that baptismal washing the guilt attached to the stain of sins would be more serious and dangerous than before. […] *My mother was active in ensuring that you were a father to me, O my God, rather than he* [Augustine's earthly father]. (*Confessions* 1.11.17)[58]
>
> At long last, therefore, *I decided to be a catechumen in the Catholic Church, which my parents had commended to me*, for as long as it took until something clarified for sure in which direction I should make my way. (*Confessions* 5.14.25)[59]
>
> [B]ecause the one Church, the body of our only-begotten Son, *in which the name of Christ had been set upon me in my infancy*. (*Confessions* 6.4.5; speaking of a time when he was at church.)
>
> But when or in what manner were they *conceived in the womb of mother church* if they were not *marked by some sacrament of faith*? (*Sermo Dolbeau* 14)[60]

In *Confessions* 1.11.17, Augustine relates that his mother had no intention of baptising him as an infant, and only considered doing so when she feared his imminent death (emergency baptism). Nevertheless, she was 'active' in teaching him about God. Additionally, he says he was 'signed' (*signabar*) with the cross and 'seasoned' (*condiebar*) with salt.[61] According to David Wright, the imperfect verb tense suggests that these were repeated actions, and thus formed a regular part of the catechumenate process.[62]

In *Confessions* 5.14.25, Augustine relates that his parents (most likely his mother particularly) had enrolled him into the catechumenate, to which he returned later in life.

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[58] Translation: Hammond, *Confessions: Books 1–8*, p. 31–33 (subsequent translations found on pp. 233 and 247). Written c. 397.
[59] Cf. Augustine, *On the Profit of Believing* 20.
[60] Wright, 'Infant Dedication', p. 359. For the Latin phrase, see below. Sermon delivered c. 397.
[61] Being seasoned with salt was an African variant of the initiation liturgy; see Michel Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate: The First Six Centuries*, trans. by Edward Haasl (New York: Sadier, 1979), p. 92.
[62] Wright, 'Infant Dedication', p. 354.

In *Confessions* 6.4.5, Augustine states that the name of Christ had been 'set upon' (*est inditum*) him during his 'infancy' (*infanti*). As he was not baptised as an infant, this appears to be an allusion to infant dedication.

In *Sermo Dolbeau* 14, Augustine says that people are 'conceived' in the church by being 'marked by some sacrament of faith' (*aliquo sacramento fidei signarentur*). This imagery is similar to that which Basil the Great uses to speak of a similar phenomenon (see above).[63]

Putting the evidence together, Christ's name was 'set upon' Augustine shortly after birth, after which he would have been 'conceived' in the church (but not yet born) and enrolled in the catechumenate. During his childhood, he would have been repeatedly signed with the cross and seasoned with salt, and his mother would have been active in teaching him about God. Later, at around thirty-three years old, he would have been baptised.

Cyril of Alexandria (376–444)

> We should also note that when Lazarus was lying dead, *he asks the woman for the assent of faith on his behalf*, as it were, so that this type may have force in the churches as well. What I mean is this: *when a newborn infant is brought either to receive the chrism of the catechumenate* or the [chrism] at the consummation of holy baptism, *the one who brings the child says 'amen' on its behalf*. (*Comm. John* on 11:26)[64]

Cyril refers to two distinct 'chrisms' (χρίσμα) that a 'newborn infant' (ἀρτιγενές βρέφος) may receive: one for enrolment into the 'catechumenate' (κατηχήσεως) and one for 'holy baptism' (ἁγίῳ βαπτίσματι). This could be evidence of either dual practice baptism, in which parents are given the choice between infant and toddler/believer's baptism, or emergency baptism, in which case parents would bring a healthy baby for the chrism of the catechumenate and those of a sick one for the chrism of baptism. Whatever the correct interpretation may be, Cyril's church had an established system for

[63] Although not given here, Augustine uses this same imagery elsewhere in his writings (see, for example, *On diverse questions to Simplicianus* 1.2.2); Wright, 'Infant Dedication', p. 359.
[64] Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John,* 88; see also Wright, 'Infant Dedication', p. 375. Greek text: *PG* 74:49. Written c. 425–428.

incorporating chrismated, but non-baptised, infants into the catechumenate.

The reference to faith on behalf of another and the saying of 'amen' suggest that this is speaking of a consecration/dedication, and not (merely) a thanksgiving.

Uncertain Examples

The first of these is Aristides, *Apology* 1.15 (Syriac version):[65]

> *And when a child is born to any one of them, they praise God*; and if again it chances to die in its infancy, they praise God mightily, as for one who has passed through the world without sins.

The term 'praise' (ܫܒܚ) may refer to a liturgical act, but baptism is not the most natural referent, since it would render non-sensical the subsequent 'praise […] mightily' (ܒܚܝܠܐ […] ܫܒܚ) upon the child's death. More likely, this refers to infant dedication,[66] though admittedly this is a short text, and one should not demand too much from it.

It is worth noting that the use of 'give thanks' is different from the fourth-century emphasis on consecration. Perhaps both acts — thanksgiving and consecration — existed side-by-side, or perhaps the former evolved into, or was set aside in favour of, the latter.

Next, is Cyril of Jerusalem *Catechetical Lectures* 15.18,[67] where the context is the antichrist.

> If thou hast a child according to the flesh, admonish him of this now; *if thou hast begotten one through catechizing*, put him also on his guard, lest he receive the false one as the True.

Cyril taught extensively in his *Catechetical Lectures*, *Procatechesis* (c. 350s), and *Lectures on the Mysteries* (c. 382 or later), and there is no indication that infants were in view for baptism. On the contrary, the catechumens

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[65] J. Rendel Harris, *The Apology of Aristides on Behalf of the Christians from a Syriac MS. preserved on Mount Sinai ed. with an introduction and translation. With an appendix containing the main portion of the original Greek text by J. Armitage Robinson*, 2nd edn, Texts and Studies (Cambridge University Press, 1893), p. 50; Syriac on p. 25. Aristides' Apology was written mid-second century.

[66] For text and discussion, including a summary of the Jeremias–Aland debate on this text, see Wright, 'Infant Dedication', p. 363.

[67] Delivered c. 350s.

could hear, understand, and participate in the ceremonies. Nevertheless, this specific text is too brief to know if Cyril is referring to unbaptised children born to Christian parents. What is clear is that at least some mature Christians in the congregation were to teach those being catechised.

Finally, we have John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians* 12.14, speaking against the pagan practice of smearing mud on a baby's head to protect it from evil.

> For how, I want to know, can he bring it to the hands of the priest? *How canst thou require that on that forehead the seal should be placed by the hand of the presbyter*, where thou hast been smearing the mud? Nay, my brethren, do not these things, but *from earliest life encompass them with spiritual armor and instruct them to seal the forehead with the hand and before they are able to do this with their own hand, do you imprint upon them the Cross*.

There is no mention of infant baptism, but rather of the signing of the cross (which Jerome also mentions; see above). However, doubt remains as to the exact referent of Chrysostom's words here. What is clear is that the parents are instructed to 'encompass' their children with 'spiritual armour' and to 'instruct them' to sign themselves with the cross. Thus, if this were a reference to infant dedication, then part of the subsequent period in the infant's life would be intentional discipleship at home.

According to Everett Ferguson, there are very few clear passages — perhaps only three or four — in the entire Chrysostom corpus that refer to 'infant baptism', and in these passages, it is not certain if he is referring to infant baptism, toddler baptism, believer's baptism (of young children), or emergency baptism.[68] In fact, there does not appear to be a clear reason to exclude a non-paedobaptist reading of Chrysostom's baptismal theology and practice. Two arguments may be mentioned. First, although only a presbyter at the time, Chrysostom preached through 1 Corinthians in Constantinople from about 392 to 393,[69] just over a decade after Gregory of Nazianzus had delivered his

[68] Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, pp. 544–545; Wright, 'Infant Dedication', p. 358. The passages are *Hom. on Gen.* 40.4; *Hom. Acts* 23.3; *Hom. Eph* 8.5; *Bapt. Catech.* 3.5–6.

[69] Wendy Mayer, *The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom: Provenance: Reshaping the Foundations* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2005), pp. 181–182.

Oration 40 from the same city, at which time Gregory voiced his preference for toddler and emergency baptism. Would he have contradicted his predecessor? Second, it should be remembered that Chrysostom himself, although born to Christian parents, was not baptised until he was nearly twenty years old, and thus it would be natural for him to have preached to others what he himself experienced growing up.

Examples of 'Special' Infant Dedication

In addition to the phenomenon of 'normal' infant dedication, the early church also knew of 'special' infant dedication, in which parents dedicated their children to be clergy or lifelong virgins. Unfortunately, in many cases we are uncertain if the dedication was accompanied by baptism,[70] but in at least one case it is clear that it was not:

> *Anyone who has vowed himself to the service of the church from his infancy must be baptised* before the years of puberty and join the ministry of the lectors. (Siricius, *Ep.* 1.9.13)[71]

Siricius, bishop of Rome, is writing this letter to Himerius, bishop of Tarragona (Spain). Thus, this phenomenon — unbaptised infants born in the church who were dedicated to service in the church from infancy — was present in Tarragona, and it is notable that the bishop of Rome did not oppose it, nor even voice any surprise at its existence. Rather, he speaks of it as if he knew what it was, and as if he approved this practice.[72] The fact that this letter was written in the late fourth century makes Rome's approval more probable, since the fourth century was, by all accounts, the time when non-paedobaptist practice was most widespread in Christendom.

Summary

If we only take into account the certain examples of infant dedication from the early third to the early fifth centuries, at least eight different

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[70] Cf. Ambrose, *Exhortation to Virginity* 6.30; Jerome, *Ep.* 24.2; 107.3, 6; 128.2; Gerontius, *Life of Melania the Younger* 1. For discussion of these and other texts, see Wright, 'Infant Dedication', pp. 366–72.

[71] Wright, 'Infant Dedication', pp. 374–375. Written in 385.

[72] Wright states, 'This glimpse of infant vows to enter the church's clerical hierarchy […] powerfully confirms how unfamiliar infant baptism must have been at this time in the church at Rome' ('Infant Dedication', p. 375).

church fathers — Tertullian, Rufinus (speaking of the practice at Alexandria and of Ambrose), Gregory of Nazianzus (speaking of himself and Basil of Caesarea), Basil of Caesarea, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and Cyril of Alexandria — speak of some form of infant dedication and/or enrolment into the catechumenate.[73] In addition, these examples come from all around the Roman Empire: Carthage, Trier, Constantinople, Caesarea, Milan, Stridon, Tagaste, and Alexandria.[74] Finally, although the phenomenon is most strongly attested to in the fourth century, its presence in Tertullian (early third century) and Athanasius (very early fourth century) firmly places it in the third century, and Cyril of Alexandria's preaching carries it into the early fifth century.[75]

The evidence for infant dedication increases when we take into account the uncertain and 'special' examples. If Aristides did refer to infant dedication, then it would be the earliest documented evidence we have of the phenomenon, pushing its presence back into the mid-second century. The other uncertain examples could expand the presence of the practice to Jerusalem (Cyril of Jerusalem). The 'special' infant dedication testimony reinforces the presence of the phenomenon, although apparently different to the normal dedication and subsequent enrolment into the catechumenate, and would extend the practice to Tarragona and maybe Rome (Siricius). The uncertain and 'special' examples do not offer further information regarding subsequent enrolment into the catechumenate, but in light of the documented examples, neither would it be unreasonable to suppose that it happened.

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[73] Again, of the original eight doctors of the church, five are connected with infant dedication and/or enrolment into the catechumenate. What is more, of the three eastern hierarchs — Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and John Chrysostom — at least two preached non-paedobaptism while they were bishops (and perhaps all three, depending on how one understands John Chrysostom's testimony).

[74] To be added to this list are the childhood places of Gregory of Nazianzus and Basil of Caesarea.

[75] The *Didache*, Justin Martyr, and Clement of Alexandria attest to some form of the catechumenate in the late first to early third centuries in Syria, Rome, and Alexandria, respectively (for Justin and Clement, see Annewies van den Hoek, 'The "Catechetical" School of Early Christian Alexandria and its Philonic Heritage', *Harvard Theological Review*, 90, no 1 (1997), 59–87). If toddler and/or believer's baptism were being practised in these places (and the first two are 'strangely' silent on infant baptism), then these would be even earlier examples of the phenomenon.

Several scholars agree that infant dedication followed by enrolment into the catechumenate was common in the early church. J. N. D. Kelly, writing on John Chrysostom but also broadening it to include others, comments that 'while a two-year catechumenate was normally required of converts from paganism, the children of Christian parents were treated as catechumens from birth'.[76] Similarly, David Wright observes, 'During most of the fourth century, if not longer, most children of Christian parents would have shared Augustine's experience of infant dedication as catechumens with no parental intention of baptism while they remained under parental responsibility.'[77] Speaking of the time period 350–420, Michel Dujarier affirms that 'it was customary for parents to present their children to the priest so they could become catechumens'.[78] Finally, after citing evidence from Jerome, Siricius, Basil of Caesarea, and Augustine that parents enrolled their children as catechumens, Everett Ferguson states, 'This may have been the norm.'[79]

Before finishing this section, it would be instructive to ask the question, At what age would such people have completed the catechumenate and been baptised? This can be answered from two perspectives: phenomenologically and in terms of the pastoral ideal. If we answer the question from a phenomenological perspective — excluding emergency baptisms — it is interesting to note how many people were baptised during the decade-and-a-half or so between their late teenage years and their early thirties:[80] Ephraem the Syrian was probably a young man; Gregory of Nazianzus was thirty; Basil of Caesarea was twenty-seven; Gregory of Nyssa was somewhere between twenty-three and twenty-eight; Ambrose was thirty-four; Rufinus of Aquileia was about twenty-four or twenty-five; John Chrysostom was approaching twenty; Jerome was nineteen; and Augustine was thirty-

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[76] J. N. D. Kelly, *Golden Mouth*, p. 17.

[77] Wright, 'Infant Dedication', p. 355.

[78] Dujarier, *History of the Catechumenate*, p. 92.

[79] Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, p. 628.

[80] Daniélou and Marrou note the convergence of fourth-century baptisms of influential Christians 'often about the age of thirty' (*The First Six Hundred Years*, p. 306). Also commenting on fourth-century figures, Wright notes that 'they range from the late teens (Chrysostom eighteen, perhaps younger) to the mid-thirties (Ambrose thirty-four), with most falling in the twenties' ('At What Ages', p. 393).

three. This age-range may not be coincidental, but could reflect a desire to wait until the youthful passions had passed before getting baptised, or even to be baptised at the same age Jesus was when he was baptised.[81]

However, if we answer the question from the pastoral ideal perspective, the answer would be that baptism was conducted sometime during childhood. Tertullian had his doubt about 'little children' but is fine with them being baptised if they 'ask' for this. Gregory of Nazianzus counselled that children should be baptised around the age of three. The boys in Alexandria were children when Athanasius baptised them, and although irregular, the bishop recognised their baptism as valid. As David Wright has noted, seven years old marked a major milestone in the development — both physical and moral — of the child, and thus made it a fitting age for baptism.[82] What appears to be most fundamental within this view of baptism is that the individual can understand the basics of the Christian faith and answer for themselves.

Although it goes beyond the scope of this article to provide a detailed discussion of the contents of early church catechetical instruction, a brief sketch can be given.[83] Based on texts such as the *Didache* and *Apostolic Constitutions*, the earliest stages of the catechumenate — at least as early as the second century — appear to have had a more ethical emphasis, although not without doctrinal instruction too. Later, in the third and fourth centuries, a two-phase catechumenate comprised of 'hearers' and 'seekers' became the norm, in which the first had more of an ethical emphasis and the second more of a doctrinal one. The first stage could last for several years, and apparently did so in the case of non-baptised children of Christian parents, while the second stage usually lasted only a few months, usually over the period of Lent, but was much more intense: daily lessons,

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[81] See Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 40.29–30 (although it is important to note that he preached against this).

[82] Wright, 'At What Ages', p. 392.

[83] See Dujarier, *History of the Catechumenate*; Lawrence Folkemer, 'A Study of the Catechumenate', *Church History* 15, no. 4 (1946), 286–307; A. Turck, 'Aux origines du catéchuménat', *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 48, no. 1 (1964), 20–31. Folkemer notes that 'the only formal collection of catechetical instructions in existence is that of Cyril of Jerusalem' ('A Study of the Catechumenate', p. 291). Similarly, Wright warns, 'our sources reveal little of what bishops and their clergy attempted in instruction of children and youth within the ministry of the congregation' ('Infant Dedication', p. 360).

fasting, exorcisms, and so forth. Not much is known of the contents of the first stage of instruction, but on Sunday mornings the catechumens would have participated in the Liturgy of the Word (the reading and preaching of Scripture) before being dismissed before the Liturgy of the Table (the kiss of peace and the Eucharist). As for the second stage, instruction centred on certain key passages from Scripture, doctrinal texts such as the Apostles' and/or Nicene Creed (which they had to memorise), ethical and spiritual discipline texts such as the Sermon on the Mount and the Lord's Prayer, and the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist.[84]

Infant dedication, enrolment into the catechumenate, and toddler/believer's baptism were well known during the patristic era; infant baptism gradually became the norm in the fifth and sixth centuries, after which it became the universal practice, leading to the virtual disappearance of both the catechumenate and believer's baptism until the Reformation and post-Reformation times.[85] David Wright's judgement on the matter is compelling: 'Although babies — some babies, especially dying babies — were baptized certainly from about the middle of the second century onwards, there is not too much in common between the baptism of the first four centuries or so — basically, a rite of conversion — and the universalized pedobaptism of the post-Augustinian era.'[86]

Conclusion and Application

The purpose of this article has not been to argue that the universal, or even majority, practice of the early Church was infant dedication, enrolment into the catechumenate, and baptism. My intent, however, was to show that this phenomenon was much more widespread, established, and developed than is usually supposed today: it enjoyed wide geographic distribution, spanned multiple centuries, was preached and practised at several important churches, and claimed the names of

[84] See *Didache* and the catechetical instructions given by Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Ambrose of Milan.
[85] Dujarier, *History of the Catechumenate*, pp. 133–135; Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, p. 857.
[86] Wright, 'At What Age', p. 394.

some of Christianity's most influential pastors and theologians from the early church period. Additionally, during the fourth century — arguably one of the most formative centuries in all of church history — it appears to have been the majority practice.

While the article's primary focus has been on historical reconstruction, it would be naive to think that such a study would not have current application for those interested in ecumenical dialogue, especially as it relates to appropriating patristic theology and practice for today's church. Toddler and emergency baptism play a minor role in the contemporary discussion, leaving believer's and infant baptism as the two majority positions in the church. These are the two that will be discussed below.

Regarding credobaptists, the most influential ecumenical document written on baptism is the World Council of Churches' Lima statement from 1982 entitled 'Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry' (BEM), and I would like to show how the current study could apply to a credobaptist approach to that document.[87]

First, BEM states, 'While the possibility that infant baptism was also practised in the apostolic age cannot be excluded, baptism upon personal profession of faith is the most clearly attested pattern in the New Testament documents' (§11). In light of this study, 'baptism upon personal profession of faith' (and toddler baptism) must also be seen as 'clearly attested' in the early church. This is not to say that it was the majority practice (although it was at some times and in some places), but rather that it was widely practised in the first centuries of the Church.

Second, BEM states that 'wherever possible, mutual recognition should be expressed explicitly by the churches' (§15), which implies the recognition of infant baptism by churches that practise believer's baptism. As this study has shown, authors such as Tertullian and Gregory of Nazianzus, although they preferred toddler or believer's baptism, nevertheless accepted infant baptism, since they never requested that infants be re-baptised at a later age. Thus, the patristic

[87] World Council of Churches, 'Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry' (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982).

testimony presented here could be a model for credobaptist churches to follow.

Third, BEM states that churches in the tradition of believer's baptism 'may seek to express more visibly the fact that children are placed under the protection of God's grace' (§16). The example of the Fathers studied here is quite helpful, since it shows how this could be done: an infant dedication of thanksgiving and/or consecration at which time the infant is seen as having been 'conceived', followed by enrolment into the catechumenate (which today might be called Sunday school, baptismal classes, etc.), followed by consistent calls for them to place their faith in Christ, at which time the individual (whatever age they may be) would be 'born again'.[88]

Regarding paedobaptism in the Protestant tradition, it is represented primarily by three historical churches: Anglicanism, Lutheranism, and Reformed. In addition to appealing to Scripture, in the sixteenth century these traditions appealed to a return to the teaching of the patristic church of the first approximately five centuries. They endorsed the Apostles', Nicene-Constantinopolitan, and Athanasian Creeds, as well as the first four ecumenical councils. They also often supported their theological argument with noteworthy Fathers such as Tertullian, Jerome, Augustine, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Cyril of Alexandria. However, these Creeds, Councils, and Fathers were not uniformly paedobaptist, and during the crucial fourth century, toddler and credobaptism seem to have been the majority practice.

Thus, there seems to be a paradox: one the one hand, these Protestant traditions sought to return to the theology and practice of the early church, yet on the other hand, they excluded an important part of it regarding infant dedication, the catechumenate, and subsequent

[88] Infant dedication services are not foreign to the credobaptist tradition. For example, see Balthasar Hübmaier, 'Letter to Oecolampadius' (16 Jan, 1525), which can be found in *Balthasar Hübmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism,* ed. and trans. by H. Wayne Pipkin and John Yoder (Walden, NY: Plough, 2019), pp. 62–72 (especially p. 72); Michael Walker, 'The Relation of Infants to the Church, Baptist and Gospel in Seventeenth Century Baptist Theology', *Baptist Quarterly* 21, no. 6 (1966), 242–262 (p. 250); T. L. Underwood, 'Child Dedication Services among British Baptists in the Seventeenth Century', *Baptist Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (1969), 164–169 (and the works cited there).

baptism. Perhaps they did this because the historical sources they had available to them at the time favoured infant baptism, and they relied on theological reasons such as the doctrine of original sin, but in light of the present study, it would seem inconsistent to continue to deny that the pattern of infant dedication was a legitimate patristic practice.[89]

Credobaptists typically have undervalued the historic tradition of the church, and subsequently have invested most of their energies into developing a biblical defence for their position. Whether one ultimately agrees with them or not, it is fair to say that they have developed a coherent, nuanced, Bible-driven defence of their position. Now that credobaptists have begun in earnest to rediscover the patristic evidence in favour of credobaptism, and now that this study has complemented this testimony with evidence in favour of infant dedication and enrolment into the catechumenate, how much longer will these historic Protestant traditions continue to exclude an important part of the patristic tradition?[90]

In summary, if the early church knew of both practices — infant and believer's baptism — and if they were able to come together and confess 'one baptism for the forgiveness of sins' and that they all belonged to the 'one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church', why should we Protestants not be able to do the same?

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[89] John Calvin, in responding to his critics' attacks that Protestant doctrine was novel, wrote, 'That it has lain long unknown and buried is the fault of man's impiety. Now when it is restored to us by God's goodness, its claim to antiquity ought to be admitted at least by right of recovery.' John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. by John McNeill, trans. by Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), p. 16. Granted, in the case of infant dedication it has not remained unknown due to 'the fault of man's impiety', but there does seem to be a parallel: if it can be demonstrated that the early Church believed or practised something, it should matter to our present situation.

[90] The recovery of the female diaconate offers an interesting parallel as to how credobaptism might be recovered in today's churches: just as the female diaconate was present during the Patristic period, vanished during the Middle Ages, Reformation, and Modern periods, and is being recovered in many traditions today, so, too, might it be said that non-paedobaptism was present during the Patristic period, vanished during the Middle Ages, Reformation, and Modern periods, and could be recovered in many traditions today.

The Metaphors We Preach By: Preaching as Graffiti

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Abstract
This article describes and discusses preaching as graffiti. That is, it is an article about the metaphors used for preaching and the potential of novel metaphors. One of the ways in which people conceptualise and describe preaching is through metaphors. These are the metaphors 'we preach by'. Some metaphors are conventional. They express the familiar but do not communicate all that there is say about the nature of preaching. Other metaphors are novel metaphors. These metaphors bring fresh perspectives to the practice of preaching. This can be seen through the novel metaphor of preaching as graffiti. It is a metaphor that associates preaching with graffiti through their shared performative nature. It also resonates theologically with the metaphorical use of the language of 'writing' in the Scriptures to describe the behaviour-changing influence of God's Word on people's lives. Furthermore, it is a metaphor that carries inferences that highlight features of preaching that are sometimes hidden or downplayed in other more conventional metaphors. These features include the artistic, transgressive, the interruptive, and the ephemeral nature of preaching as it contends with other, sometimes unrecognised, words spoken into people's lives.

Keywords
Preaching; metaphors; graffiti; art

Introduction

'Shifting metaphors means changing perspectives — making new connections and seeing in new ways — for both the creator of and the audience for the metaphor.'[1]

This article describes and discusses preaching as graffiti. That is, it is an article about the metaphors used for preaching and the potential of novel metaphors. One of the ways people describe and conceptualise

[1] Sonja K. Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice* (Longrove, IL: Waveland, 2018), p. 289.

preaching is by metaphors. These metaphors come from a variety of sources. These metaphors are more than literary ornaments but shape and express the understanding of the practice of preaching. Some metaphors are conventional and familiar. Other metaphors, however, novel metaphors, can challenge dominant understandings and suggest alternative perspectives on practice. In this article, therefore, I describe and discuss the significance of the metaphors used for preaching and the insights which can be gained through using the novel metaphor of preaching as graffiti. I proceed as follows. First, I introduce the nature of the metaphors 'we preach by', their significance for shaping understanding and practice, and the contribution made by novel metaphors. Second, I describe and discuss preaching as graffiti. I do this with reference to the nature of graffiti as writing, performance theory, and Scripture. Third I describe and discuss some of the inferences that follow from conceptualising preaching as graffiti. Finally, I draw the article to a conclusion. Throughout the article, I interact with literature on metaphor, graffiti, and preaching. Like a good novel metaphor and some forms of graffiti, the goal is to be playful and provocative.

The Metaphors We Preach By

In this section I introduce the 'metaphors we preach by'.[2] One common way people conceptualise, describe, and discuss preaching is through using metaphors. This approach lies at the heart of Thomas Long's popular textbook, *The Witness of Preaching*.[3] In this book, he asks, 'What does it mean to preach?'.[4] He then answers this question with reference to three '"master" metaphors' for preaching, those of 'herald', 'pastor', and 'storyteller/poet', before adding his own favoured metaphor of 'witness'. As will be demonstrated below, these are merely four of many metaphors for preaching.

[2] This is a deliberate play on the title of the influential book by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2003; first published, 1980).
[3] Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 3rd edn (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016).
[4] Long, *Witness*, pp. 11–57.

To state the above, however, begs the question of what a metaphor is. This question is important because the nature of metaphors and their function is an area of study in its own right. On the one hand, in the literature there is an emphasis on metaphor as a function of language. On the other hand, there is an emphasis on metaphor as a function of thought. This, in turn, leads to consideration of the relationship between metaphor in language and thought.[5] David L. Ritchie's definition holds the linguistic and the conceptual understandings together when he writes that a metaphor is 'seeing, experiencing, or talking about something in terms of something else'.[6] This definition has two additional benefits. First, it indicates that metaphors consist of two main components brought into comparison. These are the topic and the metaphorical description. In the literature on metaphor, these are sometimes described as the 'tenor' and the 'vehicle', or the 'target domain' and the 'source domain'.[7] Second, Ritchie's definition blurs the strict grammatical lines between metaphors and similes. This is not to say that they are identical. Instead, a simile can be regarded as a more explicit form of 'signalled' metaphor while recognising that not all metaphors are similes.[8] In this article, therefore, I am drawing on current understandings of metaphors which highlight metaphors as the way in which people understand their experiences, shape their thinking, and express their understandings.

When it comes specifically to the topic of preaching, people use a variety of metaphors. [9] Many of these metaphors come directly from

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[5] Zsófia Demjén and Elena Semino, 'Introduction: Metaphor and Language', in *The Routledge Handbook of Metaphor and Language,* ed. by Elena Semino and Zsófia Demjén (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), pp. 1–10.

[6] David L. Ritchie, *Metaphor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 8. This definition is consistent with the slightly longer 'consensus' definition given by Demjén and Semino 'that metaphor involves the perception of similarities or correspondences between unlike entities and processes, so that we can see, experience, think and communicate about one thing in terms of another' ('Introduction', p. 1).

[7] This language is used throughout the literature, e.g. Ritchie, *Metaphor*, pp. 10–11.

[8] Aletta G. Dorst, 'Textual Patterning of Metaphor', in *Handbook of Metaphor*, ed. by Semino and Demjén, pp. 178–92.

[9] Some metaphors are expressed in terms of the preacher, and some are expressed in terms of the practice of preaching. Both are inextricably connected in both conventional and novel metaphors. It is because preaching is 'heralding' that the preacher is a 'herald' and because preaching is 'Jazz' that the preacher is a 'Jazz musician'. I would suggest that generally metaphorical development moves from the practice to the preacher. In this article, I present the

the Scriptures. These scriptural metaphors include the preacher as a herald, pastor, witness, teacher, ambassador, fisher, steward, and approved worker.[10] However, how people own, adopt, and develop these scriptural metaphors can vary considerably. Thus, for some, the metaphor of the preacher as a 'fisherman' (sic) (Mark 1:16–20) means that it is valid for people to use the language of 'bait', 'lure', and 'net' to describe how they should try to win others to the Christian faith.[11] Others, however, while challenging the gendered and violent nature of the metaphor, still value the emphasis associated with the metaphor on the 'call' to ministry in the context of life.[12] Therefore, while some metaphors for preaching come directly from Scripture, how people appropriate them can vary according to different views on the nature and interpretation of Scripture.

While many metaphors have a direct biblical basis, others emerge from theological reflection on other metaphors in conjunction with the practice of preaching. So, for example, if God is love, then 'God is lover', and preachers who seek to communicate this God do so as 'lovers'.[13] As demonstrated, such development by theological reflection does not necessarily abandon biblical allusion. Yet the approach is different from that discussed above. The emphasis is more theologically reflective than biblically exegetical. Moreover, these reflections can engage with associations beyond the text. Thus, Charles Campbell considers the historical practice of street preaching, including naked street preaching, in the light of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1:18–25, to talk about preachers as 'holy fools' and 'sacred jesters'.[14] In such instances, we have metaphors extended and generated through theological reflection.

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different metaphors the way they are framed in the literature but focus on the practice of preaching in the development of my own discussion of preaching as graffiti.

[10] John Stott lists some of these biblical metaphors in *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), pp. 135–37.

[11] Noel C. Gibson, *The Fisherman's Basket: Open Air and Other Methods of Evangelism* (New South Wales: Freedom in Christ Ministries, 1984).

[12] Lincoln E. Galloway, 'Preacher as Fisher', in *Slow of Speech and Unclean Lips*, ed. by Robert Stephen Reid (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010), pp. 109–18.

[13] Lucy Lind Hogan, 'Preacher as Lover', in *Slow of Speech*, ed. by Reid, pp. 35–56.

[14] Charles L. Campbell, 'Preacher as Ridiculous Person: Naked Street Preaching and Homiletical Foolishness', in *Slow of Speech*, ed. by Reid, pp. 89–101 (p. 97).

Other and often novel metaphors come from the association of preaching with similar and yet different practices. This involves a move to the contemporary. We see this with metaphors related to the performing arts. Thus, we have preaching as art,[15] as theatre,[16] as community theatre,[17] as Jazz,[18] as Blues.[19] In these cases, the associations may not always be obvious. Instead, the similarities belong at the level of detail, conceptuality, and practice. Such associations will require explanation. Despite this explanation, some will treat such metaphors with suspicion or rejection. This suspicion may be due to a perceived lack of biblical or theological rationale. Or it may be that people consider the metaphors inappropriate for preaching. Thus, when Joseph M. Webb discusses preaching as 'comedy', he opens his book with responses to biblical, theological, ethical, and rhetorical objections.[20] Consequently, proponents might need to not merely explain but to defend such novel metaphors. There are, therefore, a wide variety of metaphors from various sources used to conceptualise and describe the practice of preaching.

While a variety of metaphors are used to describe the practice of preaching, they are not mere literary ornaments. Instead, the metaphors people preach by are a matter of identity concerning how they both understand and practise preaching. Kate Bruce highlights this in her discussion of various images for preaching when she asks,

> Just who do you think you are as a preacher? The question is a serious one. How the preacher imagines, sees or looks upon their role will affect the way they engage with the task of preaching. The metaphors that master us shape our practice.[21]

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15 Darius L. Salter, *Preaching as Art: Biblical Storytelling for a Media Generation* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2013).

16 Alec Gilmore, *Preaching as Theatre* (London: SCM Press, 1996).

17 Stuart Blythe, 'Collaborative Preaching as Community Theatre', *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, 14, no. 3 (2014), 5–21.

18 Kirk Byron Jones, *The Jazz of Preaching: How to Preach with Great Freedom and Joy* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004).

19 Otis Moss III, *Blue Note Preaching in A Post-Soul World: Finding Hope in An Age of Despair* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018).

20 Joseph M. Webb, *Comedy and Preaching* (St Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1998). While Webb's book is about preaching 'and' comedy, he goes beyond discussing humour in a sermon to discussing the 'comic sermon'. As such, I would contend that he is discussing preaching 'as' comedy.

21 Kate Bruce, *Igniting the Heart: Preaching and the Imagination* (London: SCM Press, 2015), p. 107.

This claim by Bruce can be related to what Robert Reid, in reference to preaching, calls 'tropes'.[22] Drawing on the work of Kenneth Burke on metaphor, Reid states that a trope is a 'mental model', one which 'we take on, like a mantle, when we step into the pulpit'.[23] Consequently, such tropes are a matter of 'preaching identity' and preaching 'difference'.[24] The significance of metaphors in shaping thinking is supported further by the influential work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. For they argue it is through metaphors that 'we define our reality' and from which we 'draw inferences' and upon which we 'set goals, make commitments, and execute plans'.[25] Metaphors, therefore, including those used for preaching, are more than semantic ornaments but represent ways of understanding, experiencing, and living in the world.[26]

The identity-shaping nature of metaphors for preaching is heightened by their theological content. Consequently, metaphors for preaching encapsulate and reveal not merely theoretical understandings of the nature of preaching but theological understandings. Therefore, just as there are a variety of metaphors for preaching, there are a variety of theologies expressed in and through these metaphors. Reid, in discussing the different metaphors for preaching, helpfully suggests that at the heart of the theological differences in various metaphors is the matter of 'agency'. Agency is how people understand 'the relationship between the human and Divine in preaching'.[27] Therefore, questions of agency, how people see God as operative in the event, are a feature of the theological nature of metaphors for preaching. This is demonstrated in Long's book *Witness*.[28] In comparing metaphors, he makes it clear that the differences are not merely stylistic or semantic but theological and accompanied by practical inferences. Consequently, as Long demonstrates, the extent to which preachers believe that the effectual

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22 Robert Stephen Reid, 'Introduction', in *Slow of Speech*, ed. by Reid, pp. 1–12 (pp. 6–9).
23 Reid, 'Introduction', p. 6.
24 Reid, Introduction', p. 8.
25 Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, p. 158.
26 The work of Lakoff and Johnson on metaphors is discussed and developed in a variety of the literature.
27 Reid, 'Introduction', pp. 2–3.
28 Long, *Witness*. See note 3 above.

nature of the preaching event is dependent upon the transcendent action of God can impact the extent to which preachers feel that they need to give attention to practical matters of rhetoric.[29]

While however, there are a variety of identity-shaping metaphors for preaching, some metaphors are more prevalent than others. This can be because of their close association with Scripture, historical longevity, an apparent clear association with the practice they describe, or simply regular use. Whatever the reason, such 'conventional metaphors' are those where 'the language community as a whole has accepted the word, expression or conceptual frame and has incorporated it into the standard repertoire of the language'.[30] Thus as discussed above, Long suggests that in at least parts of the preaching community of the Global North, there a number of conventional or 'master' metaphors. Moreover, he suggests that while people might have different opinions and perspectives,

> The herald image was the most prevalent metaphor advanced by homileticians in the twentieth century when they sought to describe what they believed the role of the preacher ought to be, though it has probably not been the most influential for the actual practice of preaching.[31]

This metaphor of herald comes from the biblical language of preaching as 'proclamation'. Thus, the famous twentieth-century Scottish preacher James S. Stewart entitled his Warrack Lectures, *Heralds of God*, stating 'this is demonstrably the New Testament conception of the preacher's task'.[32] In turn, as discussed by both Long and Bruce, it is a metaphor that gained theological support from the neo-orthodox theology of Karl Barth.[33] Indeed, since Christian preaching claims something of a divine nature and, unlike much other public speaking, requires engaging with a sacred text, the metaphor of the preacher as herald has much to commend it. Furthermore, as a conventional metaphor, it enables a shared understanding of what people mean when they say preaching. While the inferences associated with the metaphor can be discussed and

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[29] Long, *Witness*, p. 21.
[30] Gill Philip, 'Conventional and Novel Metaphors in Language', in *Handbook of Metaphor,* ed. by Semino and Demjén, pp. 219–32 (p. 223).
[31] Long, *Witness*, 20.
[32] James S. Stewart, *Heralds of God* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1946), p. 5.
[33] Long, *Witness*, pp. 20–30; Bruce, *Igniting*, pp. 121–27.

debated, the general idea is clear: someone proclaims a message received from another.[34]

The above said, the existence of conventional metaphors for preaching is not without its difficulties. For example, they can be so commonly accepted by those who use them that they lose their metaphorical nature. That is, people treat them as literal descriptions of the practice.[35] This is problematic because metaphors not only disclose similarities but obscure differences.[36] This means that their description is only ever partial while suggesting the definitive. The fact is, there are ways in which a preacher is like a herald but also ways in which they are not. A related problem with conventional metaphors is that they can subjugate the significance of other metaphors. Aaron P. Edwards, in his thoughtful and detailed work, argues contra Long that 'the "herald" should be seen not as a *function* of the preacher but as a fundamental *identity*' and that the other images come '*underneath*' the image of herald and are informed by it.[37] To be sure, this 'ordering' allows the identity of the herald to be maintained 'without discounting' what the other perspectives emphasise.[38] Yet, in this strategy, it appears that the alternative images can only complement and not critique the dominant idea. Thus, they are minimised. Furthermore, depending on their use and interpretation, the privileging of only certain conventional metaphors with their attendant inferences can leave some excluded from that which is called the practice of preaching. Thus, Anna Carter Florence turned to 'preaching as testimony' to allow the voices of marginalised women to be heard as preaching.[39] Likewise, Moss offered 'Blue Note preaching' to articulate an expression of Black preaching

[34] It is interesting to note that Long does not include the metaphor of the 'preacher as teacher' as one of his master metaphors. I would contend that this is another important conventional metaphor. However, in some circles the relationship between teaching and preaching is somewhat contested and that requires a discussion beyond the scope of this article.

[35] In traditional metaphorical theory, writers described such metaphors as 'dead' metaphors (Ritchie, *Metaphor*, p. 209).

[36] Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, p. 10.

[37] Aaron P. Edwards, *A Theology of Preaching and Dialectic: Scriptural Tension, Heraldic Proclamation and the Pneumatological Moment* (London: T&T Clark, 2018), p. 131 (italics original).

[38] Edwards, *Theology*, p. 131.

[39] Anna Carter Florence, *Preaching as Testimony* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

because, in his experience, the preaching he knew 'was not confirmed or ratified by seminaries or western gatekeepers'.[40] Thus, while conventional metaphors are useful, on their own they do not describe the full variety of the nature of the practice of preaching and can indeed be exclusive.

In addition to conventional metaphors for preaching, there are also novel metaphors. Some of these, like Blues and Jazz have been mentioned above. Like conventional metaphors, they operate by providing a 'coherent structure, highlighting some things and hiding others'.[41] In contrast to the conventional metaphors, however, novel metaphors can offer fresh and creative perspectives for understanding and practice. On this, Gill Philip helpfully explains,

> At the level of language, novelty (the product of a creative mind) occurs when words are used metaphorically in ways which differ from their conventional applications […] At the level of thought, novelty introduces new elements into the existing conceptual frame which force the concept to be re-elaborated.[42]

Novel metaphors, therefore, can be simply playful in their appeal. In terms of language, they can present something in more creative and compelling ways and since 'the brain is pre-programmed to notice the unusual, so novel metaphors — once encountered — stick in our mind'.[43] More significantly, novel metaphors invite new ways of understanding and conceptualising the practice under consideration. This requires sufficient 'similarity' between the topic and the metaphor but also some 'cognitive effort' for the associations to be fully understood.[44] The level of novelty will have an impact on the amount of cognitive effort required to make sense of the metaphor, and Philip talks about the hesitation that occurs 'as we rapidly try to connect the meaning we expected and the word that actually appears, running through our mental repository of meanings of the unexpected word'.[45] Of course, both conventionality and novelty are relative terms based

[40] Moss, *Blue Note Preaching*, p. vii.
[41] Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, p. 139.
[42] Philip, 'Conventional and Novel', p. 224.
[43] Philip, 'Conventional and Novel', p. 224.
[44] Philip, 'Conventional and Novel', p. 224.
[45] Philip, 'Conventional and Novel', p. 225.

upon prior knowledge and experience. Novel metaphors, therefore, may require greater explanation and signalling when people introduce them in order to help map the metaphorical associations between the topic and the metaphoric vehicle.[46]

In sum, one of the ways people discuss and understand preaching is by way of metaphors. These metaphors come from a variety of different sources. These metaphors can represent and reinforce important convictions regarding the nature of preaching and its attendant practice. Some metaphors have a conventional nature based on the common ground of established associations. In contrast to these, novel metaphors can enable different perspectives as they employ different associations. I will now demonstrate this more fully through a discussion of preaching as graffiti.

Preaching as Graffiti Writing

To describe preaching as graffiti is to use a novel metaphor. It describes preaching in terms of a seldom or little used comparison.[47] This requires some discussion. In this section, therefore, I will discuss the association between preaching and graffiti. First, I clarify that by graffiti I mean graffiti writing. Second, I highlight the performative connection between preaching and graffiti. Third, I offer a biblical and theological reflection on preaching as graffiti. In this way I will establish the mapping between preaching as the topic and graffiti as the vehicle of meaning.

The term 'graffiti' finds its origins in the Latin meaning 'to scratch'. It is a plural term, the singular being 'graffito'. Graffiti itself has been around for as long as people have intentionally made marks on

[46] The language of 'signalling' is used in the literature to describe the processes through which the metaphorical nature of a word may be introduced and highlighted.

[47] In the literature which I have read, I am only aware of one minor reference to preaching and graffiti. I will refer to it below. To be sure there are places that discuss graffiti or street art as preaching, such as 'Public Art as Prophetic Word', <https://nextchurch.net/public-art-as-prophetic-word/> [accessed 19 August 2022]. Although related, graffiti as preaching is a different metaphorical construction from preaching as graffiti in terms of which element is the topic, and which is the vehicle. I am discussing preaching as graffiti.

rocks or walls.[48] However, the 'modern graffiti movement' began in Philadelphia and New York in the mid to late 1960s.[49] Since then, it has been a movement which has developed. These developments have included the variety of surfaces on which graffiti is written, the materials used to produce the graffiti, the content of the writing, the style of the writing, the size of the writing, the inclusion of embellishments to accompany the writing, the presence of images, images as street murals, and the public's perceptions of graffiti. Practitioners and observers contest these developments and the accompanying views of what constitutes graffiti.[50] Nevertheless, modern graffiti, in various forms, is now, like its historical precursors, a global phenomenon.[51]

While graffiti takes a variety of shapes and forms, one early and regular concept associated with graffiti is that graffiti is 'writing'. This can include slogans and statements or word-based images.[52] Early modern practitioners certainly referred to themselves as writers, and a variety of writers commonly describe them in this way.[53] As the modern movement developed, with cultural, ethnic, and regional variations, the writing became more elaborate. This was expressed not merely through the addition of embellishments such as 'arrows, halos, and crowns' but in 'the way that letters were designed and executed, not as expedients but as expression unto themselves'.[54] As Susan Phillips writes in her introduction to graffiti,

> As a medium of communication, graffiti lies somewhere between art and language. Words become signifiers, solutions, and slogans; that is, they cease to be individual words but become symbols and images, which communicate

[48] The 'Introduction' in *Scribbling Through History: Graffiti, Places and People from Antiquity to Modernity*, ed. by Chloé Ragazzoli, Ömür Harmansah, Chiara Salvador, and Elizabeth Frood (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), pp. 1–15, is helpful for such introductory details.
[49] Roger Gastman, *Wall Writers: Graffiti in Its Innocence* (Berkeley, CA: Gingko Press, 2016), p. 18.
[50] Something of the diversity of practices and opinions can be read in the *Routledge Handbook of Graffiti and Street Art*, ed. by Jeffrey Ian Ross (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).
[51] Roger Gastman and Caleb Neelon, *The History of American Graffiti* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2010), pp. 394–95.
[52] I do not consider all street art to be graffiti if it is primarily mural based, but I see graffiti as a particular expression of street art. The relationship between graffiti and street art is variously discussed in the literature.
[53] Gastman and Neelon, *History*, p. 5.
[54] Gastman and Neelon, *History*, p. 74.

> at a variety of levels. These word images are laden with visual modifiers of style, color, placement, and form.[55]

Phillips also points out that some graffiti writing correlates 'more closely to spoken words than other types'.[56] Reflecting upon graffiti associated with communist struggle, she states, 'We can imagine people at a demonstration yelling these words or picture such slogans in leaflets strewn across city streets. This type of graffiti is closely correlated to words as they exist both in speech and formalised writing.'[57] This type of correlation between the spoken word and written graffiti certainly seems evident in written slogans such as, 'It's only Rock n' Roll',[58] 'Support the Miners', [59] 'Boring',[60] 'God Bless America',[61] 'Make Love not War',[62] obscene references, and religious statements such as 'Pray',[63] 'Worship God',[64] and 'Jesus Saves'.[65] However, it is not so evident in other word-based forms where other considerations may play a more significant part than a didactic message.[66] Be this as it may, at the core, graffiti writing is 'an art of the word'.[67] It is an artistic word-based act of communication where the words and letters are central to the imagery even if it is accompanied by more explicit pictures.[68] (See Figure 1 for some different examples of graffiti writing accompanied by an explicit image.) This is what I mean by graffiti in this article.

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55 Susan A. Phillips, *Wallbangin' Graffiti and Gangs in L.A.* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 39.
56 Phillips, *Wallbangin',* p. 43.
57 Phillips, *Wallbangin*, p. 41.
58 Roger Perry, *The Writing on the Wall: Replica Reissue with Archive Shots and New Features* (London: Plain Crisp Books, 2015; first published, 1976), p. 27.
59 Perry, Writing, p. 18.
60 Banksy, *Wall and Pieces* (London: Century, 2006), pp. 126–27.
61 Gastman, *Wall Writers*, pp. 2–3.
62 Miyase Christensen and Tindra Thor, 'The Reciprocal City: Performing Solidarity – Mediating Space Through Street Art and Graffiti', *International Communication Gazette*, 79, no. 6–7 (2017), 584–612, (p. 586).
63 Gastman, *Wall Writers*, p. 24.
64 Gastman, *Wall Writers*, p. 55.
65 Gastman and Neelon, *History*, p. 54.
66 Phillips, *Wallbangin'*, p. 39.
67 Phillips, *Wallbangin'*, p. 40.
68 Again, the point here is not that words are not images or artistic but to distinguish this from murals and street art while recognising that the lines of difference may be thin.

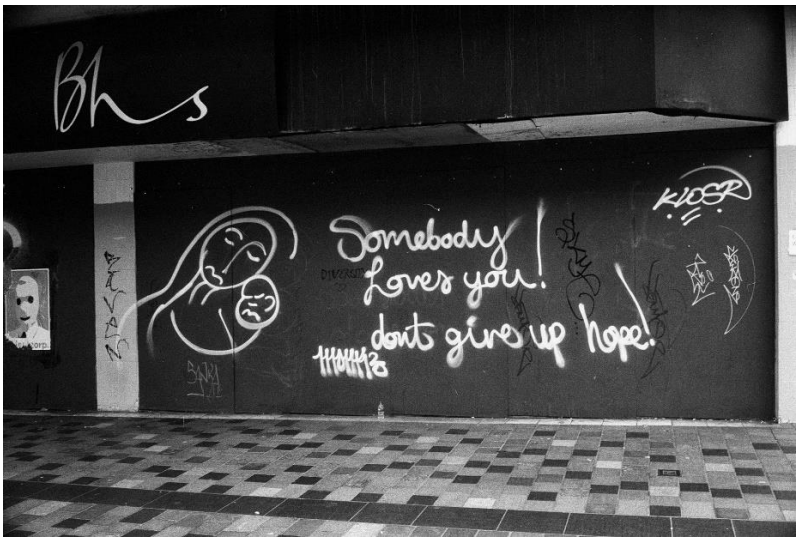

Figure 1: Photographer Stephen Blythe, Glasgow, 2020. Used with permission.

Following the above, the metaphorical ground association between preaching and graffiti is the 'word based' performative nature of both practices.[69] To be sure, some graffiti writers, given the illegal nature of their activities, may wish to remain hidden from all but perhaps a few colleagues while producing their work. Yet, even then, self-expression, recognition, and identity are important aspects of graffiti writing as encapsulated in the 'tagging' of a 'name' in one's own neighbourhood and then beyond.[70] Furthermore, some graffiti writers have gained not merely an insider but a wider recognition and status for their work.[71] Be this as it may, both preaching and graffiti typically involve a person intentionally expressing themselves in a public place with an intended audience.[72] As such, in different ways, graffiti, like

[69] Phillips, *Wallbangin'*, p. 40.

[70] Lee Bofkin, *Global Street Art: The Street Artists and Trends Taking Over the World* (New York, NY: Firefly Books, 2014), p. 13.

[71] This can include notoriety such as Banksy (though not all would see his stencilled work as graffiti writing) or legal and gallery-based graffiti. See Ronald Kramer, 'Straight from the Underground: New York City's Legal Graffiti Writing Culture', in *Handbook of Graffiti,* ed. by Jeffrey Ian Ross, pp. 113–23.

[72] A common feature of graffiti and preaching is that at times the performance is intended for insider audiences and at times for more general audiences.

preaching, involves the various aspects of performativity that are 'Being', 'Doing', 'Showing doing', and 'Explaining "showing doing"'.[73] The latter refers to reflexivity, evidenced in how writers would practise their work and rate the work of others and in the subsequent literature on the subject.[74] More specifically, however, some writers and commentators describe graffiti as performance art.[75] As such, graffiti as a metaphor for preaching belongs most closely to those metaphors described above that come from the performing arts, such as theatre, Jazz, and Blues. Indeed, it is Moss in his work on 'Blue Note' preaching who makes one of the few brief references to preaching as graffiti in his discussion of Hip Hop.[76]

While the primary association between preaching and graffiti are their performative natures, the metaphor is not without biblical allusion or theological potential. In this respect, it is interesting to note that writers on both ancient and modern graffiti describe the practice with reference to the idiom of 'the writing on the wall'.[77] It is unclear to what extent the various writers on graffiti relate this idiom to Scripture. Yet, in her book *Wallbangin'*, Phillips includes a lengthy quotation from Daniel 5:5–7, 17, 23–31.[78] She later describes that incident of the disembodied handwriting 'upon the plaister of the wall of the king's palace' (KJV) and what follows as 'perhaps the most famous interpretation of graffiti'.[79] This interpretation was one of judgement. In contrast, in John 7:53–8:11, in what Chris Keith described as 'perhaps

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73 Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 2nd edn (Abingdon, Routledge, 2006), p. 28. I have argued elsewhere that preaching is a performance, including Blythe, 'Collaborative Preaching'.

74 Craig Castleman, *Getting Up: Subway Graffiti in New York* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), pp. 20–26.

75 Jedd Ferrell, 'Foreward: Graffiti, Street Art and the Politics of Complexity', in *Handbook of Graffiti*, ed. by Jeffrey Ian Ross, pp. xxx–xxxvii (p. xxx), Stefano Bloch, 'Challenging the Defence of Graffiti, in Defence of Graffiti', in *Handbook of Graffiti*, ed. by Jeffrey Ian Ross, pp. 440–51 (p. 446).

76 Moss, *Blue Note Preaching*, p. 56.

77 For example, Perry, *Writing*, and Karen B. Stern, *Writing on the Wall: Graffiti and the Forgotten Jews of Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

78 Phillips, *Wallbangin'*, pp. xx–xxi.

79 Phillips, *Wallbangin'*, p. 16.

the most popular story in gospel tradition',[80] Jesus engages in some 'reverse graffiti',[81] writes in the dust, and refuses to condemn the woman caught in adultery.[82] Both these Scriptures invite intertextual reflection upon the Decalogue given to Moses on 'tables of stone, written with the finger of God' (Exod 31:18, RSV).[83] Both incidents involved an interpreter to explain the significance of what was written.[84] Both of these Scripture passages are also concerned with behaviour. Theologically this resonates with the divine intention to give a 'new' covenant written not on stone but people's hearts (Jer 31:31–34, Heb 8:8–12). In turn, for his part, Paul suggests in 2 Corinthians 3:3 that such heart writing occurs by the Spirit through the preaching of the gospel by ministers of the new covenant. Thus, Martin Luther described Paul's ministry as the 'hand' or the 'pencil' or 'pen' of the writer who is the Spirit.[85] Drawing on such biblical allusion and reflection, it seems valid to claim that preaching is the practice of seeking in the name of God and through the power of the Holy Spirit to *write transformative words on the walls of people's hearts*.[86] To be sure, this language is metaphorical. In a large part it is scriptural. It also resonates with preaching understood as graffiti writing.

In this section, therefore, I have described and discussed graffiti as a novel metaphor for preaching. I have done this with reference to the nature of graffiti as writing, their shared performative nature, and theological reflection on Scripture. In the following section, I draw out and discuss some of the inferences of conceptualising preaching in this way.

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[80] Chris Keith, *The Pericope Adulterae, the Gospel of John, and the Literacy of Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), p. 1.

[81] Fiona McDonald describes 'reverse graffiti' as 'a message fingered into the dust' as on a car (*The Popular History of Graffiti from the Ancient World to the Present* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013), Kindle, loc. 1494).

[82] The various discussions concerning the textual integrity of this passage, notwithstanding.

[83] Several commentators on Dan 5:5 make the connection with Exod 31:18, e.g., John J. Collins, *Daniel* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 246. Some commentators have also made this intertextual connection to John 8:6, 8, and Keith gives a detailed defence of this intertextual allusion in *Pericope Adulterae,* pp. 175–202.

[84] Massimo Leone discusses the importance of this in Daniel in, 'God's Graffiti: On the Social Aesthetics of Divine Writing', *Aesthetics*, 23, no. 1, (2013), 110–34 (p. 133).

[85] Cited by Scott M. Manetsch, *2 Corinthians* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022), p. 146.

[86] Italics mine.

Inferences

To conceptualise preaching as graffiti invites several inferences that extend the understanding of the nature and practice of preaching. As is the function of novel metaphors, this brings to light sometimes hidden, marginalised, or fresh perspectives on the practice of preaching. In this section, I discuss four potential inferences of preaching as graffiti.

To conceptualise preaching as graffiti is to speak of a form of preaching that pays attention to language's artistic nature. Preachers can communicate meaning in a variety of ways. As John S. McClure points out, some language is 'denotative', and some language is 'connotative'.[87] As described and defined by McClure, denotative language aims for controlled semantic clarity.[88] In contrast, connotative language, including the 'artistic' style, is more open, imaginative, and creative, making use of 'figures of speech such as metaphors and similes'.[89] As with graffiti, so in preaching, the performer may choose where they place emphasis given the context.[90] Yet, in preaching, even such a choice is undeniably rhetorical. That is, it is a choice which recognises the persuasive nature of all language and the artistic nature of at least some language in the communication of 'truth'.[91] Certainly, some theological approaches to preaching, including those associated with the metaphor of the herald, are unwilling to highlight the significance of the rhetorical.[92] Yet, this is not so in other traditions, such as in the African American preaching tradition.[93] In his interpretation of this tradition, Moss states, 'the Blue Note preacher views the preaching task as art. Words are the preacher's craft, like the paintbrush of the painter and the instrument of the composer' and again, 'they draw with the paintbrush of the Word, strokes of tone, colors of oratory, auditory dynamics on a

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87 John S. McClure, *The Four Codes of Preaching: Rhetorical Strategies* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), pp. 61–85.
88 McClure, *Four*, pp. 72–85.
89 McClure, *Four*, p. 61.
90 Phillips, *Wallbangin'*, p. 29.
91 For McClure, the 'Semantic Code' is about how preachers communicate 'meaning' through language and is related to convictions regarding the nature of truth (pp. 56–58).
92 Long, *Witness*, p. 21.
93 Frank A. Thomas, *Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2016), pp. 56–69.

drab canvas of a broken world'.[94] Of course, there can be a danger that an overemphasis on the rhetorical and the beautiful devoid of theological content can lead to mere entertainment. Yet as Frank Thomas points out, this need not be the case.[95] Furthermore, the artistic may not only be rhetorically valid but rhetorically necessary in preaching, which wishes to capture people's imaginations so that they can see and live in the world differently. Thus, Thomas defines one feature of prophetic or 'dangerous' sermons as being that they use 'the language of poetry and art that lifts and elevates the human spirit by touching the emotive chords of wonder, mystery, and hope'.[96] Preaching as graffiti leans into this rhetorical tradition of giving attention to the artistic as an integral part of communicating the message.

Second, to talk about preaching as graffiti invites us to consider the transgressive nature of preaching. A commonly associated feature of graffiti is that it is illegal.[97] As indicated above, however, not all graffiti is illegal.[98] In turn, legality is a relative concept. Be this as it may, people regularly perceive graffiti as a practice that transgresses dominant and controlling social norms regarding acceptable behaviour, property rights, the nature of art, and the public space. This condemnation seems far from commissioned graffiti work, gallery displays, and the public appreciation of a Banksy.[99] Indeed, it seems far from the practice of preaching, which, at least in the Global North, regularly occurs in designated spaces among law-abiding congregations, protected by law and gathered in liturgical assembly.[100] Yet, this domestic liturgical picture is not all there is to say about the nature and practice of preaching. Rather, historically, globally, and practically, preaching is a much more varied practice in terms of location, occasion, intended audiences,

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[94] Moss, *Blue Note Preaching*, pp. 26 and 14.
[95] Frank A. Thomas, *The God of the Dangerous Sermon* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2021), pp. 21–34.
[96] Frank A. Thomas, *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2018), p. 20.
[97] Phillips argues that if it is legal, it is not graffiti, though she admits this is a complex and contested idea (*Wallbangin'*, pp. 18–20).
[98] Kramer, 'Straight from the Underground'.
[99] Ferrell discusses some of the 'contradictions' in the legality of graffiti in 'Graffiti, Street Art', pp. xxxvii–xxxix.
[100] Most general books on homiletics assume this context.

purposes, and indeed legality. This is not least the case with preaching, which like graffiti, has operated under the threat of punishment, has sought to engage the wider public or has participated in some form of prophetic protest. Among such preaching, we may include preaching by slave preachers, women preachers, open-air evangelists, and civil-rights preachers. In turn, and perhaps just as significantly, we may also include those who preach in the regular liturgical contexts but who, in the words of the theologian Willie Jennings, resist the pull 'toward a respectability politic resourced by a respectability preaching', a pull that 'turns preachers into propagandists for nation-states, and/or plantation capitalism, and/or white supremacy, and/or patriarchy with its gender-binding normativity, and a host of other life designers working toward the pleasures of control'.[101] While not all graffiti is transgressive, this was undoubtedly a characteristic of the early modern graffiti movement. Likewise, while not all preaching is transgressive, we can be reminded that Jesus, who came preaching, ended up on a cross. Charles Campbell reminds us of this in his recent book on preaching and the 'grotesque'. He does so when he refers to the '*Alexamenos graffito* (c. 238–244)', which pictures a human form with an ass's head hanging on a cross, a young man giving adoration, and the mocking tag line, '*Alexamenos worships his God*'.[102] Therefore, to talk about preaching as graffiti highlights a historic and living expression of preaching that crosses boundaries and blurs lines of what might be considered socially acceptable for the sake of the gospel message it proclaims.

Third, and following on from the above, describing preaching as graffiti highlights the 'interruptive' nature of preaching.[103] That is, the message proclaimed is a message that enters a dialogue with the other sometimes unnoticed pervasive messages that shape and influence people's beliefs and behaviours. Lee Bofkin makes the simple but important point that when graffiti writing started in New York in the 1960s, advertising signage was everywhere and 'huge embellished names punctuated the city's skyline'.[104] In adding their names to those names

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[101] Willie Jennings, 'Foreword' in Charles L. Campbell, *The Scandal of the Gospel: Preaching and the Grotesque* (Louisville, IL: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021), pp. ix–xii (pp. x–xi).
[102] Campbell, *Scandal*, p. 7.
[103] Christensen and Thor, 'The Reciprocal', p. 591.
[104] Bofkin, *Global*, p. 12.

and to the street political propaganda surrounding such events as the 1968 Presidential campaign, the early writers did not necessarily see their behaviour as political.[105] However, some later writers and street artists see their actions as challenging the control and commodification of public space through multi-national advertising.[106] Such writers point to the 'visual pollution' of 'advertising on the sides of buses, billboards and the like' and see graffiti as a way of challenging the hegemonic control of space.[107] Indeed, in this perspective, particular significance is given to graffiti that subverts existing advertising through its addition.[108] (In Figure 1 the graffiti is written beside the logo of the store 'British Home Stores'.) Graffiti may sometimes be written on a clean wall, but even when this is so, few spaces carry no implicit or explicit messages. Likewise, few people are blank canvases or only inhabit liturgical spaces. They have been written over and written in by many experiences, as have the preachers' lives. Thus, Jennings describes sermon preparation as 'wrestling each week with difficult texts in order to offer a word from God that is bound up with and yet aimed at the cacophony of voices, the myriad of struggles, and the forest of feelings, dreams, and memories that weave together a congregation'.[109] As such, preaching may require not merely writing words, but 'new' words on the walls of people's hearts.[110] For such preaching to be interruptive requires 'negotiating a hearing' with the rhetorical world of the listeners.[111] It means paying attention to the 'moral imagination' of the preacher and listeners and understanding what it means to work with and against different perspectives.[112] In turn, it requires the preacher to enter deeper into the sometimes 'grotesque' realities of people's existence to speak of God yet present.[113] To preach as graffiti is to speak in dialogue with the other voices influencing people's beliefs and behaviours.

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105 Gastman, *Wall*, p. 58.
106 Christensen and Thor, 'The Reciprocal', p. 607.
107 Christensen and Thor, 'The Reciprocal', p. 607.
108 Christensen and Thor, 'The Reciprocal', p. 607.
109 Jennings, 'Foreword', p. ix.
110 This is a phrase I remember being spoken into the troubled religious history of Northern Ireland in 2004 and set against the backdrop of divisive wall murals.
111 This is the dominant theme in McClure's book, *Four*.
112 This is the dominant concern in Frank A Thomas's book, *Surviving A Dangerous Sermon* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2020).
113 This is a dominant concern in Campbell's book, *Scandal*.

Four, to describe preaching as graffiti is to consider the 'ephemeral' nature of preaching. For graffiti, ephemerality refers to the potential 'fleeting nature of the marks'.[114] Once made, they can be removed, written over, and altered with no guarantee of permanence.[115] One writer puts it as follows: 'The art that remains behind is, by its public and often illicit nature, vulnerable to all sorts of erasure. Exposed to the elements, buffed into oblivion, gone over by other artists, or lost to changes in the built environment, it is unlikely to last.'[116] (Figure 1 gives an idea of words written over, partially obscured, and partially erased.) Ephemerality also refers to the act of writing graffiti.[117] As such, graffiti is not merely the product, but the performance, the event, with an almost need for it to be re-performed over and over if it is to continue to exist and have a lasting impact.[118] Reflection on this becomes almost theological as graffiti commentators speak about the ephemeral quality of graffiti as 'simultaneously proclaiming presence and absence' and as representing 'being and becoming'.[119] To be sure, regular preaching or preaching 'as teaching' may aim to build knowledge in some educative way. However, the resulting product may be more of a messy montage than a scaffolded learning process. For both listeners and contexts are changing. Like graffiti writers on freight trains, the physical surface may quite literally be here today but gone tomorrow, or at least not regularly turning up on a Sunday. In turn, as Campbell states, 'Dynamic, unsettled change, not static security, is at the heart of our faith. For we live in the interval between the old age that is dying and the new that is being born.'[120] Preachers may imagine a more permanent outcome for their preaching and prefer the idea of tablets of stone to writing in the dust. Yet even tablets of stone can be broken. Instead, ephemerality calls for faith in something as 'foolish' as words sprayed into the air looking for somewhere to stick. In turn, however, the constancy of this act bears witness, not merely to a God who spoke, but a God who speaks.

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114 Phillips, *Wallbangin'*, pp. 29–30. On this subject, Phillips draws upon the work of other authors, including the Spanish writer Armando Silva.
115 Phillips, *Wallbangin'*, p. 30.
116 Ferrell, 'Graffiti, Street Art', p. xxxvi.
117 Phillips, *Wallbangin'*, p. 30.
118 Phillips, *Wallbangin'*, p. 31.
119 Cited in Phillips, *Wallbangin'*, pp. 32–33.
120 Campbell, *Scandal*, p. 55.

Certainly, graffiti writers have found the significance of their work 'elongated' through photography, digital reproduction, and sharing on social media.[121] Similarly, preachers find their sermons recorded not merely on paper or audio but live streamed on video. This is significant because each mediated performance decontextualises and resituates the original. Perhaps more significantly, the expectation of mediation, as with graffiti, can influence the nature of the actual event for an anticipated wider audience.[122] As with graffiti writers, preachers therefore need to consider the weight that they give to local, situated, and ephemeral performances as being at the core of their practice.

Conclusion

One of the ways in which people understand and articulate preaching is through metaphors. These metaphors vary in source, content, and nature. By the nature of metaphors, these metaphors reveal similarities while hiding differences. Conventional metaphors express the familiar. Such metaphors, however, only offer a limited perspective on the nature and practice of preaching. Novel metaphors bring fresh perspectives, although such metaphors may require discussion and defence regarding their associations and inferences.

To describe preaching as graffiti, particularly graffiti writing, is to use a novel metaphor. It is a metaphor that finds its ground association with preaching, as with some other novel metaphors, in its performative nature. Scripturally and theologically, it connects with the metaphorical use of the language of writing in the Scriptures to describe the behaviour-changing influence of God's Word on people's lives. Thus, in this article, I have posited preaching as graffiti as the writing of transformative words on the walls of people's hearts.

The metaphor of preaching as graffiti highlights some features of preaching that can sometimes be hidden or downplayed in other and perhaps more conventional metaphors. These features include the artistic, the transgressive, the interruptive, and the ephemeral nature of

[121] Ferrell, 'Graffiti, Street Art', pp. xxxvi–xxxvii.
[122] Ferrell, 'Graffiti, Street Art', pp. xxxvi–xxxvii.

the practice. Together they imply that preaching as graffiti is a practice that knowingly engages in not merely private but public discourse. In so doing, preaching as graffiti knowingly contends with other voices which seek to influence people's lives. However, as the discussion above demonstrates, preaching as graffiti is merely one metaphor among many. It hides as well as reveals. It is novel rather than conventional. Its value, however, as a novel metaphor, is precisely in the fresh thinking it stimulates about the nature and practice of preaching and what preachers believe they are trying to do when preaching.

Movements of Reconciliation Within the Trinity: Inferences for Pastoral Theology

Alistair J. Cuthbert

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Abstract
Situations of abuse, neglect, violence, control, hubris, and so forth, which break relationships and leave a trail of unforgiveness and hurt, are commonly encountered by those in person-centred care services, especially ministers of the Christian church. In these scenarios, the need for genuine, reconciling transformation of the inter-personal relations is significant and imperative, and yet there are often numerous blockages that limit statements of grace and forgiveness to only lip service. What is often missing is a robust theology of reconciliation upon which all verbal and physical statements of forgiveness and reconciliation can be grounded. In this article, Paul S. Fiddes' theology of reconciliation, which is undergirded by his 'persons as relations' definition of the Trinity, is outlined and then drawn upon in order to begin a delineation of a vigorous theology of forgiveness and reconciliation. Into this theology it will be possible to locate all attempts at forgiving and reconciling movements towards inter-personal transformation.

Keywords
Reconciliation; forgiveness; relations; Trinity

Introduction

In her essay 'Love Your Enemies: Toward a Christoform Bioethic', M. Therese Lysaught argues that forgiveness and reconciliation are not 'Pollyanna, touch-feely, why-can't-we-all-just-get-along sort of things' but rather practices which are concrete and require much repetition and a lifetime of effort to learn. Moreover, they are not habits which can be formed individually without the help of a community of persons. Since forgiveness and reconciliation are not natural to our fallen human nature, they have to be mediated within a community; a relevant

community which is open to the concrete practices of forgiveness and reconciliation that make it possible.[1]

There is no shortage of belief within Christianity that a community of Christian believers who accept that forgiveness and reconciliation are possible should be something regularly demonstrated and experienced. However, it is questionable whether churches have creatively and fruitfully facilitated space within services and ministries for genuine acts of forgiveness and reconciliation. This, despite the fact that Christian ministers or workers, like ministers of different faiths or workers in other person-centred care professions, regularly come into contact with persons who are unforgiven and unreconciled survivors of conflict, trauma, abuse (all types), historical and current sexual exploitation, marginalisation or oppression. As common knowledge among pastors attests to, these causes of relational breakdown are all-too-common human realities within church pastoral and mission ministry in the United Kingdom.

Moreover, it is vital that all church ministry praxis should be undergirded by a clearly articulated operant theology, which can, for those who earnestly seek reconciliation, ground any genuine reconciling action beyond lip-service statements of forgiveness into whole life transformation. Notwithstanding the prevalent articulation and definition of Christ's reconciling love and forgiveness, as based upon the apostle Paul's delineation of Christ's death and resurrection as the quintessential act of reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5, it seems the case that church leaders seldom manage to journey with someone past the above-mentioned 'Pollyanna-touch-feely' wishful thinking type of shallow and precarious statements of forgiveness.

Using the constructive-systematic theology of Baptist theologian Paul S. Fiddes, I argue in this article that a robust theology of participation within the relations of the triune God offers an optimal theological framework from which a pastoral and operant theology of reconciliation could be built; one that is applicable to a wide range of

[1] M. Therese Lysaught, 'Love Your Enemies: Toward a Christoform Bioethic', in *Gathered for the Journey: Moral Theology in Catholic Perspective*, ed. by David Matzko McCarthy and M. Therese Lysaught (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), pp. 307–28.

pastoral situations of conflict and unforgiveness within mission and ministry. By drawing upon Fiddes' trinitarian theology, it is not my intention to address or repeat critiques given elsewhere.[2] Rather, having found Fiddes' theology sturdy and pastorally helpful, I endeavour to build upon his model for forgiveness and reconciliation, which is based upon his 'participation in the relations' trinitarian understanding. This will develop a theology of reconciliation vigorous enough for the various scenarios of trauma, hurt, abuse, or estrangement, that are encountered by Christian ministers in which there is a desire for reconciliation from either victim, perpetrator, or both.

This exploration into the theology of reconciliation will consist of four parts: consideration and development of Fiddes' 'relational movements without objective persons' thesis; examination of his theology of salvation and atonement based upon a nuanced Abelardian theory of transformation; consideration of the need of rightly remembered and healed memory in the process of forgiveness; and, assessment of the implications for the realisation of robust and lasting reconciliation through acts of Christian worship. Finally, this investigation will be concluded with a brief comment on the significant potential for change and growth when an emphasis upon trinitarian relations is used to focus on *becoming* instead of *being*.

Participation in Triune Divine Relations

Within certain streams of Hebrew Bible scholarship, it has been lamented that the Christian church in the western world has relied for too long on Old Testament monarchical images of dominance and masculine power. There is, so it is claimed, a need for the non-monarchical biblical witness of God to be brought to the forefront.[3] Fiddes, who started his academic career as a Hebrew Bible scholar, is part of this move to unearth, communicate, and amplify the God of Scripture in a way that resonates with the aspired to western cultural

[2] For sustained, fair, and effective discussion of Fiddes' theology and his use of sources, see the various essays in Anthony Clarke and Andrew Moore (eds), *Within the Love of God: Essays on the Doctrine of God in Honour of Paul S. Fiddes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[3] For example, Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), pp. xiii–xvi.

milieu of egalitarianism. If abuse, dominance, exploitation, or oppression is rooted in perceived, apparent, or actual hierarchy in relationships, as often seems to be the case, then what is needed is a theology which exemplifies the non-hierarchical, non-monarchical nature and character of Yahweh. This can be done by describing God's triune nature in terms of panentheistic relations which can heuristically describe God's perichoretic interaction within Godself and between God and creation.

Fiddes asserts that defining God's triune nature as a social, perichoretic, and panentheistic reality *actually* places human beings in participation with the relations of the Godhead, and this has some significant advantages that offer solutions to perennial problems in church history and the praxis of the Christian faith. Key for this article, such a definition strongly counters all persistent images of dominance, power, and monarchical superiority which would seem to enable church cultures where subordination and abuse occur.[4] The divine dance that emphasises interpenetration and a focus on the movements, not the dancers, removes the domination of the Father, which is often used to justify oppression. It throws open relational language allowing us to talk about a motherly father or fatherly mother which, without undermining it, brings equality to our understanding of the Trinity.[5] This egalitarian dance flattens out authority structures both within the state and the church, and it redefines authority in terms of *kenotic*, humble service as modelled by Jesus in John 13. Fiddes claims that vicious cycles of domination, power-plays, and scapegoating could lessen if we focus on our participation in the Trinity and the completeness of fellowship we have with the triune God.[6]

Another benefit is that social, personal language rooted in pastoral experience is vital and very promising in helping humankind understand its relations both with God and with each other. Participative language is not subservient to analogous language, but

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[4] Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 2000), pp. 62–71.
[5] Fiddes, *Participating in God*, pp. 71–96. See also Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (London: SCM Press, 1981).
[6] Fiddes, *Participating in God*, pp. 96–108.

rather provides an appropriate image for the personalness of God.[7] Seeing God as an event of relationships grounded in the language of participation can, insists Fiddes, allow us to retain the heritage language of 'subsistent relations' so long as we raise our gaze to a third level of meaning: God's relations are as 'beingful' and real as that which is either created or uncreated, and in themselves lies their ground of existence.[8] This understanding is what sets the foundation for a 'social' trinitarian model[9] consisting of *perichoresis* and mirroring Jesus's high priestly prayer in John 17:21.[10]

The final advantage of this perichoretic and panentheistic model of God is that it can lead to a genuine understanding of our participation in the divine nature (Acts 17: 28; Col 1:16–20; 2 Pet 1:4) which could, claims Fiddes, help us more effectively close the post-enlightenment gap between ontology and epistemology since we know God as we participate in life. It may also help with ecological theology and inter-personal relations since all of creation — because of its covenant with God (Gen 9:8) — shares in the divine dance and responds to God, and participation in the Trinity closes the gap between the subject and object which will impact, intensify, and deepen our relationships with each other.[11] This could, for the purposes of this article, offer the distinct possibility of healing all ruptures within human relations irrespective of the severity, content, or context.

Of course, any proffered trinitarian theology will be contested and face some scholarly push back, especially if it claims a level of uniqueness. Indeed, Fiddes' definition of trinitarian 'persons as relations' and 'participation as relations' which are the central theological claims of his articulated panentheistic doctrine of God are, by his own admission, his *unique* contribution to trinitarian theology.[12] He is very

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[7] Fiddes, *Participating in God*, pp. 28–33.

[8] Fiddes, *Participating in God*, pp. 34–46.

[9] This social trinity model is based on relations, not persons, of the Trinity and has been labelled a 'radical' model. Paul S. Fiddes, 'Relational Trinity: Radical Perspective', in *Two Views on the Doctrine of the Trinity*, ed. by Jason Sexton (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), pp. 159–85.

[10] Fiddes, *Participating in God*, pp. 46–56.

[11] Paul S. Fiddes, 'Participating in the Trinity', *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 33, no. 3 (2006), 375–91.

[12] Paul Fiddes, personal communication with the author, 15 and 16 March 2016. This unique contribution of Fiddes has come in for significant criticism in recent years. For instance, in

aware that this language comes from Augustine and Aquinas, and his claim of uniqueness lies in taking an extra step beyond 'subsistent relations' and using radical language that talks about the 'event of relationships'. This, he claims, is the best language of participation and it sits well with both *prayer* and the *eternal generation* of the Son from the Father which we experience in the *mission of God*.[13] Moreover, as every children's pastor knows, it is very difficult to communicate the ancient formula of the Trinity without slipping into modalism or tritheism. Children's talks, as well as sermons, often fall short of describing the relations in God and so, because the idea of 'participation' takes the triune relationships very seriously, participation in the Trinity needs to be the central idea, which, Fiddes suggests, can be best articulated within a panentheistic framework.[14]

In the face of Fiddes' claim of uniqueness, however, there is the frequent rebuttal that it is incoherent to speak about relations without involving any language of persons, and, as McCall argues, the emphasis on relations leads to a jettisoning of classic Christology and the embracing of degree Christology.[15] Granted, on the specific charge that Fiddes is moving away from classic towards degree Christology, Fiddes is ambiguous and possibly guilty.[16] Concerning the accusation of incoherence however, Fiddes avers that all human language falls short

response to Fiddes' radical model, Molnar forcefully asks what relationships are being referred to when using the term *perichoresis*, since the compound term confuses two terms historically used to refer to the inner relations of the Trinity, not relations between God and humanity. See Paul D. Molnar, 'Response to Paul S. Fiddes', in *Two Views on the Doctrine of the Trinity*, ed. by Jason Sexton, pp. 191–197 (pp. 195–96). Notwithstanding the push back, participation in the 'relations', not persons, of the Trinity is the centripetal idea to which all Fiddes' theology migrates. He comes back to it often in his writings on the doctrine of God. For example, see Paul S. Fiddes, 'Creation Out of Love', in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. by J. Polkinghorne (London: SPCK, 2001), pp. 167–91 (pp. 184–91); Paul S. Fiddes, 'The Quest for a Place which is Not-a-Place: The Hiddenness of God and the Presence of God', in *Silence and the Word: Negative Theology and Incarnation*, ed. by O. Davies and D. Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 35–60 (pp. 51–55); Fiddes, 'Participating in the Trinity', pp. 375–91.

13 Fiddes, 'Participating in the Trinity', pp. 379–83.

14 Fiddes, *Participating in God*, pp. 11–13.

15 Thomas H. McCall, 'Response to Paul S. Fiddes', in *Two Views on the Doctrine of the Trinity*, ed. by Jason Sexton, pp. 197–203. It could be countered, however, that New Testament trinitarian language is both relational and understandable. See Matt 3:16–17 for example.

16 Paul S. Fiddes, 'Review of *Christology in Conflict: The Identity of a Saviour in Rahner and Barth* by Bruce Marshall', *Journal of Theological Studies* 40, no. 2 (1989), 700–03.

and that our own human experiences of living in relations with others can be seen to reflect and participate in the relations within God; we are simply trying to find the most appropriate language in light of revelation,[17] and delineating the Trinity as an 'event of relationships' is, asserts Fiddes, a participatory concept that makes sense *only* in existential events of daily life.[18]

Moreover, he continues, not only is this the most appropriate language that we have to speak of the persons of the Trinity, but 'persons as relations' is methodologically sound, uses the majority of theological sources — that is Scripture, tradition, and experience[19] — and was the approach of the early church fathers who defined hypostasis relationally, not objectively.[20] Fundamentally, we exist within a universe of participation with relationships at the epicentre, all of which is experienced within the very being of God. The entire universe is engaging in God like this and so into this experienced framework we should place all other existential questions and events, especially those of forgiveness and reconciliation.[21]

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[17] 'Revelation is not to be replaced by human experience, but the self-disclosure of God is located where God wants to be' (Fiddes, 'Relational Trinity', p. 185).

[18] McCall, 'Response to Paul S. Fiddes', pp. 197–203. Paul S. Fiddes, 'Rejoinder Comments and Clarification', in *Two Views on the Doctrine of the Trinity*, ed. by Jason Sexton, pp. 204–06 (pp. 205–06).

[19] Of course, it should be pointed out that historically, all traditions of the church have consensually held Scripture, tradition, and reason to be the sources of theological formulation. 'Experience', as the fourth source of Wesley's quadrilateral, does not have universal acceptance or univocal meaning. For a critique of Fiddes' use of experience see Andrew Moore, 'Experience and the Doctrine of God', in *Within the Love of God: Essays on the Doctrine of God in Honour of Paul S. Fiddes*, ed. by Anthony Clarke and Andrew Moore (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 61–76.

[20] Holmes disagrees, claiming that the eastern Fathers were committed to divine simplicity more than Fiddes acknowledges and that the concept of 'relations' does not connect to the idea of personhood, as claimed by Fiddes. Stephen R. Holmes, 'Response to Paul S. Fiddes', in *Two Views on the Doctrine of the Trinity*, ed. by Jason Sexton, pp. 186–190 (pp. 188–190). For a sustained defence of this rebuttal point, see Stephen R. Holmes, *The Holy Trinity: Understanding God's Life* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2012), pp. 97–120.

[21] Paul S. Fiddes, 'What is God? [parts 1&2]', Closer to Truth, <https://www.closertotruth.com/series/immortality-and-personal-consciousness#video-2221> [accessed 12 April 2022].

Following Abelard but with a Difference

Buttressing Fiddes' 'participation as relations' trinitarian theology is an understanding of salvation as a process of transformation which can only happen in relationship and community and is undergirded by a theology of atonement which situates 'sacrifice' at its heart. Following H. Wheeler Robinson, Fiddes asserts that there is a cross in the heart of God which thus eternalises suffering.[22] This creates outcomes in the divine relations and movements of the triune God, and grounds the theology of transformative forgiveness and reconciliation that Fiddes sees as a model. Locating the cross into the centre of God's being is possible because of the catalytic event of the crucifixion of Christ; that historical moment of crucifixion, cry of dereliction, and resurrection of Jesus Christ which establishes the objective event from which Fiddes develops his nuanced Abelardian atonement theory: a 'subjective view which has an objective focus'.[23]

Fiddes advocates a modern atonement theory which has greater explanatory power in today's western culture as one that begins at the subjective pole, by focusing on the present response to God, and is then *followed by* affirmation of the objective event of the cross for a response.[24] Indeed, a subjective theory with an objective focus manages, so Fiddes claims, to overcome the perennial polarity between the subjective and objective found in most other atonement theologies. Instead of a focus on God's demand for justice or the Satan's destruction, Fiddes follows and develops Abelard by holding the *agape* of God as the central impetus for both salvation and the atonement. Within the *agape* of God, both the human and divine go through a process of change, resulting in the most satisfactory way of dealing with human alienation and estrangement, as well as with the fragmentation of social relationships which need to be

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[22] The cross is due to the active suffering which befalls God. Fiddes, *Participating in God*, pp. 166–68; cf. H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Cross in the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1965).

[23] Paul S. Fiddes, 'A Response to Stephen R. Holmes' (paper presented at the one-day colloquium on the Doctrine of God in conversation with Paul Fiddes, St Mary's School of Divinity, University of St Andrews, St Andrews, Fife, 16 April 2016).

[24] Paul S. Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation: The Christian Idea of Atonement* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1989), pp. 28–29.

healed and reconciled.[25] God's *agape* love is more than mere example; it is transformative.

Indeed, it is Fiddes' commitment to understanding salvation as a *process of transformation* that underlies his preference for a subjective view with objective focus. Starting with his baptistic commitment to community and relationship within an eschatological reality, he uniquely interweaves it with the more eastern concept of progressive divinisation, which is identified by being increasingly moulded into the likeness of God. Within a committed and faithful Christian community, one that views the other side of Easter as the *only* place from which we can see reconciliation and in which our ultimate hope lies,[26] Fiddes defines salvation as a moving away from sin towards a more divinised existence that, in the process, effectively deals with aspects of residual fallenness such as estrangement, anxiety, hostility, unforgiveness, fear, and idolatry.[27]

This process reflects effectively the fundamental purpose of God's transformational, suffering love, its *raison d'etre*, which is to heal broken relationships in acts of divine-human reconciliation. God is constantly seeking out people to save (1 Tim 2:3–4; 2 Pet 3:9), perennially offering forgiveness and reconciliation to the sinner in a process which is costly to God. This must happen in the here and now, and involve response from humanity: the reciprocal movements in the process of salvation are the intimate act of atonement.[28] This reconciliatory act with humanity also has its place within a greater quest for the unity of creation through redemption. Salvation in the present is enacted by God as creator and redeemer seeking to bring oneness to a chaotic and disharmonised creation, often symbolised in the Hebrew Bible as sea monsters of chaos.[29] Like forgiveness and reconciliation

[25] Paul S. Fiddes, 'Salvation', in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. by J. Webster, K. Tanner, and I. Torrance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 176–96 (pp. 178–80).
[26] Paul S. Fiddes, *Freedom and Limit: A Dialogue between Literature and Christian Doctrine* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), p. 82; Paul S. Fiddes, 'Tragedy as Rhetoric of Evil', in *Rhetorik des Bösen / The Rhetoric of Evil*, ed. by Paul S. Fiddes and Jochen Schmidt (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2013), pp. 165–92 (p. 176).
[27] Fiddes, 'Salvation', pp. 176–78.
[28] Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, pp. 14–17.
[29] Scholars such as Boyd and Day argue that these monsters are demonic, malevolent beings with their own irrevocable freedom to wreak havoc on creation. See Gregory A. Boyd, *God at*

with humans, this harmonisation of creation involves much pain, suffering, and cost to God, and causes a continual kenotic posture of vulnerability within the relations of the Trinity.[30]

As with his 'persons as relations' definition of the triune God, Fiddes' 'subjective view which has an objective focus' has not gone unnoticed nor passed without scholarly critique. Because his atonement idea places the present process of salvation prior to the past objective event of the cross and is juxtaposed with the insistence that God continually suffers through vulnerable love in the process of salvation and reconciliation, interlocutors have stated that this atonement theory comes dangerously close to syncretising the specific and unique suffering of the Son on the cross into a broader and more general account of divine suffering.[31] In response, Fiddes assures that despite locating himself firmly within a reinterpreted Abelardian tradition on the atonement which is often accused of underplaying the cross of Christ,[32] his refined account of the cross exemplifies not only the sublime example of who God always is in creative-redemptive work[33] but that it is, moreover, a totally unique and ultimate event in the story of the human and divine. The cross is the most intense event of divine suffering because God goes the furthest he ever will into a world alienated from its creator in order to achieve reconciliation.[34]

War: The Bible & Spiritual Conflict (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), pp. 93–113; John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 87.

30 Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, pp. 17–22; cf. Fiddes, 'Creation Out of Love', pp. 167–91.

31 Holmes, with forensic insight, acknowledges that Fiddes manages to avoid collapsing Christology into divine passibility in the way other divine suffering accounts do. However, he goes on to claim that Fiddes is less successful in keeping the cross the objective focus in his critique of various soteriological images. See Stephen R. Holmes, 'Who Can Count How Many Crosses?: Paul Fiddes on Salvation', in *Within the Love of God: Essays on the Doctrine of God in Honour of Paul S. Fiddes*, ed. by Anthony Clarke and Andrew Moore (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 120–33.

32 As Aulen points out, the main reason why Abelard's subjective view was rejected in the Middle Ages by traditional theologians was his tendency to assign no special significance to the death of Christ (Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement* (London: SPCK, 1931), pp. 96–97).

33 Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, pp. 24–26.

34 Fiddes, 'A Response to Stephen R. Holmes'.

The Role of Memory

Having briefly sketched the theological case for locating movements of reconciliation within the relations of the Trinity, one needs to now consider the pastoral-theological overtones, especially the *actual* practice of forgiveness and reconciliation which, for those survivors, offenders, or both who genuinely want to reconcile, goes beyond external lip service to authentic relational rebuilding. One key area, as highlighted by Fiddes in following Jacques Derrida, Paul Ricoeur, and Miroslav Volf,[35] is the process of forgiveness and the function of memory in that process. In *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World,* Volf posits the question, 'How can we enjoy the blessings of memory without suffering its curses?'[36] The curses Volf refers to are memories, both qualitative and quantitative, that prevent movements of forgiveness, let alone reconciliation. The answer is to develop truthful memory that can be used in the process of forgiveness, since too much memory can actually hamper or prevent forgiveness.[37]

Fiddes partially agrees with Volf. While acknowledging that too much memory, especially malevolent memories, can hinder forgiveness, Fiddes insists that there can only be forgiveness when there is *true* memory; the wrong cannot be forgiven if it has been forgotten. However, the proffered notion of forgetting with forgiveness is based upon Isaiah's account of forgiving and forgetting attributed to Yahweh himself,[38] and advocated by Volf, Derrida and Ricoeur. It does contain elements of merit that Fiddes incorporates into his delineation of forgiveness and reconciliation as being a journey of anguish consisting of two voyages: one of discovery and one of endurance.[39]

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35 Paul S. Fiddes, 'Memory, Forgetting and the Problem of Forgiveness: Reflecting on Volf, Derrida and Ricoeur', in *Forgiving and Forgetting: At the Margins of Soteriology,* ed. by Johannes Zacchuber and Hartmut Von Sass, Religion in Philosophy and Theology 82, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), pp. 117–33.

36 Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), p. 85.

37 Volf, *The End of Memory*, pp. 85–102, cf. Fiddes, 'Memory, Forgetting and the Problem of Forgiveness', pp. 118–23.

38 'I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more' (Isaiah 43:25).

39 Paul S. Fiddes, 'Preaching Forgiveness', *Preaching Today*, 36, no. 1 (1993), 11–15 (pp. 11–12).

Derrida's definition of forgiveness as an unconditional, limitless, and non-instrumental *gift,* given without expectation of reciprocation, grounds the movement of the forgiver in their journey of anguish, specifically in terms of the voyage of discovery. For those victims wanting and able to make this journey, forgiveness, Fiddes insists, must be offered before any repentance and with no expectation that there will ever be repentance from the perpetrator, since this act of gifted forgiveness forgives both the actor and the act together.[40] When speaking forgiveness over people *before* they repent, reconciliatory repentance can be unlocked since the person will be subjectively set free from guilt; this will take the perpetrator and victim, hopefully, into new, undiscovered territory.[41] This is indeed what Christ did in his earthly ministry (Matt 9:2) which climaxed with his declaration of forgiveness from the cross (Luke 23:34).[42]

Similarly, Ricoeur agrees that non-conditional forgiveness eradicates culprit and victim categories but, contra Derrida, he states that the work of memory has pertinence since memory concerns an event which is at the heart of all exchanges centred around repentance, forgiveness, and absolution. Fiddes welcomes and uses the flexibility and untidiness about forgiveness in Ricoeur, as well as an insistence on having a carefree memory.[43] It is this untidiness and unpredictability that give rise to the endurance voyage in the forgiver's journey of anguish.

Overall, Fiddes' theology of reconciliation, which borrows related elements from Volf, Derrida, and Ricoeur, situates all forgiveness and reconciliation in the participatory-relational network of the triune God. Given our participation in the relations of the triune God, we participate not only in the reconciling and forgiving movements of God but also in divine suffering and empathy. Thus, our situatedness within movements of divine possibility and participation in divine empathy opens victims up to understanding forgiveness as a

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40 Fiddes, 'Memory, Forgetting and the Problem of Forgiveness', pp. 123–27.

41 Forgiveness *before* repentance will, claims Fiddes, take restorative justice to a new level of effectiveness and move the penal system much closer to its set aim of reform (Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, pp. 14–17, cf. Paul S. Fiddes, 'Restorative Justice and the Theological Dynamic of Forgiveness', *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* (2015), 1–12).

42 Fiddes, *Participating in God*, pp. 197–220.

43 Fiddes, 'Memory, Forgetting and the Problem of Forgiveness', pp. 127–30.

journey of anguish that includes voyages of discovery, endurance, and empathy. Moreover, given our participation and situatedness, we know and experience this journey with God, not alone. In this journey of anguish and empathy, the victim absorbs the hostility and tries to place themselves in the offender's shoes. Clearly, it is a journey open only to those who arrive at a juncture where they want to offer forgiveness and have a desire to be reconciled.

Since it is all based on the Abelardian atonement of transformation where God makes a journey of empathy through Jesus of Nazareth into the depths of human despair and estrangement in order to transform rebellious lives, all chosen movements of forgiveness participate in this divine act and the journey of forgiving memory thus becomes part of God's journey. Ultimately, the journey of anguish is an optional movement into the unknown in which one is trying to win the offender back into relationship, something made possible by the memory of the violence and injustice of the cross that lies at the heart of the Christian faith, and which invites participation in the God who transforms, forgives, and reconciles.[44]

Implications for Pastoral Theology

In a recent and unfinished conversation with philosopher Pamela Anderson, Fiddes agrees that there are significant dangers in forgiving too quickly: for instance, in situations of domestic violence where the woman is under duress to 'just forgive' while remaining in an abusive family situation. In these types of situations, ones that pastoral ministers come across with some regularity, small and slow steps should be taken towards starting first with an imaginative narrative about the offender that could foster a desire in the victim to extend forgiveness to the perpetrator. Indeed, insists Fiddes, since forgiveness should be framed as an emergent property materialising out of dialogue, it is possible to encourage forgiveness without demanding it.[45]

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[44] Fiddes, 'Memory, Forgetting and the Problem of Forgiveness', pp. 130–33; Fiddes, 'Preaching Forgiveness', pp. 13–15.

[45] Paul S. Fiddes, 'Forgiveness, Empathy and Vulnerability: An Unfinished Conversation with Pamela Sue Anderson', *Angelaki*, 25, no. 1–2 (2020), 109–25 (pp. 119–21).

Having established that forgiveness is an unconditional *gift*, this does not mean that it is easy or a 'touchy-feely' type of action. Rather, it is a struggle that cannot and should not be circumvented or short-circuited precisely because there is an intrinsic tension between forgiveness and justice, and this is a cause of disturbance.[46] At a deeper theological level, forgiveness leading to reconciliation is premised in the inimitable reconciling act of God in and through Christ that reveals 'the incongruity of God's recognition of God's creatures as *perpetrators* of sinful relations and as *victims* of the sinful relations of others'.[47] Therefore, this incongruity, which is present in all situations of antagonism and unforgiveness, needs to be brokered and broken by radical and unilateral action. As Fiddes has already pointed out, the starting point of forgiveness leading to reconciliation is to offer forgiveness *before* repentance, which could metaphorically or physically be done by outstretching one's hand of forgiveness to persons or groups with whom there is an interpersonal conflict.[48] This will transcend the trappings of destructive mutuality and also open the door to posthumous forgiveness for offenders who are no longer alive.

The juxtaposition of the incongruity of broken relations with a theology of pastoral ministry leads to some imperatival conclusions. As Jesus himself instructed, when a worshipper who is about to make an offering remembers an unreconciled situation with a brother or sister, then that person is to go and first initiate reconciliation with them (Matt 5:23–24). Considering that the one bringing the offering is both offender and victim in different situations renders void any act of worship before reconciliation is sought.[49] Moreover, the incongruity is dramatically acted out and overcome in every act of corporate Christian worship as progression takes place from unconfessed sin to repentance, and in the celebration and movement of a broken community of persons to a newly established community rooted in Christ Jesus.

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46 Fiddes, 'Forgiveness, Empathy and Vulnerability', pp. 110–11.

47 Christoph Schwobel, 'Reconciliation, Justice and the Incongruity of Recognition' (paper presented at the Society for the Study of Theology Reconciliation Conference 2021, Newnham College, University of Cambridge, 13–15 September 2021). Italics mine.

48 Schwobel, 'Reconciliation, Justice'.

49 It should be noted that our Roman Catholic and Anglican brethren regularly create opportunities in their liturgical approach for forgiveness and reconciliation *before* acts of worship.

In less liturgical and more sermon-centric traditions, such as the Baptists, the pulpit can become the epicentre of movements of forgiveness and reconciliation rooted in the relational movements of the Trinity. Paramount for this is articulating and emphasising the painful journey of forgiveness and reconciliation to the preclusion of a divine courtroom legal pardon.[50] There are a range of texts in both Testaments which elucidate God's reconciliation journey of anguish and endurance into which all believers can situate themselves and move in divine reconciling movements as they forgive and potentially reconcile with other persons.[51]

Collectively, all aspects of Christian worship, whether corporate or individual, in a church building or some other space, could be acts whose sole purpose is to create a new and different future for the worshipping community — both individuals and groups — by making promises and keeping them; a triumvirate of 'forgiveness, promising and yearning'. Because any promise-keeping happens within a web of relationships, there is a ripple effect which could bring significant healing to a myriad of relationships, through which God is enabled to win back offenders via reconciliation and life-transformation.[52]

Nevertheless, the question arises as to what this looks like concretely in Christian worship and ministry. Key to how this could be answered is our recognition that moments and movements of forgiveness and reconciliation are situated within a 'persons as relations' trinitarian reality of the panentheistic God, one in whom we 'participate in the divine nature' and 'live and move and have our being'. What follows are some brief and embryonic suggestions. First, we need to use our imagination while consciously thinking of the Holy Spirit. Then persons participating in Christian worship who are in need of and are open to pronouncements of forgiveness and possible reconciliation can, through declaration and prayer, situate all acts and utterances of forgiveness and reconciliation as taking place within the communications, love, and relations that intrinsically exist within the

[50] Fiddes, 'Preaching Forgiveness', p. 11.
[51] For instance, Jacob and Esau, Hosea and his wife, Christ on the cross (Fiddes, 'Preaching Forgiveness', pp. 12–14).
[52] Fiddes, 'Forgiveness, Empathy', pp. 111–13.

triune God. This incorporates, of course, what Fiddes calls 'the infinite twisted knot' that is found in the 'yes' between the Father and Son, a knot actualised during the moment of Christ's cry of dereliction which is infinite enough to contain all 'noes' of rebellion and sin including attitudes of hostility, bitterness, and other corollaries of unforgiveness on the part of created beings, both physical and spiritual.[53]

Second, if salvation is a process of transformation with agape love and sacrifice at the epicentre, then all relationships within the church, both in times of worship and during the rest of the week, should be moving toward the *telos* of a community underpinned by an Abelardian theology of atonement.[54] If relationships are to be healed through forgiveness and reconciliation, then the subjective locus of the objective focus needs to be facilitated through opportunities for unreconciled persons to converse, relate, work together, and to be in fellowship. Life groups, discipleship ministries, and other serving opportunities could be organised in such a way as to give those in need of forgiveness and reconciliation opportunity to be together and journey alongside one another.

Third and finally, in acts of Christian worship, space needs to be created to allow persons to ponder, reflect, and form *true* memory of the historical rupture(s) in the unreconciled relationship. Care should be taken to not allow too much time for mental indulgence that could

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[53] The 'no' found in the 'yes' between the Father and Son has become a regular theme in Fiddes' corpus of work since 2006, and one that he gets from Hans Urs von Balthasar's work on dramatic soteriology. Select works where the theme appears includes Fiddes, 'Participating in the Trinity', pp. 388–90; Paul S. Fiddes, 'Dual Citizenship in Athens and Jerusalem: The Place of the Christian Scholar in the Life of the Church', in *Questions of Identity: Studies in Honour of Brian Haymes*, ed. by A. R. Cross and R. Gouldbourne, Centre for Baptist History and Heritage Studies 6 (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2011), pp. 119–40 (pp. 133–36); Paul S. Fiddes, Brian Haymes and Richard Kidd, *Baptists and the Communion of Saints: A Theology of Covenanted Disciples* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014), pp. 95–101; Paul S. Fiddes, 'The Trinity, Modern Art, and Participation in God', in *Christian Theology and the Transformation of Natural Religion: From Incarnation to Sacramentality: Essays in Honour of David Brown*, ed. by Christopher R. Brewer (Leuven: Peeters, 2018), pp. 81–100 (p. 96). As Fiddes said to this author in an interview, 'There is only one place that anyone can say "no" to God and this is in the "yes" of the Son to the Father' (Paul Fiddes, personal communication with the author, 15 and 16 March 2016).

[54] Lyall insists that *agape* love is the underlying root of all pastoral relationships, including ones needing to be reconciled. This is because the agape love demonstrated through the incarnation of Christ enables any person to situate themselves into the context of the one being offered forgiveness. David Lyall, *The Integrity of Pastoral Care* (London: SPCK, 2001), pp. 97–98, 154–56.

change a true memory to one of embellishment and hyperbole. Effective illustrations, stories, or imagery could be used in order to catalyse the memory reflection exercise and prepare the forgiver to initiate their journey of anguish that could lead to a voyage of discovery.[55] Though challenging, the ideal would be to have junctures in the worship service with enough time to allow for formation of true memory, and opportunities to commence unconditional agape forgiveness that will, hopefully, catalyse a journey of forgiveness, repentance, and reconciliation.

Conclusion: More Becoming, Less Being

In concluding, while never self-identifying as a process theologian, Fiddes has accommodated into his doctrine of God elements of potential, growth, and becoming over any category of pure act (*actus purus*). Therefore, creation's participation in the relations of the triune God, relations that have room for potential and becoming, offer a location within the panentheistic reality of God for genuine movement through the process of forgiveness into actual, experiential healing and reconciliation of inter-person relationships. The theological emphasis upon the relations of the Trinity as constant movement and change places greater focus on becoming instead of being, and this elicits greater opportunities for growth and development, both in this life and the life to come.

Fiddes, following Ricoeur and much poetic literature, holds that the *eschaton* is by nature open and full of possibility. With regard to the end of evil, Fiddes' hopeful universalism posits that there will be a final and complete overcoming of all evil, including de-personalised, unreconciled, and dehumanising relations: this is a Christian hope in

[55] Recently, this author witnessed an effective illustrative lesson on the dangers of giving the devil a foothold by not dealing with anger, offense, and resentment quickly enough (Eph 4:26–27). Using the image of a homemade monkey trap that is used in Africa (a carton with a banana in it; the monkey puts its hand through the hole to get the banana but cannot get its hand out unless it lets go of the banana, which most monkeys do not), the speaker's point was that we often hold on to offense and dislike just like the monkey with the banana and so we get trapped in unforgiveness and bitterness. Instead, we should let go of the offense through forgiveness and, like a smart monkey, be released from the entrapment. Unfortunately, no space or time was created following the talk for people to approach others whom they needed to forgive.

which no one is left outside, alienated, or rejected.[56] The overcoming, however, will not be instant but a gradual eradication of evil as it allows people to repent, grow, and be sanctified before and after death, which best explains those above-mentioned scripture texts that speak of God wanting 'all to be saved'.[57]

Therefore, situating the journeying process of forgiveness and reconciliation — often encountered by Christian ministers in their ministerial duties and pastoral care — into the constantly becoming and changing participation in the relations of the triune God can and should unlock growth and development in the stages of forgiveness and reconciliation by assimilating the work of the triune relations into the restorative process between unreconciled persons. Moreover, framing this operant theology within a broader eschatological 'now and not yet' milieu creates room for hope-filled optimism in the face of death and the best theodicy, since justice, healing, and wholeness can be found in post-death growth and development of those who remained unforgiven and unreconciled to other persons at the point when their lives were prematurely cut short.[58]

[56] Paul S. Fiddes, 'Question and Answer Session' (Institute for Theology, Imagination & the Arts Seminar, St Mary's School of Divinity, University of St Andrews, St Andrews, Fife, 15 April 2016).
[57] Paul S. Fiddes, *The Promised End: Eschatology in Theology and Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 190–196; Fiddes, 'Tragedy as Rhetoric', pp. 188–89.
[58] Fiddes, *The Promised End*, pp. 49–52, 133–35.

Towards a Baptist Theology of Creation: Thinking in Place with Willie James Jennings and Baptist Ecclesiology

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Abstract
The article takes Willie James Jennings's vision for a theology of creaturely connection as a starting point for suggesting a distinctively Baptist mode of creation theology — one that both flows out of and may further inform Baptist ecclesiology. It is argued that theologies of creation and church are mutually informing and patterned after one another in ways that tend to go unrecognised. Drawing on the work of Stephen Holmes and Paul Fiddes, it is suggested that the interrelated emphases on responsible discipleship, congregational liberty, and associationalism orient the Baptist imagination toward the particularities of local communities, encouraging a doctrine of creation that analogously begins with and lingers over how a given place is created and sustained by God in its ecological interdependence.

Keywords
Creation; Willie James Jennings; place; ecclesiology

Introduction

'Belief in creation has to refer to current real-world places or it refers to nothing'.
—Willie James Jennings[1]

Near the end of *The Christian Imagination*, Willie James Jennings reflects on the destructive effects that the colonial imagination has had on the world over the last five centuries, declaring the racialising and distorting legacy of this mindset a 'revolt against creation'.[2] He therefore suggests the need for a 'far more grounded doctrine of creation', one that may function as a reparative balm for the fracture that has been introduced into the Christian imagination by the colonial theology of extraction.[3] In

[1] Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 85.
[2] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, p. 248.
[3] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, p. 248.

response to the racialised, commodified, and desacralised vision of the world that has resulted from the separation of peoples from land, place, and natural histories, he suggests that the doctrine of creation 'should not be articulated as though it is first an academic dissertation about divine power and ownership or human stewardship of the earth or about theoretical possibilities of the exact nature of human origins or about the precise relationship between biblical accounts of creation and the actual cosmic order of material existence'.[4] Rather, it should be 'first a doctrine of place and people, of divine love and divine touch, of human presence and embrace, and of divine and human interaction' — that is, 'a way of seeing place in its fullest sense'.[5] Thus in Jennings's analysis, a doctrine of creation that does not attend to the interwoven particularities of people and place remains within the destructive (and racialised) constraints of the colonial imagination.

While Jennings has continued to develop these intimations toward a larger project and forthcoming monograph on the doctrine of creation, I here wish to join my own voice to his in imagining how such a theological vision might unfold. And in fact, I aim to do so with recourse to our shared denominational heritage as Baptists. This article will therefore take Jennings's critical vision as a starting point for developing a distinctively Baptist mode of creation theology — one that both flows out of and may further inform Baptist *ecclesiology*. In what follows, I propose that an explicitly and self-consciously Baptist creation theology can take up Jennings's challenge in an intellectually generative and pragmatically relevant manner. In sum, I suggest that the interrelated emphases on responsible discipleship, congregational liberty, and associationalism orient the Baptist vision toward the particularities of a given place, encouraging a doctrine of creation 'from below', so to speak: that is, one that begins with and lingers over how *this* place is created and sustained by God; how *this* place lives from the earth as an interconnected community of creatures; how *this* place may be kept, tilled, enriched, and made more just by the work of our hands in the life of the Spirit.

[4] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, p. 248.
[5] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, p. 248.

Jennings: Creaturely Connection versus a Theology of Extraction

The features of Jennings's thought that are especially germane for the concerns at hand are his articulation of *creaturely connection* and the *theology of extraction*. The former will be brought into contrastive focus below; the latter, he argues, is what has emerged from the colonial vision of the world. Through a supersessionist reading of Scripture and Christian civilisation, this vision first imagined the European as autonomous and separable from the earth, capable of manipulating the world through god-like knowledge and power over it. It then turned an objectifying and commodifying eye upon New World lands and inhabitants: viewing the land as 'inert, dead ground existing only in potential', the colonial gaze separated indigenous peoples from any meaningful relation to place, denying land as facilitator of identity and replacing it with an essentialising scale of racial existence featuring the white European at the pinnacle.[6] Having 'hollowed out our sense of our creatureliness and reduced the world to an inert or minimally alive resource for our use', this deformed theological vision remains normative and formative into the present, to pervasively damaging effect — ecologically, politically, and theologically.[7]

'We lost the world as creation', Jennings laments, 'with the emergence of a way of seeing the world and peoples that displaced their identities from the earth, animals and their environs'.[8] Perceiving the earth as dead matter to be rendered economically productive through domination or domestication, and drawing New World peoples into a scale of values oriented to whiteness, the colonial European saw themselves not as one creature among other creatures, but as enacting a creative agency upon the world's untapped natural resources with the divinely given power, authority, and blessing to do so. The emergence of such a 'theology of extraction' signified, and continues to signify, the

[6] Willie James Jennings, 'Being Baptized', in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. by Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells, 2nd edn (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 277–89 (p. 284).
[7] Willie James Jennings, 'Reframing the World: Toward an Actual Christian Doctrine of Creation', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 21, no. 4 (2019), 388–407 (p. 390).
[8] Jennings, 'Reframing the World,' p. 390.

'death' of the world 'as an animate and communicative reality for Christians and so many others'.[9]

The colonial gaze sees the world as sitting 'silently, passively, waiting to give itself up and give up what lies within it. Only in its surrender and in its role as divinely given gift can its life be honored by bringing that life to maturity through occupation, examination, manipulation, fragmentation and extraction.'[10] Operating according to such an extractive theology of creation, European colonists 'positioned themselves as those first conditioning their world rather than being conditioned *by* it'.[11] By contrast, New World inhabitants understood the earth 'as never silent, never passive, but always already actuality, speaking in and through creatures, including the human creature, and making intelligible life itself as both resource and source'.[12] Such awareness of the land's vitality and interconnectivity was essential to the life of indigenous peoples encountered by the European colonists, and perceived by the latter as so much superstition, savagery, or demonic influence. Yet it is precisely this kind of 'land-based identity' and 'ecology of connection' that Jennings maintains is essential for Christian theology to perceive anew if it is to recover creation — and the life of creatures — in the wake of the colonial imagination.[13]

A Christian doctrine of creation must therefore find and foreground ways of re-establishing this 'creaturely connection', the loss of which has given way to the 'pedagogy of lines and circles'.[14] This pedagogy refers to the colonial project that draws arbitrary *lines* through land to carve and divide it into an economic entity in terms of private property, and *circles* around human bodies to demarcate racial identities that are severed from the complex web of relations to land, earth, and culture — and therefore malleable to the economic ends and values of whiteness. A theology grounded in creaturely connection thus represents for Jennings the necessary foil to a theology of extraction and its attendant commodifying imagination. It is 'a participatory reality in

[9] Jennings, 'Reframing the World', p. 394.
[10] Jennings, 'Reframing the World', p. 397.
[11] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, p. 60 (italics mine).
[12] Jennings, 'Reframing the World', p. 397.
[13] Jennings, 'Being Baptized', p. 281.
[14] Jennings, 'Reframing the World', pp. 399–400.

and through which we enter into the communicative and animate density of the creaturely world interacting with the built environment'.[15] As such, it is existential as well as conceptual; hence we might say that it elicits and reflects an ecologically self-involving theology of creation, one that actively draws the self into a deeper awareness of human connectivity with the world and its inexhaustible web of interrelations.

What has taken place in the long unfolding of colonial destruction, Jennings contends, is not simply the product of doctrines, but is also rooted in a particular *posture* toward the world made possible by a supersessionist mode of reading. Carrying to its logical conclusion the ancient heretical tendency to forget that Christians have entered the story of Israel to become 'second readers' of the world and God's relation with it, colonial Christianity saw itself instead as the first and final arbiter of knowledge about the world. Positioning themselves as 'first readers' of creation, as those whose knowledge and power over nature reflected a deified perspective, 'Christians reframed the world and bodies and in so doing reframed thought itself as an action *upon the world* rather than an action *of the world*'.[16] As such, the distortion of creation that has taken place cannot be resolved through more thinking — no matter how ecologically, cosmologically, or politically attentive — within the logics of first reading that continue to characterise western thought (including much ecologically-oriented creation theology). Thus, what a theology of creation must do is to 'situate us as creatures in process of joining other creatures in and through life with God whereby we constantly enact *second readings* that build with and within the ways others see the creation'.[17] Engaging creation not as though our thought is what conditions the world, but as those who receive from others the knowledge of its givenness and interrelatedness, an ethos of 'second reading' is therefore 'the way of the creature that attends carefully to the ways of other creatures listening and learning from them of the reality of this world and of God's life with the world'.[18]

[15] Jennings, 'Reframing the World', p. 400.
[16] Jennings, 'Reframing the World', p. 389 (italics mine).
[17] Jennings, 'Reframing the World', p. 394.
[18] Jennings, 'Reframing the World', p. 389 (italics mine).

Contrary to a theology of extraction and the pedagogy of lines and circles, such second reading is 'a process fundamentally governed by the *pedagogy of joining* we learn as gentiles entering the story of Israel (…) a pedagogy offered to biblical Israel in the New Testament where they were invited to join the lives of gentiles in new and revolutionarily intimate ways'. Yet this habit of mind is all but absent in Christian thought, Jennings laments, a fact that 'shows itself painfully in our doctrines of creation', which by and large continue to read the world as though Christian theology possesses a first, unmediated view of reality.[19] Reforming this totalising mode of seeing means that we must relativise and historicise our claims to knowledge, especially through recovering and learning to hear the voices of indigenous peoples, as well as attending to 'non-white', 'non-Western', and 'feminine' modes of knowledge-building that have been cast aside as sub-rational or unscientific by the hubris of supersessionist logic and hyper-rational Western epistemology.[20]

In summary of this short engagement with Jennings, then, a doctrine of creation that is capable of extricating itself from the legacy of colonial logics and the theology of extraction that separates us from the world must be about grounding us in earthly life, about articulating and fostering creaturely connection. Such a creation theology must be as much about ethos as it is about content, about a pedagogy of joining and second-readings that attends to the particularities of land and place. As I will demonstrate in the following sections, it is especially here that we may recognise — or at least develop — something distinctively Baptist about Jennings's vision.

Baptist Ecclesiology

Because of the constellation of ongoing debates around Baptist history and identity, it is important to clarify from the outset that in this section I am not attempting to address those conversations directly, or to delineate precisely what it is that makes Baptists Baptist. Rather, I am undertaking the more modest task of outlining Baptist ecclesiology by

[19] Jennings, 'Reframing the World', p. 394 (italics mine).
[20] Jennings, 'Reframing the World', p. 389.

describing how Baptists do in fact do church and teasing out the basic theological commitments that inhere within this mode of ecclesial life. Drawing on the work of Paul Fiddes and Stephen Holmes, I offer below a broad synthesis of Baptist ecclesiology, one that I take to be faithful to the realities of historical development and global Baptist identity, as well as reflective of my own lifelong experience in a wide spectrum of Baptist churches in the United States and United Kingdom:

> *Baptist ecclesiology is rooted in an understanding of the individual's proper response to Jesus's call to discipleship as voluntary covenant membership in a local church, with the conviction that the local church retains the congregational liberty to respond directly to the lordship of Christ, as it corporately discerns the guidance of the Holy Spirit for its life together.*

The particular schematic formulation is my own, but I trust it will be readily recognisable to anyone invested in Baptist life and thought. I will briefly unpack the major aspects of this ecclesiology ('individual', 'discipleship', 'voluntary', 'covenant membership', 'local church', 'congregational liberty', and 'corporate discernment') with reference to Fiddes and Holmes, and subsequently take this characterisation as a jumping off point for thinking about a Baptist creation theology.

Individual, Voluntary Discipleship

Individualism may seem an odd place to begin developing an ecclesiology; but as will become clear, this emphasis belongs to a broader framework of theological commitments that hang together such that, in terms of conceptual explanation, one could just as well begin with covenant membership, congregational liberty, or associationalism. Phenomenologically, however, Baptist life begins here, with a deeply personal understanding of the individual's relationship with God in terms of a pneumatologically guided discipleship to Jesus.

Holmes summarises neatly: 'In Baptist theology, God deals directly with each particular human being, summoning him or her to respond in repentance and faith to the gospel call, and to take his or her place within the active community of the redeemed, living a life of

visible holiness and committed to the evangelization of the world.'[21] The directness, immediacy, and personal nature of God's relationship to each person is reflected in the commitment to believer's baptism, as Baptists understand this responsive action to be a matter of individual decision — one that cannot be made 'as a result of some proxy decision', on the basis of the faith of the church or family.[22] Rather, the individual is called *as individual* to follow Christ, into a life of faithfulness and visible regeneration through the power of the Holy Spirit; one cannot be a disciple of the living and personal Lord by proxy or association, but must respond to his call with the fullness of existential commitment. Baptism and church membership must therefore be voluntary, and of course this also means that they can never be coerced by state violence or coterminous with citizenship and its benefits. And as we will see, this individualism also constitutes an egalitarian responsibility for the life of the church and its mission in the world.

Covenant Membership in the Local Church

While the Baptist understanding of faith and discipleship is thus deeply personal and, in this sense individualistic, it at the same time cannot be reduced to the private faith of the individual: 'God's call comes to individuals', Holmes affirms, 'but the call is to become a part of a community of faith.' In Baptist understanding, this means covenant membership in a local congregation, for it is primarily in and through the local church body that 'God has promised to be active'.[23] Two interrelated ideas need unpacking here: the concept of covenant, and its application to the local church. Fiddes has given particular attention to the role of covenant in Baptist ecclesiology, suggesting that it may be the common thread that holds Baptist life and theology together across time and geography.[24] Looking at the first Baptist congregations that emerged from the English Separatist movement (which considered the state church to have voided its covenantal responsibilities to God), he sees that in a new and creative interpretation of Scripture, these Baptists

[21] Stephen R. Holmes, *Baptist Theology* (London: T&T Clark International, 2012), p. 95.
[22] Holmes, *Baptist Theology*, p. 95.
[23] Holmes, *Baptist Theology*, p. 6.
[24] Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002), p. 17.

particularised the idea of God's covenant relation with the church, 'as a relationship between God and distinct local congregations. *Each* local church, even if only two or three faithful people, was to be gathered by its own covenant.'[25] There were (and are) two dimensions to this notion of covenant, which continue to be discernible in Baptist theology up to the present: the vertical and the horizontal.

'On the vertical plane is the relation of the congregation to God', he observes, 'which takes the particular form of living under the rule of Christ alone, who is calling a church into covenant.' Thus while 'it is essential that faith be voluntary, in response to the initiating grace of God, the local church is *not* to be regarded as a merely voluntary society'. To the contrary, 'the congregation gathers in obedience to Christ as the maker of the new covenant through his death and resurrection'.[26] This vertical dimension thereby calls into existence a horizontal covenantal reality as well, according to which 'members of the congregation relate to each other and agree to live together by a certain discipline of life, holding each other up to the high demands of discipleship'.[27] In short then, 'the members of a church instituted by covenant thus undertake a dual promise, to be faithful to God and to one another'.[28]

This conceptualisation of covenant elucidates the primacy of the local church that is characteristic of Baptist life and theology. As Holmes summarises, '[t]here is no "Baptist church" that is not a local congregation'.[29] As the particularisation of God's covenantal relationship with individual churches is operative on the vertical plane that founds and establishes local congregations, so on the horizontal plane one's covenantal membership is not with a global or translocal institution, but with the local body. Baptists do of course acknowledge the global communion of saints and universal church of Christ as one catholic body, but they hold that 'that universal church is only instantiated in local congregations'. As Fiddes summarises, Baptists from their beginnings 'have regarded the local congregation as a visible

[25] Fiddes, 'Baptist Ecclesiology', in *T&T Clark Handbook to Ecclesiology,* ed. by Kimlyn J. Bender and D. Stephen Long (London: T&T Clark, 2020), pp. 25–240 (p. 226).
[26] Fiddes, 'Baptist Ecclesiology', p. 226 (italics mine).
[27] Fiddes, 'Baptist Ecclesiology', p. 226.
[28] Fiddes, 'Baptist Ecclesiology', p. 226.
[29] Holmes, *Baptist Theology*, p. 97.

manifestation […] of an "invisible church"'.[30] It is to the Baptist understanding of the local body's relation with other churches and structures that we now turn in order to round out this picture.

Congregational Liberty for Corporate Discernment

The primacy of local church covenant membership, then, is both reflection of and ground for the Baptist understanding of congregational liberty. Contrary to cultural connotations, the concept of congregational liberty is not primarily about the rejection of authority but a matter of its source(s). '[T]he particular Baptist vision of the local church', Holmes summarises, 'depends, theologically, on the belief that Christ's rule over the church is experienced directly by each local congregation, and not mediated through a translocal hierarchy.' As such, Baptist ecclesiology is grounded in a particular understanding of the Lordship of Christ; for while all Christian denominations will of course affirm that Lordship in a cosmic or global sense, 'the Baptist distinctive is applying this resolutely *to the local congregation*'.[31] For Baptists, no state authority or ecclesial body can stand as mediator of Christ's Lordship over the local church. As Jesus Christ calls the individual believer directly and personally to a life of discipleship, so he directly establishes (by the work of the Spirit) the local congregation in its common life under his immediate authority. Thus, as Fiddes puts it, 'the rule of Christ as discerned by the church takes precedence over human structures of authority, and is constantly allowed to relativise them'.[32]

The rule of Christ as discerned by the church, then, is the operative principle for the Baptist understanding of congregational church government. Such discernment, moreover, is not made exclusively by the pastor(s) or any other leaders, but rather by a prayerful hearing of Scripture and Spirit in the context of corporate discussion among all members, lay and ordained — commonly referred to as the 'church meeting'. The church meeting, Fiddes observes, 'makes decisions about the life and mission of the local church, preferably by finding a consensus but where necessary through a democratic vote'. Despite the

[30] Fiddes, 'Baptist Ecclesiology', p 232.
[31] Holmes, *Baptist Theology*, p. 101.
[32] Fiddes, 'Baptist Ecclesiology', p. 238.

language of democracy, however, this practice is rooted in pneumatological expectation and Christological authority rather than the will of the people simply; for '[t]he aim is not to win a majority to a particular opinion but to find "the mind of Christ" for the congregation'.[33] The logic of this governmental process, profound in its simplicity and elegant in its consistency, is as follows: 'Christ deals directly, or perhaps mediately, through the Holy Spirit, with every particular believer. From this claim it is an easy step to insist that every particular believer in a given fellowship should be involved in the discerning of Christ's call on the fellowship, and so in the governance of the church.'[34] Thus as indicated above, the individualism characteristic of Baptist thought, rather than isolating the believer, actually places each one squarely in the corporate life of the church in ways that demand responsible action and involvement.

Finally, one further issue must be framed: the relation of congregationally governed local churches to one another in regional, national, and global communion. While each Baptist congregation operates independently in terms of its governance and decision-making, 'that does not mean that it is free to ignore whatever lies beyond the bounds of its own fellowship. Instead, Baptists have, virtually from their foundation, held that true churches have a duty to unite together for support and instruction.'[35] There is therefore an understanding of congregational *inter*dependence in Baptist life, resulting in networks of mutuality that unfold in terms of 'associationalism', wherein individual congregations cooperate in regional and national associations for mutual edification, discernment, and financial support. However, congregations 'may always voluntarily withdraw from them, and regularly do', since no associational decision can ultimately 'commit a church to any doctrinal or ethical decision'.[36] Membership in these various associations thereby remains voluntary, and while certain decisions at the associational level may result in individual congregations being barred or excluded from their resources, churches cannot be made to comply in any final sense. As Fiddes observes, the association functions by analogy as a 'church

[33] Fiddes, 'Baptist Ecclesiology', p. 228.
[34] Holmes, *Baptist Theology*, p. 101.
[35] Holmes, *Baptist Theology*, p. 104.
[36] Holmes, *Baptist Theology*, p. 96.

meeting of church meetings', thereby further extending the logic of corporately discerning the mind of Christ in individual liberty and responsibility. As in the local church, the guiding principle of the associational meeting is the pneumatological expectation that the mind of Christ will be revealed through collective prayer and hearing of the Word.

In summary of this outline, we might think about Baptist ecclesiology in terms of three concentric circles, beginning with the individual called to discipleship in the centre, moving outward to the circle of the local congregation, and then to the association at the periphery (with the associations themselves overlapping and interlinking). Phenomenologically and in terms of the responsibility of discipleship, life in the church begins with the individual's voluntary response to Christ's call; yet this call inheres and places the individual within the common covenantal life of the local congregation called together by the Spirit. In turn, the congregation retains the liberty to discern and respond directly to the mind of Christ as its unmediated authority in the particularities of its context; yet it does so always in the recognition that it is but one visible and interdependent instantiation among others of the body of Christ in the world.

I said above that I am not attempting to enter the fray of debates about Baptist identity with any precision. I nonetheless think it a straightforward observation in light of the preceding outline to say that whatever historical or practical specifics one may argue for, the distinctive thing about Baptists comes down to the shape of our ecclesiology. Indeed, Baptists have tended to deny that there is anything unique about our doctrinal commitments at all, aside from our understanding of the church and the baptismal practice implicated by it. And formally this is true, as Baptists are well within the mainstream of orthodoxy on other classical doctrinal questions; as Holmes recognises, 'there is no Baptist doctrine of the Trinity, or of salvation, or of eschatology, which is not shared with other Christian communities'.[37] However, Fiddes has noted that in making such qualifications without nuance, we have 'not always realiz[ed] how deeply intermeshed

[37] Holmes, *Baptist Theology*, p. 7.

ecclesiology and sacramental theology are with concepts of salvation and the nature of the triune God'.[38] We have already seen, for example, how the link between soteriology and discipleship is refracted through and shaped by Baptist ecclesiology in an idiosyncratic manner. It stands to reason, then, that thinking from the starting point of the ecclesiology outlined above may give other theological loci a specifically Baptist texture as well. Thus, taking Fiddes' cue regarding the interconnectedness of such commitments, the remainder of the article proposes that if we take our distinctive ecclesiology as a starting point and think seriously and systematically about its broader logics, it suggests a comparably distinctive Baptist theology of creation.

Church and the Doctrine of Creation

This section first provides the basis of an argument for an ecclesiological creation theology, outlining the logic of these doctrinal connections in a manner that gives basic justification for the move to come. Following on from this, I will unpack the major features of a specifically Baptist creation theology that flow from the ecclesiology outlined above.

An Ecclesiological Doctrine of Creation

The rationale for developing an explicitly ecclesiological doctrine of creation is as follows: If we take the church to be the body of Christ in the world (1 Cor 12:12–31), the community where he has promised to be present in the power of the Spirit (Matt 18:20) to restore human beings to God, themselves, each other, and the world (Isa 65:17f; 2 Cor 5:17–19); if, in short, the church is the present primary site of God's work of new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15) in eschatological expectation of its fulfilment (Rom 8:22–23; Rev 21), then in the life of the church and God's relation to it we should expect to encounter God's intent for and relation to creation as a whole. Thus, the way in which we exist as church suggests an implicit doctrine of creation: a doctrine of *new* creation, in which the goodness and meaning of creation are illuminated by the light of Christ, and that which fractures or opposes this goodness is brought back into harmony with the Creator and

[38] Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, p. 17.

thereby made whole and right. This is not to claim an unmediated divine authority for the church in the world, nor to suggest that the visible church is coterminous with the will of God — for the fullness of reconciliation remains an eschatological hope, and the church remains a church of redeemed sinners. Rather, I am simply arguing that there is good reason to identify a more direct relationship between ecclesiology and the doctrine of creation than is usually acknowledged, and suggesting that this connection is more operative in the life of the Church than we are accustomed to think.

Ecclesiology has tended to be considered in its (legitimate) relation to Christology, or perhaps more specifically in terms of soteriology or sacramentology. While not rejecting these connections, the ecclesiological theology of creation that I am proposing sees a more malleable web of doctrinal logics, in which ecclesiology is caught up more directly in a hermeneutical circle with the doctrine of creation, rather than existing as a Christological appendix in the body of systematic thought. Formally and in the contents pages of systematic theology textbooks, a number of other logical connections are involved to get from creation to ecclesiology, via the doctrine of God, Christology, eschatology, and so on. But functionally and in the life of the church their mutual influence is more direct; they flow in and out of each other without regard for formal systematic procedure, because both are ultimately about our fundamental ways of being in the world. Creation theology, then, is always lived through the structures, commitments, and shape of the church.

This is a twofold claim. First, I am making a claim about the way in which theology *does* operate: I am suggesting that doctrines of church and of creation influence, colour, and reshape one another on an ongoing basis in the life of the church — in its social action, preaching, and catechesis — even when such connections are not made explicit in doctrinal or confessional terms. It seems to me that something very close to this is what Jennings has argued so persuasively in assessing the ways the colonial imagination reshaped creation and its understanding of the church's relation to it (one thinks, for example, of the 'doctrine of discovery' by which popes bestowed 'rights' of 'ownership' to Christian nations who encountered lands already long inhabited by

indigenous peoples). And second, I am making a claim about the way in which theological investigations *ought to* operate: I am suggesting that we should consciously and intentionally think about ecclesiology and the doctrine of creation in terms of mutually influential logics.

An important question at this point is who are the 'we' that I am speaking of. On the one hand, I am speaking for 'we' theologians and Christians broadly, for as I have indicated, I believe this connection is everywhere real and operative, if largely unnoticed. On the other hand, I am speaking specifically as a Baptist, for I am presently arguing that Baptist ecclesiology bears particular potential for shaping a distinctive and important mode of creation theology. As a theologian of the church universal, then, I contend that we should think about ecclesiology and creation as directly bound up together because Christology is already implied in both. More to the point, Christology is the space in which both doctrines operate. While this is more obvious and commonly recognised for ecclesiology, we have tended to forget that it is also true for the doctrine of creation. Creation is not a pre-Christian space,[39] for the second person of the Trinity is an active agent in creating and sustaining all things (Col 1:15–20). Christology without creation is therefore an abstraction, as is any ecclesiology that may spring from it. Such an ecclesiology will always suffer from a certain un-reality or otherworldliness, a disconnection from the earthy and worldly realities created, incarnated, and restored by God in Jesus Christ.

As a Baptist theologian, I will take all this a step further and unpack how an ecclesiological doctrine of creation can and should unfold within the life of my own denominational tradition. Because ecclesiology plays such a determining role in Baptist life and imagination, I am seeking to indicate how we are in a position to make these connections explicit to significant theological effect, both conceptual and practical. In the course of demonstrating my central claim that Baptist ecclesiology may provoke a distinctive creation theology that responds to Jennings's concerns, this unpacking, then, will also function as an argument-by-demonstration for the connections between creation and ecclesiology that I have been articulating.

[39] My thanks to Hanna Reichel for this formulation.

Toward a Baptist Theology of Creation

I now turn to filling out these connections through the lens of Baptist ecclesiology as we have explored it thus far, by outlining seven basic features of a creation theology that flow out of Baptist congregational life. Recall that the governing ecclesio-logic at work here is that our understanding of the church's life and God's relation to it both illuminates and reflects our understanding of the proper life of creation in its interconnectedness and position before God as Creator. I will therefore begin each consideration with a tenet of Baptist ecclesiology, and work out what I take to be its implications for a theology of creation. As will come into focus, our ecclesiology and its imagination for the local and particular makes Baptist thought well equipped to respond to Jennings's critique and vision by thinking in place: by beginning with and lingering over what it means for *this* place to be creation before God and in creaturely interconnection.

1) In the Baptist understanding, God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit establishes covenantal churches of believers at the local level, relating to them im-mediately in the particularities of their life together in a given time, place, and cultural location. Extending this pattern to creation more broadly by our ecclesio-logic, it follows as a basic first principle that God relates to the diversity of created places in fittingly distinct ways, affirming the particularity and identity of local creaturely communities in the fullness of their ecological interrelatedness. 'Place' here refers to a creaturely location in the fullest sense: the land and the people that live with, on, and from it; the soil itself and the innumerable creatures that have their lives through its cycles of seasons, growth, decay, life, and death. In their inexhaustible uniqueness then, each and all places are full of meaning and the fecund presence of the Spirit, and one place cannot be substituted for another in our thought about or relation with it. Though it is the same Spirit at work in all places, the integrity of local creaturely communities — like that of local church communities — should be foregrounded and celebrated, such that the distinctive character of the place is seen to reflect God's unique and personal relation to it.

2) In light of the immediate and specific character of God's relation to the local church, Baptists therefore live in expectation of the

Spirit's particular guidance for the congregation in a given moment of its life. Following our ecclesio-logic into the theology of creation, this encourages a habit of mind guided by the expectation that God's activity and life-giving presence will be discernible in and through wider creaturely communities, through the sustaining and creative power of the Holy Spirit. Yet, as is the case in covenantal church membership, in order to discern this divine presence rightly one most know a place intimately, having comprehended oneself as bound up in relationships of mutuality and interdependence with its life. In other words, we must belong to the place rather than presuming that the place belongs to us. Belonging to local ecological communities in an abiding way therefore positions us to be able to discern their character as creation, and such an imagination enables us to perceive whatever place we are in as the place of God's presence.

3) Baptists anticipate this presence and guidance for the local church, and therefore hold that the congregation must discern the mind of Christ for itself, through trust and attentive hearing of the Word. On this understanding, no translocal authority can determine the will of God or mind of Christ for the local congregation, and the shape of the church's life cannot be determined with *a priori* certainty by any theological or ecclesial principles. By extension, a Baptist theology of creation should foreground and insist upon the fact that local ecological communities of human beings and their fellow creatures have needs and an inner integrity that cannot be determined *a priori* by the needs, character, or productive capacities of *other* places. Recognising the inherent creaturely value and divinely affirmed character of place in its fullness, we must respect the particularity of land, people, and the identity-facilitating bonds that constitute their creaturely connection.

4) Further to this effect, in Baptist life and theology the reality of one's discipleship is deeply individual, but at the same time intimately shaped by and made possible within the local church community. Attending to this reality from the perspective of creation, Baptist theology should foreground the manner in which one's identity as creature is individual and particular, yet made possible only by the interrelationships of persons to place, land, and community that always precede any ostensible autonomy. For attempting to abstract the self

from this fundamental web of connection results in the refusal of creaturehood and a life of un-reality, leading to the 'revolt against creation' that Jennings identifies as the result of the colonial imagination. This will require of Baptists a stronger and clearer emphasis on the communal and covenantal nature of our ecclesiology than we have often managed, as the individual responsibility of voluntary discipleship and covenant membership has tended to give way to the individualism of 'soul freedom' and notions of autonomy derived more from cultural definitions of freedom than the sole authority of Jesus Christ and the Spirit who gathers his body together. Yet while we have not always succeeded in stressing this, it is there at the heart of our ecclesiology as a resource that ought to (re)shape our understanding of ourselves as creatures.

5) According to Baptist ecclesiology, no state power or ecclesiastical body has the right to impose a shape of life or faith on the local church. Essential to the Baptist understanding of the church is the determination that the human being's relationship to God cannot be coerced or made to adhere to a predetermined mode of expression. Recognising the particularity of God's relationship to individual human beings as well as to the church communities of which they are members, a Baptist theology of creation will therefore not imagine that one people, nation, or church can transpose itself and its interests onto the place or faith of others. In line with Jennings's concerns, the parochial character of Baptist ecclesiology shapes our imagination in such a way that the colonial pedagogy of lines and circles should be ruled out from the outset. The Baptist imagination ought to be conditioned to relativise not only the violent certainty of the state, but also (with Jennings) any pretension to Christian mastery of creation or absolute knowledge of its meaning and reality.[40] As indicated by Holmes above, discerning the mind of Christ is an act of confident faith and trust, but one that can never claim the kind of certainty to justify an exertion of violence over the integrity of others' relation to God. Thus, Baptists ought to be predisposed to being 'second readers', hearing the voices of indigenous peoples and respecting the knowledge of Creator and creation made possible through their long belonging to place. A Baptist creation

[40] Cf. Jennings, 'Reframing the World', p. 389.

theology as I have been outlining it should therefore be especially attuned to the particularity of God's relationship with people and place that precedes our own presence there.[41] Here again, we must acknowledge the fact that Baptist mission activity, though by definition never an explicit extension of any state power, has nonetheless participated significantly in the colonial mindset endemic to the idea of 'global missions'. But also again, a failure to live into the logics of our convictions does not negate the reality that these implications are there as potent resources.

6) Extending these considerations further along this line, though governed congregationally, Baptist associationalism stems from the recognition of churches' interdependence with one another, as individual manifestations of the church universal. Extended to a theology of creation, the concentric circles model of Baptist ecclesiology carries the potential to pattern the pedagogy of joining proposed by Jennings, as it trains us to recognise our interrelatedness with other local ecological communities and seek God's presence in ever-broadening contexts of creation. Where local church primacy and congregational liberty form the Baptist imagination to attend to local ecologies and creaturely communities, the associationalism that is also essential to our church life should train us to respect the integrity of other places on their own terms; at the same time, this learned posture should foster a desire for intimacy and connection with other places, through which we may mutually support one another and enlarge our understanding of the Creator who holds each and all places together.

7) Finally, when extended to a theology of creation, the individual responsibility of discipleship and church membership, along with the communal commitment of the local congregation to discerning the mind of Christ in its concrete context, foster a sense of practical responsibility for the wellbeing of local ecologies and economies. To wit, the interplay of responsibility, locality, and associationalism should form the Baptist imagination to respond constructively to our present ecological crisis in important ways — namely, by developing sustainable

[41] On honouring indigenous knowledge of Creator and creation, see e.g., ordained Baptist minister and Native American theologian Randy Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), pp. 57–60.

modes of life at the local level, for the sake of the worldwide community of creation.

Properly speaking, there is in Baptist ecclesiology no such thing as passive participation, for the horizontal and vertical dimensions of the covenant demand active involvement on the part of all members, lay and ordained alike. Set in the context of creation theology, this active responsibility for the life of the church community ought to incite in Baptists a comparably active and responsible life in the broader creaturely communities of which we are a part. Rather than (merely) bemoaning the problems caused by other people in seats of power, a Baptist creation theology orients us to the personal responsibility involved in developing alternative modes of ecologically responsible, creaturely life together in the concrete here and now. An emphasis on the primacy of the local church should form Baptists to recognise their local ecological and economic communities as the primary site of such responsibility, and to invest in their protection, flourishing, and regeneration. Such involvement should include support for and participation in the just production of local food through regenerative agricultural practices, and will call churches to care for local watersheds and rivers, forests and prairies, to commit themselves to the preservation of native plants and animals, and to assess how congregational and individual property is being used to further or hinder such commitments.

In turn, the Baptist commitment to associationalism ought to alleviate us of the dual temptations to despair or to hubris with regard to ecological destruction and the church's responsibility in the midst of it. In the same way we trust that God calls together, sustains, and guides individual churches in covenantal relation with them, we may analogously live in the humility of faith and hope that the Spirit of God is always present and moving in the global web of ecological communities. As such, we need be neither paralysed by the overwhelming nature of worldwide ecological degradation, nor compelled to take on the impossible responsibility of seeking (or imposing) global solutions — a reflex rooted in the colonial imagination described by Jennings, which amounts to catastrophic injustice as often as not. As we go about the work of responsible care for our local

ecologies, all of which are unique in their needs and capacities, we may (and must) trust that God's sustaining love for all of creation is operative in each and all of the world's communities, just as we understand it to be in our own. An imagination shaped by associationalism therefore directs us ever more deeply into the life of our land, our place, and our communities, for the sake of the whole world and our own creaturely flourishing within it.

Concluding Reflections

I have argued throughout this article that theologies of creation and church are mutually informing and patterned after one another. What we believe about the church will be reflected in our creation theology, and what we believe about creation — about its meaning and our place within it — will be refracted back into the church's self-understanding. There is therefore an analogy, indeed more than an analogy, between the shape of our ecclesiology and that of our doctrine of creation. If we understand the church as 'first reader' of the world, the final arbiter of knowledge and rightful possessor of creation by divine right, then our doctrine of creation will trend inevitably towards the colonial theology of extraction. Likewise, if we see creation as dead matter for our use, human beings somehow hovering above the rest of the natural world, then our ecclesiology will become profoundly dualistic and — as history attests — a tool in the hands of nations and empires. But of course, this connection may also be fostered for the good, for a right understanding of our creaturely belonging in the world; this is the direction that I have attempted to develop by intimating a Baptist theology of creation.

As I have shown, Baptist ecclesiology suggests a lived theology of creaturely connection, grounded in responsibility and thus capable of responding to ecological crisis in concrete ways. This has not been to say that other denominational traditions do not have their own resources to take up Jennings's challenge, nor that everything about this vision is necessarily the provenance of Baptists exclusively. However, as I have demonstrated, there is something distinctively resonant between Jennings's vision for a doctrine of creation and the Baptist mode of being church in the world. Thus, with Holmes, I have proposed an

explicitly Baptist theological vision for the doctrine of creation, 'not because I believe that the entire world ought to be Baptists, but because I believe we have a vision of the Christian life that is of interest and worth, and that deserves to be better understood — by Baptists, and by others — than it presently is'.[42]

[42] Holmes, *Baptist Theology*, p. 9.

Seeking an Indian Identity: Baptist Witness in Orissa, India, from the 1860s to the 1880s

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Abstract:
The English General Baptists represented a strand of Baptist life which took shape in the seventeenth century and became a denominational body alongside the larger Particular or Calvinistic Baptist denomination. In 1816 the General Baptist Missionary Society (GBMS) was formed, a product of the New Connexion of General Baptists that resulted from the Evangelical Revival. This article examines the way GBMS sought to develop an authentic Indian witness in Orissa, from the 1860s to the end of the 1880s. It examines several themes: developing local churches and leaders; concern and care for all human needs; wider connections with other bodies; Baptist convictions; and an enlarged Baptist identity created in 1891 when the GBMS amalgamated with the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS). The article makes especial use of the GBMS monthly magazine, the *Missionary Observer*. Brian Stanley, in his history of the BMS, suggests that the Orissa mission was one of the most fruitful fields for Baptist work in India. The features of this have not previously been analysed.

Keywords:
General Baptist; missionary; identity; convictions

Introduction

The English General Baptists represented a strand of Baptist life which took shape in the seventeenth century and became a denominational body alongside the larger Particular or Calvinistic Baptist denomination.[1] The description 'General' signifies 'general atonement', an aspect of Arminian theology, and a perspective sometimes seen as tracing back to John Smyth and his congregation in Amsterdam, although that identification has been challenged.[2] By the eighteenth

[1] Stephen Wright, in *The Early English Baptists, 1603–1649* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2006), shows the demarcation was not straightforward in the early period.
[2] Stephen Holmes, 'When Did John Smyth Embrace "Arminianism" – And was the First Baptist Congregation "Particular"?', *Baptist Quarterly* [hereafter, *BQ*], 52, no. 4 (2021), 146–57.

century, a number of General Baptist congregations were embracing Unitarianism. This period saw the formation in 1770, under the influence of the Evangelical Revival, of what became the New Connexion of General Baptists.[3] The dynamic leader of the New Connexion was Dan Taylor (1738–1816), who had been a Methodist local preacher. He took some Methodist features into Baptist life, for example the term 'Connexion'.[4] It was in the year of Taylor's death that the General Baptist Missionary Society (GBMS) was formed. The GBMS was formed by the New Connexion and was not related to churches in the Old General Baptist movement, who had largely slipped into Unitarianism.[5] The prime mover was John Gregory Pike, the pastor of Derby's General Baptist Church for forty-four years. He was secretary of the GBMS from its formation in 1816 until his death in 1854.[6] This article examines the way GBMS sought to develop an authentic Indian witness in Orissa, from the 1860s to the end of the 1880s. In 1891 the GBMS amalgamated with the Baptist Missionary Society. The article makes especial use of the GBMS monthly magazine, the *Missionary Observer*.[7]

Developing Local Churches and Leaders

Considerable attention has been paid to the early formation and development of the GBMS.[8] The Baptist Missionary Society (BMS), which had been formed in 1792 and was a Particular Baptist body, felt unable to accept a General Baptist as a missionary when a request was

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[3] See Stephen L. Copson, 'General Baptists in the Eighteenth Century' and J.H.Y. Briggs, 'New Connexion of General Baptists, 1770–1813', both essays in *Challenge and Change: English Baptist Life in the Eighteenth Century,* ed. by Stephen Copson and Peter J. Morden (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 2017), pp. 29–55, and pp. 57–75 respectively.

[4] Richard Pollard, *Dan Taylor (1738–1816): Baptist Leader and Pioneering Evangelical* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2018).

[5] For the New Connexion, Dan Taylor and the Old General Baptists, see Stephen Copson, 'Dan Taylor and the Old General Baptists', *BQ*, 49, no. 2 (2018), 75–81.

[6] Peter Shepherd, 'J. G. Pike of Derby: Pastor, Evangelist and Founder of the General Baptist Missionary Society', *BQ*, 43, no. 3 (2009): 132–53.

[7] Published monthly in the *General Baptist Repository* (later *Magazine*) and *Missionary Observer*.

[8] See James Peggs, *A History of the General Baptist Mission* (London: John Snow, 1846); G. P. R. Prosser, 'The Formation of the General Baptist Missionary Society', *BQ*, 22 (1967), 23–29; Amos Sutton, *A Narrative of the Mission to Orissa* (Boston: David Marks, 1833).

made for this. However, there was considerable goodwill.[9] In India, William Carey and his colleague William Ward were happy to advise the GBMS in its formative period. The advice was to begin work in Orissa (now Odisha), eastern India, at that time part of Bengal. William Bampton and James Peggs, together with their wives, began work in Cuttack, the capital of Orissa, in 1822. Carey had already been translating the Bible into the local language, Oriya, and the area, with its influential Hindu temple, was seen as strategic for Christian witness. By 1830, twelve GBMS missionaries had arrived in Orissa. At that point the New Connexion had 11 000 members, in 109 churches. The years up to 1858, when over thirty GBMS missionaries had served, have been characterised by Kanchanmoy Mojumdar as a period of 'preparation' for Baptist activity due to generally limited impact.[10] Nonetheless, there was a growing church in Cuttack. This had 137 members in 1845, with a further fifty-two members in six outstations.[11] The decades that followed were a time when an identity was more fully worked out.

A Cuttack Mission Academy (subsequently, Theology College) operated from the later 1840s and thus, as Brian Stanley notes, the Orissa mission 'had the advantage of having a training institution located at the heart of a geographically concentrated Christian constituency, an advantage that Serampore in the BMS mission lacked'.[12] There was a strong emphasis on the role of Indian pastors and evangelists. At a Thanksgiving Day at Cuttack in October 1859, there were reports of the impact of local Indian evangelists reaching out in the markets. The preachers gained hearers, while occasionally being stoned.[13] Two factors appear to have been at work in this period. Following the Indian Rebellion of 1857–1858, which signalled the alienation of many Indians from the rule of the British East India Company, there was increased emphasis in Orissa on local Baptist

[9] For the friendship between Dan Taylor and the Particular Baptist, John Fawcett, see Pollard, *Dan Taylor*, pp. 127–28.

[10] Kanchanmoy Mojumdar, 'Baptist Missionaries in Orissa, 1822–58: A Study in Western Impact on 19th Century Society', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 37 (1976), 327–35. See p. 327.

[11] Peggs, *History of the General Baptist Mission*, p. 257.

[12] Brian Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1792–1992* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), p. 163.

[13] 'Thanksgiving Day at Cuttack', *Missionary Observer*, October 1859, p. 394. Authors of reports were not named.

leadership. The *Missionary Observer* (hereafter, the *Observer*) covered in detail local Indian preachers, such as Tama and Makunda, and their leading of meetings. The other factor was the '1859' evangelical revival, an international movement with a focus on prayer and witness, and in May 1859 a GBMS article was published on 'Religious Revival'.[14] On the theme of effective witness, the January 1862 *Observer* had a letter about Gunga Dhor, an extraordinary preacher in Orissa described as the 'Charles Spurgeon of India'. A high caste Brahmin, he had been baptised in 1828 and later ordained. He had a deep interest in John Bunyan and prayer and had recently preached a sermon on 'The character of Holy War by Bunyan Sahib'.[15] The identity was connected with England while finding fresh forms in India.

An annual conference of the churches was held in Orissa, at which reports were given and messages preached in English and Oriya. At the 1865 Conference, it was noted that Indian preachers occupied 'a large share of Conference'. By this time, some had more than thirty years of service, and pensions were provided for retirement.[16] In 1867, there was deep concern at Conference for the effect of the devastating famine of the previous year in which it was estimated that one quarter of the population of Orissa had died.[17] The question of ensuring a missionary presence was raised: during the 1860s only two new missionaries had arrived in Orissa. However, discussions led to a more positive outlook. Instead of 'excessive modesty', which could lead the General Baptists 'to depreciate our own work', there was a call to affirm the church planting and training of local leaders that had taken place.[18] A year later, John Clifford, then in his early thirties, who was to become a towering figure among General Baptists, gave an impassioned address at the autumn meetings of the Baptist Union in which he referred to the caste system in India as a 'gigantic edifice', not a 'structure built of sand but an adamantine barrier'; and he went on to pronounce that it had been 'shaken to its base by the thunderbolt of human brotherhood shot from

[14] 'Religious Revival', *General Baptist Herald*, May 1859, pp. 161–66.
[15] 'Letter from Rev. W. Hill', *Observer*, January 1862, pp. 33–34.
[16] 'The Orissa Missionary Conference', *Observer*, February 1865, p. 77.
[17] Bidyut Mohanty, 'Orissa Famine of 1866: Demographic and Economic Consequences', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28 (1993), 55–66.
[18] 'Annual Conference', *Observer*, August 1867, p. 253.

the heavens'. He argued for the equality of all people.[19] Although Clifford's picture of the victory of equality was over-drawn, at a New Year conference in Cuttack in 1869, one missionary, John Buckley, who had served in Orissa since 1844 and would continue until his death in 1886, spoke of meetings at which missionaries were 'spectators'. He observed 'with great joy' the faith in Christ and the ability of local pastors.[20]

In 1869–1870, as the New Connexion celebrated one hundred years as a General Baptist denomination, there were reports of considerable numbers in Orissa 'who had put on Christ by public baptism', often following the work of local evangelists and of Bible Women — who were female evangelists focusing on reaching other women. At one baptismal service, five hundred Hindus and Muslims were reckoned to have been present. It was noted that Orissa had only five European missionaries, half the number of a quarter of a century previously. Yet the churches were 'growing faster than ever before'. Among themes often taken up in the preaching of local pastors were witness, holiness, prayer, and the Holy Spirit. The preaching was motivating members to witness and in the case of some to train as pastors. Mention was made of those studying in the College. Following the centenary celebrations, an appeal was made for money for a larger Baptist building in Cuttack: it emphasised that the Baptist Chapel was the oldest Protestant building in Orissa and that in other places besides Cuttack, steadily increasing congregations produced a need for more buildings for worship.[21] The GBMS Annual Report for 1878 recorded 452 members in the Cuttack churches, 209 at Pipli, and 152 at Berhampur.[22]

Although Indians were taking the lead in much of the mission work, there was some excitement in 1882 when it was reported that Thomas Mulholland, a native of Glasgow, was coming to Orissa to superintend the Mission Press at Cuttack. He had a background in

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[19] 'The Christian Conscience', *Observer*, November 1868, pp. 347–50.
[20] 'The New Year at Cuttack', *Observer*, March 1869, pp. 95–96.
[21] 'Reports from Orissa', *Observer*, May 1869, pp. 159–62; 'Orissa Chapel', *Observer*, August 1871, p. 253.
[22] 'GBMS Annual Report, 1878–79', pp. 11, 24, 38.

printing and had for eight years been a home missionary with the Free Church of Scotland. He began to train for Free Church ministry but was 'led to consider the subject of believers' baptism, and after prayerful consideration of the Scriptures he came to the conclusion that this was the only baptism enjoined in the word of God'. [23]The General Baptists knew of Andrew Bonar, described as Mulholland's 'revered pastor'. In several interviews with Bonar and others, attempts were made to counter Mulholland's new convictions. Mulholland, in a decision that caused him 'considerable pain', was baptised and joined Adelaide Place Baptist Church, Glasgow, and later made his way to Orissa with the GBMS.[24] At the Orissa Conference in 1883, the *Observer* reported that the attendance was the largest in the history of the mission. Conference recognised the place of European missionaries, but especially gifted younger Indian preachers, such as Gideon Mahanty: there was no sense of superiority of English Baptists over Indian. Indeed, it was suggested that over the previous ten years the increase in Baptist membership in England had proportionally been much less than in India.[25]

It was difficult for the New Connexion to appeal for new missionaries from England when the overseas mission fund was struggling to meet its financial outgoings. Mulholland returned to Britain after just under three years. By 1888, the denomination was being called to special prayer as the 'missionary debt' had grown to £1200. Giving did not increase significantly, and it was only a legacy that paid off the debt.[26] For those in the churches in Orissa, however, the focus was on local mission rather than legacy money. Growth in the churches was continuing, all under Indian leadership, with those being baptised coming partly from Indian Christian families and partly from those who had no Christian background. One of those baptised in 1888 was a grandson of Ghanu Shyam, a long-standing, 'very able' minister and tutor in the College. Another was someone in his late twenties, Kina Ram Bose, a Hindu 'from a high class family and in Government

[23] 'A New Missionary for Orissa', *Observer*, June 1882, p. 237.
[24] 'A New Missionary for Orissa', *Observer*, June 1882, p. 237.
[25] 'Orissa Conference', *Observer*, March 1883, p. 113; 'Notes', *Observer*, May 1883, p. 157.
[26] 'An Important Proposal', *Observer*, January 1888, p. 38.

employment'.[27] A report in the *Observer* in 1889, looking back over sixty years, made this significant pronouncement: 'Never in the history of the Mission were the Society's operations in Orissa so extensive or so encouraging as they are now.'[28] A Baptist witness with its own identity had been established.

Concern and Care

Alongside the Mission's desire to see people come to faith in Christ, there was concern to care for the whole person. In recognition of the needs of orphans in Orissa, the Mission had opened orphanages at Cuttack and Berhampur in 1836, and at Ganjam in 1841. With the terrible famine of 1866, the needs multiplied and new orphanages were opened at Cuttack, Pipli, and Berhampur to accommodate 1300 children. Care was given and training in skills was offered. Over time, the skills gained by those in orphanages, in conjunction with what was offered in GBMS schooling, included weaving, carpentry, farming, printing, and blacksmith's work. The government praised what was done and helped in certain cases with costs.[29] The locations for a number of the orphanages were Christian villages set up by the Mission. Brian Stanley notes, 'Christian villages tended to act as a magnet for the outcaste and fellow traveller, and thus helped to inflate the total Christian community to about five times the size of the baptized membership.'[30] It was reported in the *Observer* that at the international Conference on Missions held in Liverpool in 1860, the setting up of separate Christian villages was questioned, with concern expressed that Christians were separated from the wider population. In Orissa, however, the villages became places of witness.[31]

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[27] 'Current Events at Cuttack', *Observer*, April 1888, p. 156; 'An Interesting Baptism', *Observer*, October 1888, pp. 397–99.

[28] 'Missionary Operations in Cuttack', *Observer*, January 1889, p. 33.

[29] Bina Sarma, *Development of Modern Education in India: An Empirical Study of Orissa* (New Delhi: M. D. Publications, 1996), p. 30.

[30] Stanley, *Baptist Missionary Society*, p. 163.

[31] 'Proposed new Christian Village', *Observer*, October 1861, p. 393–94; See, The Secretaries of the Conference, eds., *Conference on Missions held in 1860 at Liverpool* (London: J. Nesbit, 1860).

A new aspect of orphanage work had to do with the Khonds, who lived in a mountainous region and had little contact with the outside world. A British official, Major S. C. Macpherson, produced in 1846 a 'Report upon the Khonds of the Districts of Ganjam and Cuttack', which was published in the *Calcutta Review*. This highlighted the way *Meriah* human sacrifices, often of children, were taking place as part of the worship of the Khonds. British officials tried to substitute animal sacrifices. Amos Sutton, a leading GBMS missionary, proposed to the Mission that at-risk children could be taken to the Baptist orphanages, but despite the need being made known in different parts of India to garner support, nothing transpired.[32] In 1861, it was reported that after fifteen years of hopes being disappointed, a further appeal had been successful.[33] John Orissa Goadby, from a missionary family, and his wife, began to visit the Khond lands and made reports on the people, their Kui language (which he learned) and their faith. The Goadbys served the Khonds till 1867, when they were transferred to Pipli because of the pressing needs of famine orphans. About 250 *Meriah* children were taken into Baptist orphanages. A number of these orphans became committed Christians, including Paul Singh, who trained as a GBMS evangelist.[34]

Another area of concern for the GBMS was education.[35] The annual mission conference in Cuttack regularly discussed possibilities for schools. Its concern for the education of girls meant that several female missionaries who came to Orissa with the Mission did so in conjunction with The Society for Promoting Female Education in the East, formed in 1834 to promote education through schools and also in zenanas, where women were cut off from any male contact outside the family.[36] Among the countries in which the Society supported

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[32] Lalrameng K. Gangte, 'Human Sacrifice among the Khonds of Orissa c.1836–1861: A Study', *Mizoram University Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, 3 (June 2017), 114–125.

[33] 'Letter from Rev. W. Miller', *Observer*, May 1861, pp. 193–95 (p. 195).

[34] *Indian Report of the Orissa Baptist Mission*, *1871–2*, pp. 5–6, cited by Stanley, *Baptist Missionary Society*, p. 163; S. P. Carey, *Dawn on the Khond Hills* (London: The Carey Press, 1936), pp. 28–29.

[35] For more on this, Jonathan C. Ingleby, 'Education as a Missionary Tool: A Study in Christian Missionary Education by English Protestant Missionaries in India with Special Reference to Cultural Change' (doctoral thesis, Open University, 1998).

[36] See Karen E. Smith, 'Women in Cultural Captivity: British Women and the Zenana Mission', *BQ*, 42, no. 7 (2007), 103–113.

educational work were China, Malaya, Burma, India and Ceylon.[37] In 1888 Harriet Leigh, who had been a GBMS missionary in Orissa since 1872, surveyed the progress in education for girls. She was particularly interested in the openings for young women as school teachers. A theme that emerged was 'the great task of raising the position of Christian womanhood in India'.[38] Bina Sarma, in a study of education in Orissa, argues that female education developed in Orissa in the nineteenth century 'only because of the exertion of the missionaries'.[39] For boys, one initiative was a Protestant Boys' School, established in 1882 by William Day Stewart, a Civil Surgeon (head of the health services of the district) based at Cuttack who had been born in Chennai. In the context of an emphasis on high quality education, satisfaction was expressed in 1889 in the *Observer* that rising educational standards were evident in the GBMS High School. One hope was that new ministers for the Orissa churches might come through this educational route.[40]

Health was also a part of the Mission's concern, although the New Connexion was not involved in recruiting doctors for Orissa. The GBMS was glad, however, that a medical school was set up in 1875 by William Stewart. One former Lutheran who became a GBMS evangelist, Prabhu Sahai, exercised a ministry of prayer for healing among a hill tribe, the Mundas, in the 1880s, and although there were set-backs after his death in 1890, the work subsequently resumed.[41] The GBMS co-operated with the American Free Will Baptists — the link had been made by Amos Sutton — and some in America occasionally queried whether health care and hospitals were a good use of missionary energy. But the overall thrust of the Free Will Baptist missionary work showed a natural partnership between medical and spiritual care.[42] The GBMS view was that there was 'a need to follow Jesus' in providing for the

[37] The Society published a Journal from 1854, the *Female Missionary Intelligencer*. See Margaret Donaldson, '"The Cultivation of the Heart and the Moulding of the Will": The Missionary Contribution of the Society for Promoting Female Education in China, India, and the East', in *Women in the Church* ed. by W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 429–42.
[38] Harriet Leigh, 'Female Education in Orissa', *Observer*, May 1888, pp. 198–99.
[39] Sarma, *Development of Modern Education in India*, p. 71.
[40] 'Mission High School and College', *Observer*, August 1889, p. 331.
[41] Stanley, *Baptist Missionary Society*, pp. 164–65.
[42] See Mrs M. M. Hutchins Hills, *'Reminiscences: A Brief History of the Free Baptist India Mission* (Boston: Free Baptist Woman's Missionary Society, 1886); David Bebbington, *Baptists through the Centuries* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), pp. 79–81, 98–100.

needs of the body as well as the spirit.[43] There was, too, an awareness of a wider understanding of health. The *Observer* in 1889 expressed a great sense of responsibility for widows, 'the wronged and suffering sisterhood in the land of the Ganges'.[44] Care should be comprehensive if Baptist witness was to be authentic.

Wider Connections

The fact that the GBMS was a small Mission contributed to an openness to cover news of missionary endeavours by other denominations. As Terry Barringer shows, although many missionary periodicals in the nineteenth century served one denomination only (others were non-denominational), they were ready to note or re-use material from other denominations. She uses the General Baptists as an example.[45] The tendency is pronounced in the *Observer*. The GBMS's closest relationships were with the BMS and the Free Will Baptists, but the *Observer* also carried extensive reports from other Nonconformist bodies. In March 1858, three pages were devoted to the work of the London Missionary Society (the LMS represented Congregationalists) and the Methodists. This echoed the call from the LMS for 'a great increase of zeal and liberality in extending the blessings of the gospel throughout India', and the urging of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society that 'greater effort by Christian people' was needed to sustain witness worldwide.[46] The coverage of the LMS and Wesleyan Methodist mission continued through the decades of the production of the *Observer*. When the *Observer* wanted to emphasise the sacrifice involved in Christian mission, it could turn to the experience of others, reproducing, for example, an address at the Annual Meetings of the LMS on the ministry of John Williams and his martyrdom in the South Sea Islands in 1839.[47]

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43 'Annual Mission Meetings', *Observer*, August 1889, pp. 325–26.

44 'The Widows of India', *Observer*, March 1889, p. 123.

45 Terry Barringer, 'What Mrs Jellyby might have read: Missionary Periodicals: A neglected source', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 37, No. 4 (2004), 46–74. In Dickens's *Bleak House*, chapter 4, when Esther Summerson first visited the Jellyby household she was unfavourably struck by a room strewn with papers — perhaps missionary publications.

46 'Missionary Societies', *Observer*, March 1858, pp. 124–27.

47 'Annual Meeting of the London Missionary Society', *Observer*, February 1863, pp. 314–17.

It was natural that the GBMS should make wider connections in India. In 1860, the *Observer* reported on a forthcoming 'Concert of Prayer'. The missionaries in Orissa responded to an invitation by the Calcutta Missionary Conference to 'set apart a week for special prayer'. The invitation was signed by the Chairman Alexander Duff, and the Secretary David Ewart (both Presbyterians from Scotland) of the Calcutta Conference.[48] This initiative became part of the Evangelical Alliance week of prayer.[49] Calcutta was a centre of Protestant missionary co-operation, with transdenominational conferences held from time to time. At these, Baptists were usually the largest group, followed by missionaries of the evangelical Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS), the Free Church of Scotland, the Church of Scotland and Methodism. In March 1865, an *Observer* report on meetings at Cuttack expressed gratitude for local and visiting speakers, noting the role of K. S. Macdonald, described as an 'eminent minister of the Free Church of Scotland', editor of the *Indian Evangelical Review*, and a leading Christian figure in the region. In the same issue the GBMS associated itself with Free Will Baptists and a call for a 'larger spirituality'. The *Indian Evangelical Review* was a quarterly 'journal of missionary thought and effort, published in India and read by those across the Protestant denominations'.[50]

The *Observer* carried items about various ways in which India was being influenced, spiritually and also politically. Great changes were going on in India and although in parts of South India there was a historic Syrian Orthodox Christian presence, which was covered in the *Observer*, on the whole what would be termed 'mass movements' to Christianity had not yet taken place.[51] Politically, John Buckley stated in 1859 that he had 'no confidence whatsoever' in Sir George Clarke, who had been appointed the first Permanent Under-Secretary of State for India, a position created after the British government took over governance in India from the previous rule of the East India Company. Clarke's principles were seen by Buckley as 'abhorrent', when compared

[48] 'Concert of Prayer', *Observer*, July 1860, pp. 465–66.
[49] 'The Week of Prayer', *Observer*, May 1861, pp. 195–96.
[50] 'Conference at Cuttack', *Observer*, March 1865, pp. 115–17, 135.
[51] For these see also J. Waskom Pickett, *Christian Mass Movements in India* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1933).

with Christian beliefs.[52] Although Buckley did not elaborate on this, it may be significant that Clarke was at the forefront of a policy that the religious beliefs of the people of India should not be subject to 'interference'. The meaning of 'interference' was discussed in the *Observer*. The GBMS was strongly opposed to any coercion, but asked whether its Mission schools, with children from varied religious backgrounds, could be accused of interference. If so, it seemed that freedom was being seriously curtailed.[53]

An important area for the mission in Orissa, as across India, was Bible translation. William Carey's translation into Oriya required revision, and this was undertaken first by Amos Sutton and then by John Buckley and Jagoo Roul in the 1860s. The latter work was a revision of the Old Testament, and the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) made grants towards it. In 1869, various parts of the Old Testament were produced and soon the whole Old Testament.[54] With the translation of the New Testament, Baptist relationships with the BFBS in India had been fraught. In the 1830s, there was a serious dispute over the translation of baptise, *baptizo*. The Baptists in India wanted this translated as 'immerse', but the BFBS would not agree and left it as an untranslated word. The outcome was that in 1840 the BMS established the Bible Translation Society (BTS).[55] It was the BTS that assisted the Orissa Baptist churches with the production of a revised New Testament in Oriya in 1862. In reporting on this great event, Buckley added that 'the Spirit of the Lord is working among us'.[56] It was only in 1883 that a solution to the issue of *baptizo* was agreed. The *Observer* spoke of the fact that the New Testament had 'not been allowed to speak intelligibly on the subject of baptism' because of BFBS policy, but now 'nearly fifty years of blockage' had ended. Baptist thinking was given space. The 'Minutes of the British and Foreign Bible Society of

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52 'Notes: Letter from Rev. J. Buckley', *Observer*, January 1859, pp. 34–35.

53 'The Queen's Proclamation at Cuttack', *Observer*, February 1859, pp. 49–52. Queen Victoria's authority was invoked.

54 William Canton, *A History of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, vol. 3 (London: John Murray, 1910), p. 387.

55 Roger H. Martin, 'Anglicans and Baptists in Conflict: The Bible Society, Bengal and the *Baptizo* Controversy', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 49, no. 2 (1998), 293–316.

56 'Completion of the Oriya New Testament', *Observer*, December 1862, p. 469.

November 29, 1882; confirmed at General Committee of January 22, 1883', signed by William Wright, BFBS editorial superintendent in London, stated that the BFBS Committee had agreed that along with the untranslated *baptizo* there could — in the margin — be a note such as 'Some translate immerse'.[57]

A notable feature of the *Observer* was the way it covered mission happening across the world. The identity of the GBMS was not parochial. On a number of occasions, the work of Moravian mission was reported. The Moravians had inspired much subsequent Protestant mission. In February 1864, the *Observer* had a piece on Moravian mission to Greenland, begun in 1733. At four mission points in Greenland there were male and female Moravian teachers, described as 'exemplary and attractive'.[58] Persecution of those in Chinese Christian villages was reported later in 1864, perhaps with Orissa Christian villages in mind.[59] In 1865, the reports included information on a Lutheran Deaconess House at Kaiserswerth, Düsseldorf, in Germany; on a Nestorian mission school in Oroomiah, Persia; and on an Institute near Rattingen, in Germany, seeking to help addicts to recover.[60] When it mentioned, as it often did, the considerable help of the Religious Tract Society, 'an old and long tried friend' of the GBMS, the *Observer* referred to the Society's endeavours in France, Spain, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, Saxony, Prussia, Switzerland, Italy, Greece and elsewhere.[61] Other reports in the *Observer* covered the Russian Orthodox Church. The fact that many Orthodox priests had little opportunity to study was noted, and the suggestion was made that Orthodox leaders were complicit in oppressing evangelicals in Russia.[62] The GBMS saw itself as part of a world-wide evangelical movement.

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[57] 'The British and Foreign Bible Society and the Baptists', *Observer*, June 1883, pp. 233–35.
[58] 'Moravian Missions in Greenland', February 1864, *Observer*, p. 57.
[59] 'Chinese Christian Villages', December 1864, *Observer*, p. 457.
[60] 'The Deaconess House at Kaiserswerth', *Observer*, January 1865, pp. 19–20; 'Mission Schools in Nestoria', *Observer*, February 1865, pp. 76–77; 'A Home near Rattingen', *Observer*, February 1865, pp. 101–02.
[61] For example, 'Orissa Conference', *Observer*, March 1867, p. 221.
[62] 'Notes', April 1865, *Observer*, p. 143.

Baptist Convictions

What might be termed an ecumenical vision of world mission was articulated in the *Observer*, but there was also robust advocacy of Baptist identity and convictions. In May 1858, the *Observer* carried a piece from John Buckley: 'As to the question of more [Anglican] bishops for India, let those who conscientiously believe in diocesan episcopacy have as many as they like provided only that they pay for them!' He was adamantly opposed to taking money for church expenses from the Indian population as a whole. Imposition, he argued, did not commend the Christian gospel. Churches, as in Baptist ecclesiology, should be supported by the voluntary giving of members.[63] This did not mean that all those who spoke from a Church of England standpoint were deemed unsuitable speakers at GBMS events. In 1861, at the annual meeting of the Society, the speaker was G. F. Cockburn, Her Majesty's Commissioner of Cuttack. Cockburn said, 'I do indeed rejoice when denominational differences are merged in one common movement for the salvation of souls.' He quoted 'the late excellent Bishop of Calcutta', Daniel Wilson, on 'the gift of unity and co-operation'. Cockburn had asked Wilson about the Baptist missionaries in Orissa, and Wilson, an evangelical, had urged that they be helped in any way possible.[64]

Although Buckley was wary of giving support to the Church of England Chaplain of Cuttack Hastings Harington in his final illness, Harington asked for Buckley to visit him regularly, which he did, and both expressed the wish that they had 'walked together' more fully than had been the case.[65] But a year later, Buckley wrote that a new chaplain had been appointed and that in a recent sermon by this chaplain a damning verdict on Baptists had been pronounced. For this new appointee, who presumably had little experience of Baptist identity in India, Baptists were 'a canting, ranting set'. Their meetings included 'religious exercises and tea' and degenerated into 'scandal and backbiting'. The view expressed was that Baptists 'rant and rave about hell as if they had been there themselves'. It was actually the chaplain who seemed to be the one ranting. Buckley contented himself with the

[63] 'Letter from Rev. J. Buckley', *Observer*, May 1858, pp. 205–07 (p. 205).
[64] 'The Annual Meeting', *Observer*, August 1861, pp. 313–15.
[65] 'Death of the Chaplain of Cuttack', *Observer*, February 1862, pp. 195–98.

comment, 'We are disciples of Him who when reviled, reviled not again.'[66] For the Baptists, the connection between the state and the Church of England, in England but also in India, was a hindrance to the gospel. In 1884, in an article 'The State Church in India', the *Observer* again raised the question of Church of England ministers in India being supported from taxes. Other denominations had to support their own ministers. What was evident to the Baptists was that the Church of England had people with 'political power'.[67]

The advocacy of Baptist convictions in the *Observer* included accounts of Baptist advance in different parts of the world. The work of the American Baptist Missionary Society as well as that of the Free Will Baptists was covered regularly. Of particular interest was the growth of Baptist life among the oppressed Karen people on the frontier of China in what was then the Burmese empire.[68] It was noted that as well as Baptists, the Swedish Missionary Association, American Episcopal Methodists, and Canadian Presbyterians had entered these areas. Coverage of China in the *Observer* was also extensive. Here, too, Baptists from America were prominent, among many missionary agencies.[69] The work of Johann Gerhard Oncken and Baptist mission emanating from Germany was often reported in the *Observer*. Baptist sentiments were also understood to be spreading in other parts of Europe, such as Sweden and France.[70] At a time when the *Observer* could state that Baptists 'arose amidst persecution as a voluntary congregation of believers', and now numbered more than five million Christians in countries across the world, the *Observer* took strong objection to a widely read article (later a booklet) in the *Fortnightly Review* entitled, 'The Great Missionary Failure'. Isaac Taylor, the author, a Church of England canon of York, was directing his comments mainly to the CMS.[71] W. R. Stevenson, in the *Observer*, argued that Taylor had himself failed, since

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[66] 'The Chaplain of Cuttack v. the missionaries', *Observer*, November 1863, pp. 468–69.
[67] 'The State Church in India', *Observer*, June 1884, pp. 235–36.
[68] Hitomi Fujimura, 'A View of the Karen Baptists in Burma of the Mid-Nineteenth Century, from the Standpoint of the American Baptist Mission', *The Journal of Sophia Asian Studies*, 32 (2014), 129–45.
[69] For an example of reports, 'A Visit to Peking', *Observer*, November 1863, pp. 435–39.
[70] For Baptists in Europe, Ian Randall, *Communities of Conviction* (Prague: European Baptist Federation, 2009).
[71] Isaac Taylor, 'The Great Missionary Failure', *Fortnightly Review*, 50 (1888), 488–500.

he had not taken into account the range of Nonconformist overseas missions.[72]

The only location outside India where the GBMS had direct involvement was in Rome. The BMS began mission in Italy in 1870–1871, supporting James Wall, an English Baptist minister. In 1872–1873, Thomas Cook, a General Baptist and the founder of the well-known travel firm, advocated GBMS work in Rome, and in November 1873 the *Observer* carried a long article on 'Our new evangelical in Rome'. The description 'evangelical' was favoured by the GBMS. The article explained that Paulo Cavaliere Grassi, a former Roman Catholic priest, had embraced evangelical and Baptist convictions through reading Scripture and had been baptised by James Wall. Grassi had been connected with the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome and was described as a dedicated pastor and scholar. His resignation letter to Cardinal Patrizi Naro, Dean of the College of Cardinals, was both firm and respectful — signed 'Your Eminence's most humble servant'. About three hundred people were present at Grassi's baptism.[73] The General Baptists adopted Grassi as a worker/evangelist in Rome and he was involved in study, preaching, and visiting. In 1874, he married an Italian Protestant woman, with Wall conducting the ceremony. It was reckoned to be the first marriage in Rome of a former Roman Catholic priest.[74] Reports from Rome continued to feature in the *Observer*. A chapel was built, and in 1878 the GBMS sent N. H. Shaw from England as a missionary. Thomas Cook largely financed the cost of the chapel.[75] John Rylands of Manchester, a Nonconformist entrepreneur, was one of those supportive and he sent £100 for work in Rome.[76]

The focus of GBMS mission remained Orissa, but the financial struggle to maintain a foreign missionary presence there became more acute. In January 1883, the leading article in the *Observer* was entitled 'Half as much again', echoing an appeal by E. H. Bickersteth for funds

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72 'The Great Missionary Failure', *Observer*, November 1888, p. 458.

73 'Our new evangelical in Rome', *Observer*, November 1873, pp. 445–51. Stanley, *Baptist Missionary Society*, pp. 220–21.

74 'Rome', *Observer*, February 1874, pp. 45, 78; and March 1874, p. 120.

75 For example, 'The Rome Chapel', *Observer*, August 1877, p. 319; cf. *Missionary Herald*, July 1878, pp. 153–5; and *Missionary Herald*, May 1879, p. 128.

76 'Notes and Gleanings', *Observer*, March 1883, pp. 119–20.

to support the ministry of CMS. The GBMS asked if 'half as much again' could be asked for Orissa.[77] Five years later, more money was still needed for Orissa, 'a field which', the *Observer* commented, 'by a common understanding on the part of other denominations, has been left to us to cultivate'.[78] Witness to the British in India as well as to Indians was advocated. In 1882, the *Observer* acclaimed a speech supporting Christian endeavour by Sir Richard Temple, who had been Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal.[79] But a provocative piece appeared in the *Observer* in 1888 with the title, 'The Government versus the Gospel, in India'. It was a comment on the British Establishment, and in particular those 'whose love of money seems to be of more interest than all else'.[80] At the same time, there were Hindus who appreciated the work of the mission. The *Observer* noted in 1889 that the influential Hindu reformer Keshub Chunder Sen had made it clear in his essays that he did not credit the British Army with helping India, while the devotion to God and the service of the missionaries evoked deep gratitude in his heart.[81] In response to this being quoted, the Orissa missionaries stated that they were seeking 'a more unreserved self-consecration, more fervent prayer, a more living faith, a larger measure of spiritual power, and a more abundant outpouring of the blessings of the Holy Spirit'.[82] This was the identity they valued.

An Enlarged Baptist Identity

Throughout the period studied here, a recurring theme was whether the GBMS and the BMS should amalgamate. There had long been the possibility that the two Societies might at least be united in India.[83] In 1861, the GBMS followed the BMS in establishing that a New Year 'sacramental offering' (i.e. an offering taken at a communion service) be taken in the churches to support 'a fund for widows and orphans of

[77] 'Half as much again', *Observer*, January 1883, pp. 33–34.
[78] 'The Financial Position of the Mission', *Observer*, September 1888, pp. 357–58.
[79] 'Objections to Christian Mission Answered', January 1882, *Observer*, p. 38–39.
[80] 'The Government versus the Gospel, in India', *Observer*, March 1888, pp. 113–115 (p.113).
[81] 'Annual Report', *Observer*, September 1889, pp. 369–72 (p. 371).
[82] 'Missions and Missionary Methods', *Observer*, September 1889, p. 372.
[83] J. H. Y. Briggs, *The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century* (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 1994), p. 147.

missionaries'.[84] The Orissa missionaries celebrated all that had been done by William Carey and his colleagues in Serampore, and to a large extent the issues of theology that had been dividing lines were seen as less important than a shared evangelical faith. In October 1870, a united meeting of the two Baptist missionary societies was held in the Guildhall, Cambridge, prior to the autumn Baptist Union meetings. Two thousand people were present at this missionary meeting. Joseph Tritton, treasurer of the BMS, gave the opening address and spoke about the two missionary bodies: 'Our object is one, our gospel is one, the Master whom we serve is one, the Spirit which moves us is one.' J. C. Pike, secretary of the GBMS and son of the founder, also spoke. He was cautiously in favour of union, while making the unusual statement, given the Arminian roots of the General Baptists, that General Baptists were 'predestined to be such'.[85]

The road towards union between the two Baptist bodies and the two missionary societies was fully explored by John Briggs in two articles in the *Baptist Quarterly* in 1991, one hundred years after the amalgamation took place.[86] It was a process which occupied both bodies to the full in the later 1880s. Indeed in 1889, when an appeal was passed on by the GBMS from a Hindu sub-magistrate in Udayagiri for a Baptist mission, and two Baptist students at the Methodist Cliff College in Derbyshire, Abiathar Wilkinson and Arthur Long, responded, the GBMS committee was 'preoccupied by the current negotiations with the BMS for the merger of the two societies, and turned down their application'. An interdenominational committee supported the mission.[87] Debates were featured in the *General Baptist Magazine* in 1888 about the advantages and disadvantages of amalgamation from the point of view of those concerned about the overseas missionary dimension. The question posed was, 'Is it desirable that the two Baptist Foreign Missionary Societies should become one?' C. W. Vick answered in the

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[84] 'New Year's Sacramental Offering', *Observer*, January 1861, p. 34.

[85] J. C. Pike, 'Our Future, The Association Letter for 1870', p. 6; 'Notes', *Observer*, October 1870, p. 315.

[86] J. H. Y. Briggs, 'Evangelical Ecumenism: The Amalgamation of General and Particular Baptists in 1891', Part I, 'A Process of Courtship', *BQ*, 34, no. 3 (1991), 99–115; Part 2, 'From Courtship to Marriage', *BQ*, 34, no. 4 (1991), 160–79.

[87] Stanley, *Baptist Missionary Society*, p. 167. Carey, *Dawn on the Khond Hills*, pp. 42–43.

affirmative, pleading for union 'for the sake of the missionaries themselves'. They needed to be part of an 'enlarged brotherhood'. J. R. Godfrey, from the Barton church, was opposed, fearing 'denominational extinction'.[88]

Despite the divergent views, joint meetings of the BMS and the GBMS met in September 1888 to seek to find a way forward. Further meetings and discussions followed. In parallel, as Briggs writes,

> the Baptist Union Assembly, meeting in Birmingham in October 1889, received from the Council a resolution in favour of amalgamation, proposed by John Clifford, and unanimously agreed. For this to have meaning would require the integration of the various societies and institutions of both bodies.[89]

At a special meeting of the BMS on 29 April 1890, a form of words was devised which officially adopted the name Baptist Missionary Society, explaining that the Society embraced the 'Particular Baptist Missionary Society for Propagating the Gospel among the Heathen' founded in 1792, and the 'General Baptist Missionary Society' formed in 1816. The proposal was warmly adopted, and the General Baptist Association and the Subscribers' Meeting of the GBMS ratified this action. There was never any question of the BMS simply absorbing the much smaller GBMS. William Hill, the secretary of the GBMS, became secretary of the Bible Translation Society, dividing his time between that role and work for the joint society.[90]

The final step in the decision-making which brought about the amalgamation came during the General Baptist Association Meeting at Burnley in June 1891, under the presidency of John Clifford. There was mention during these final discussions of ways in which Orissa missionaries had received significant support from the BMS missionaries in India. The 1891 Burnley meeting lasted four hours, and the resolution in favour of amalgamation was carried by 155 votes to 39. Thus, it was not unanimous, and for some the distinction between Calvinists and Arminians remained important. However, there was an

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[88] 'The Baptist Foreign Missionary Societies', *General Baptist Magazine*, December 1888, pp. 449–55.

[89] Briggs, 'From Courtship to Marriage', p. 170.

[90] 'Amalgamation Accomplished', *Observer*, June 1891, pp. 237–40.

explicit desire to co-operate in preaching the gospel across the world. Clifford spoke of the unity of Christians as an aid to that task. When many knew nothing of the atonement of Christ, the question was raised whether differences between 'general' and 'particular' were important enough to be debated.[91] Rather, what was hoped for was a great missionary endeavour. Ernest Payne, in his history of the Baptist Union, was to comment, perhaps with undue optimism, 'With remarkable ease and amity, the older distinctions passed from the mind of the denomination as a whole.'[92]

Conclusion

The story of the General Baptist Missionary Society has been somewhat overshadowed by the fame of William Carey and the Serampore mission. However, Brian Stanley suggests that the Orissa mission was 'one of the most fruitful fields in India'.[93] The number of missionaries was never large, which meant that from the beginning, and most especially in the period examined here, Indian leadership was crucial to the development of the churches and their identity. Dhirendra Kumar Sahu, tracing the formation of the ecumenical Church of North India, suggests that the pioneer generation of the Baptists 'came nearer than any other body to the ideal of a truly independent Indian church'. Mission and church were 'an integrated whole'.[94] Those leading the mission and church in Orissa saw their work as holistic. It was necessary, and in line with the teaching of Jesus, to address the needs of the whole person. A further aspect of the GBMS, as it sought an authentic identity, was that through the *Observer* a range of mission and ministry across the world was covered. At the same time, Baptist convictions were affirmed. Finally, the wider identity of the GBMS was created through amalgamation with the much larger BMS. There was a desire to see this in a positive way, as 'Amalgamation Accomplished'. The *Observer* ceased to be published, with the *Missionary Herald* now the organ for the

[91] 'Report', *Observer* 1891, p. 505.
[92] Ernest Payne, *The Baptist Union: A Short History* (London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1858), p. 147.
[93] Stanley, *Baptist Missionary Society*, p. 56.
[94] Dhirendra Kumar Sahu, *The Church of North India* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1994), pp. 35–36.

combined Baptist missionary work. By 1970, when the Church of North India was formed, it was a Baptist minister from Cuttack, Benjamin Pradham, who was one of those playing a central role. The Baptists of Orissa/Odisha had continued to be open to a larger identity.[95]

[95] Stanley, *Baptist Missionary Society*, p. 414; Sahu, *North India*, pp. 136–37.

Book Reviews

Steven R. Harmon, *Baptists, Catholics, and the Whole Church: Partners in the Pilgrimage to Unity* (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 2021), 246 pages. ISBN: 9781565484979.

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Recently, Baptist theology has taken significant steps to analyse the ecumenical dimension of faith and to perceive better the common vision of the church. Baptist identity is seen more clearly in the context of the whole church. Ten years ago, a document entitled 'The Word of God in the Life of the Church', based on 2006–2010 conversations between the Baptist World Alliance and the Catholic Church, was published. Theologians, such as Paul Fiddes and Curtis Freeman, have helped readers to understand the common Christian heritage shared by Baptists and other denominations. Baptists have been engaged in discussions initiated by the World Council of Churches.

Professor of Historical Theology at Gardner-Webb University School of Divinity Steven R. Harmon, the author of *Baptists, Catholics, and the Whole Church: Partners in the Pilgrimage to Unity*, is a well-known contributor in the field. His previous books on ecumenism, for example, *Baptist Identity and Ecumenical Future* (2016), as well as the volume reviewed here, present him to readers as a champion for visible unity between Baptists, Catholics, and other Christians. He argues that Baptists and the traditions from which they are historically separated, actually need one another. In the case of Baptists and Roman Catholics, the two ecclesial traditions are more similar than meets the eye, argues Harmon, and this enables them to 'travel together as fellow pilgrims on the journey toward a more visibly united church'.

The present book, however, is slightly different in style and tone when compared to Harmon's previous volumes on the topic, as it vividly shows Harmon's personal engagement in ecumenical work, encounters with theological challenges, and meeting with other theologians in

different contexts. It is a collection of lectures and presentations which have been offered on different occasions at conferences and bilateral dialogues. It also contains two sermons, which are homiletical applications of theoretical perspectives. In his homily 'The Cruciformity of Communion' Harmon describes pain that comes from the experience of brokenness 'at the Eucharistic table that we will not share'.

The author poignantly expresses the focus of this volume: 'This book harvests and presents the fruit of these more concrete applications of my theoretical work as a Baptist ecumenical theologian, informed especially by various experiences of Baptist ecumenical encounter with the Catholic tradition.' (p.15)

This is a 'must read' for students and scholars who want to be informed — intellectually and emotionally — about the Baptist search for ecumenical aspects of their tradition.

Steve Taylor, *First Expressions: Innovation and the Mission of God* (London: SCM Press, 2019), 256 pages. ISBN: 9780334058472.

Reviewed by Peter Stevenson

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This missional study comes from someone actively involved in a range of missional initiatives. Steve Taylor, a creative Baptist leader from Aotearoa/New Zealand, reflects here on new expressions of church in the United Kingdom. His reflections on practice yield insights into innovation in mission with a much wider relevance.

The book's origins lie in doctoral research carried out in 2001 when he interviewed 'alt. worship communities and various Christian thinkers about new forms of church' (p.ix). In 2012–2013 he revisited those 'initial experiments in ecclesial innovation' (p.4) and discovered that 'only five [...] seemed, from a distance, to have survived' and seven 'seemed no longer active' (p.9). Taylor argues that valuable insights arise not only from reflecting on 'first expressions' of church which 'Tried' and survived (chapter 4), but also from considering initiatives which

'Tried and Died' (chapter 5). Alongside evaluating this small group of 'fresh expressions' he also considers the *Fresh Expressions* initiative established by Anglicans and Methodists in the UK.

Taylor seeks 'hermeneutic discoveries that will guide the church as it seeks to be apostolic and one, holy and catholic' (p.5). He desires 'to hold these communities in reflective gaze before God, looking to see what patterns of God might be visible' (p.11).

There is vulnerability in the way Taylor reflects on these fresh expressions. His own experience of planting a church which later closed, raised questions about 'how to understand innovation not only in birth, but in death' (p.10). In chapter 5 he identifies treasures which can emerge even when a fresh expression appears to have 'failed'. For example, he notes that even initiatives which have not proved sustainable, have often been *leadership incubators*.

Taylor creates 'thick descriptions' of missional communities, drawing upon interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and online resources. This is not a research methodology manual, but it clearly demonstrates how a range of research methods can be profitably employed in the service of mission.

This theological reflection is carried out in conversation with others. In chapters 6 and 7 his consideration of *Fresh Expressions* involves interviews with 'key pioneering influencers' such as Stephen Croft, Stephen Cottrell, and Rowan Williams. He also engages in a creative dialogue with Charles Taylor in order to 'clarify the shape of witness in a secular world' (p.17). This contributes to a stimulating discussion about 'ambient witness' in chapter 10. Combine all of this with a serious engagement with biblical material and the result is a healthy example of how to do practical theology.

For anyone interested in mission, practical theology, and empirical research, *First Expressions* contains plenty of interest. Taylor's insights will hopefully stimulate others to explore initiatives in their own contexts, 'looking to see what patterns of God might be visible' there.

Helen Paynter, *God of Violence Yesterday, God of Love Today? Wrestling Honestly with the Old Testament* (Abingdon: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2019), 176 pages. ISBN: 9780857466396.

Reviewed by Daniël Drost

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Revd Dr Helen Paynter is an Old Testament scholar and director of the Centre for the Study of Bible and Violence at Bristol Baptist College. She has written an impressively short and simple book on a complex topic: how to read the texts on the violence of God in the Old Testament. Simple is a compliment here, because in about 170 pages the author develops a method for careful Bible reading, gives some essential definitions and distinctions, and puts the theory into practice by engaging some major texts on violence in the Old Testament.

Regarding these texts, she makes the following helpful distinctions: (1) texts which describe violence, such as the violence of Samson; (2) texts which implore violence, such as the Psalms of vengeance; (3) texts which contain violence against animals, such as the commandments on animal sacrifices; (4) texts which describe violence as divine judgement, such as the death of Uzza; and finally and most difficult to relate to, (5) texts in which God summons violence, such as the conquest of Canaan.

Paynter explains that the biblical narrative is a theological composition, full of symbolic language, and that it is very helpful first of all to try to understand to what purpose these texts were written. In her exposition throughout the book, she takes the reader by the hand in an exercise of careful Bible reading, which is most of all inspiring because of her radically honest approach. She concludes at the end of the book that there are many questions left; 'at present, I am in an uneasy limbo' (p.153).

Throughout the book I sense a struggle between the Baptist theologian in her, who prefers a direct identification with the biblical narrative as God's Word, and the biblical scholar, who emphasises the complexity of the text, its genre and language, and most of all the

difference between the *Sitz im Leben* of the writers and of the modern readers of the Bible. By emphasising that Bible reading requires a community (including biblical scholars), she brings the two extremes together.

I think the careful approach — expressed in a popular level book — is helpful and impressive. Paynter emphasises the text and its context above the reader and their context. I understand she is a biblical scholar, so this is her main field of interest and expertise. I think, however, two things might have made this book even stronger: first, is the explicit hermeneutical question of which readings lead to wholesome communities and which readings are damaging community life. Second, references to rabbinic tradition might have been helpful, since rabbinic Judaism has a tendency to read the biblical narrative in ways that lead to nonviolent practices. There might be some wisdom or hermeneutical insights for us Christians as well.

Perry Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education, 2nd Edition: A Practical Handbook for Integrative Learning* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2022), 367 pages. ISBN: 9781839730856.

Reviewed by Matthew Norman

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This second edition of Shaw's 2014 book incorporates feedback in three key areas to modify and develop his insights and practice with curriculum development in theological education. These three areas are thinking theologically about theological education, models of missional curricula and common characteristics, and promoting change.

Shaw holds an EdD from the Asia Graduate School of Theology Alliance and is currently the Researcher in Residence at Morling College in Sydney, Australia. This book continues to build upon his work as the Professor of Education at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in Beirut, Lebanon. Shaw notes that this book seeks to encourage and

provide practical tools for readers engaged in theological education who seek to implement a curriculum that encourages multidimensional learning by intentionally designing for cognitive, affective, and behavioural learning.

This edition focuses on the need to apply these concepts related to a multidimensional, integrative curriculum to develop contextual theological education models in what Shaw calls the 'Majority World'. According to Shaw, this emphasis stems from the church's rapid growth in these areas and the lack of contextually significant theological education representations and methodologies.

Following the prefaces to both editions of this text, there is a brief introduction that presents an overview of Shaw's work with the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS). The book continues in three parts. Part 1 focuses on the broader philosophical and educational underpinnings for changing a curriculum. Part 2 contributes various lenses related to what Shaw calls integrative and transformative learning. Part 3 offers practical tools and guidelines to help teachers develop pedagogical practices that focus on learning, which Shaw sees as critical when attempting to fulfill the church's missional mandate.

Shaw begins this edition by exploring how one can develop a robust theological approach to theological education. The theological approach that he suggests is missional-ecclesial, which he maintains in Chapter 1 is at the core of his orientation toward theological education. According to Shaw, 'good theology should drive our pedagogy', and his brief overview of theological affirmations 'all point to the need for a holistic and transformative approach to theological education which is both integrated and missional' (pp.17-18). The implication of Shaw's idea here frames theological education as holistic in that it engages cognitive, affective, and physical aspects of the learners and is reflective, meaning that it calls for reflection on practice via a missional understanding of God.

The book presents a concise overview of recent scholarship in education and how such scholarship can be applied practically to theological education. Shaw's hands-on experience at ABTS and other examples he includes from around the world provide tangible illustrations of the educational theories he is discussing. Crucial is Shaw's repeated demonstration that education is about learning, not teaching. This perspective on education, together with his list of nine 'Right Questions', offers tangible steps for the reader to explore a reimagining of a theological education curriculum. This book is an excellent introduction to educational theory and scholarship focused on theological education.

Najib George Awad, *After-Mission, Beyond Evangelicalism: The Indigenous 'Injīlīyyūn in the Arab-Muslim Context of Syria-Lebanon* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2021), 387 pages. ISBN: 9789004444355 (paperback), ISBN: 9789004444362 (e-book).

Reviewed by Ksenija Magda

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Evangelicalism is in a crisis and that is no news. But, asking how global criticism of (Western) evangelicalism, with its centuries-long mission endeavours and post-Christendom theology impinges on the communities it created is a relatively unresearched question. Consequently, Awad's study is fascinatingly relevant on so many levels beyond the primary concern for 'Eastern Protestants', the *'Injīlīyyūn*. The research rests on a wide spectrum of missional learning and the author's own experience as a Syrian scholar, first studying in Germany and England, and now working in the USA. Awad offers some valuable insights into how Christians in general need to handle the post-Christendom ordeal — globally — although he describes the need of the *'Injīlīyyūn* in Syria/Lebanon for a confrontation with the 'factual existential and ecclesial crisis inflicted on them by their faith' (p.4).

The book is divided into three parts: the history, the theology, and the way forward.

Awad identifies and explains the missionary endeavours and their 'otherizing' techniques which have defined evangelicalism since the eighteenth century. 'Otherizing' results from the belief that Christianity is superior and has the Truth. This is why it must be incarnated in the politics of any civilised land. Awad points to the resulting double agenda of the 'religious' and 'cultural' that flow from this for the missionaries. But the lack of success in evangelism was supplemented by a very successful acculturalisation of Christendom in the Middle East. Awad reminds us that the 1400 years of Christian-Muslim co-existence in the region prior to the 'Arab Spring' (2011) testifies to a successful Christian influence in the common Arab culture. Western evangelical mission in the eighteenth to twentieth centuries benefitted from it. Awad believes that trans-Arab Islam-dom (with its radicalism) is patterned after the radical Christendom claims of the missionaries.

The 'Arab Spring' changed circumstances dramatically, but *'Injilīyyūn* did not notice. Their request for support from the West to 'save the Christians in the Arab world' from the Muslim other, added oil to the fire. They contributed to the broader Middle Eastern tragedy of 'bleeding out' of Syrians in general but of Christians in particular. Since the beginnings of Christianity, this time the Christian witness might not survive. The *'Injilīyyūn* agenda is hence no longer evangelism or acculturalisation, but sheer survival. *'Injilīyyūn* must change their slogan to 'save the humans of the Arab world', recognising the 'criminal dream of hegemony' (p.305). Christians in the region are still Arab and only religiously a minority. As such Christians have lived and thrived as a 'small but influential' group. The gospel does not need a political system to thrive.

'Injilīyyūn in the Middle East must also abandon the Islamophobia of the West. They must start dialoguing with people on all sides, Muslims and other Christians included. But they should not opt for an 'alliance of minorities' as this dangerously feeds the conflict of Christendom and Islam-dom.

The book is clearly structured and easy to follow, although sometimes the content can be difficult to swallow. Facing the truth is rarely easy. For me, the read was challenging because I couldn't help but recognise my own history of similarly unhelpful 'otherizing' and 'self-otherizing' presented as 'the Truth'. Inevitably, I was thinking up alternatives to these unhelpful traditions in Central and Eastern Europe. But that's a good thing.

David W. Bebbington, *The Evangelical Quadrilateral: Volume 1: Characterizing the British Gospel Movement* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2021), 382 pages. ISBN: 9781481313780; *Volume 2: The Denominational Mosaic of the British Gospel Movement* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2021), 358 pages. ISBN: 9781481313797.

Reviewed by David Warboys

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David Bebbington has for some time been among the most pre-eminent Baptist historians, writing definitive works on history and historiography. This two-volume collection of essays expands upon Bebbington's previous work, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, from which he takes his broad definition of evangelicals as those emphasising the quadrilateral of Bible, cross, conversion, and activism. Bebbington initially covers the broad history of evangelical origin and later revival, before offering several more specific studies on a range of evangelical figures and groups. With thirty-two essays split between two large volumes, the size of the work need not feel intimidating. Each article is written to stand alone, meaning that figures or movements are always explained when introduced. Readers looking to study specific topics will be grateful for this care taken. The amazing range of scope, from the transatlantic preaching tours of D. L. Moody to the hymns remembered on his deathbed by a congregationalist minister, can only be applauded and this huge variety means that any keen historian will find something of interest. Bebbington demonstrates throughout his familiar ability to cover complex definitions thoroughly and in comprehensible ways.

These sections, often at the start of chapters, enable the reader to set out on firm ground.

Bebbington's great strength is an ability to present thorough and painstaking research, both primary and secondary, in a readable way. While there is far too much material to mention here, and there are no bad articles in the work, it may be helpful to comment on some specifics. Bebbington explores splinter movements towards stricter Calvinism, including the Particular and Strict and Particular Baptists, who often abandoned the conversion part of the quadrilateral. These provide helpful avenues for study, but perhaps some space could have been dedicated to movements in the opposite direction, such as the Unitarianism that attracted many Baptists. These movements are mentioned, but not explored in the same depth. Another area of excellent study is essays in Volume 2 addressing the ways in which evangelical groups were shaped by, or fought against, enlightenment influences. Bebbington makes a powerful and nuanced case against the idea that historical evangelicalism should always be equated with an anti-science approach. It is particularly striking to see how far back many current faith-and-religion debates go, with evangelicals in the early eighteenth century discussing the likelihood of intelligent extra-terrestrial life.

A further strength of Bebbington's writing is the way that he presents this history to allow modern parallels to be drawn, but without attempting to steer the direction of this. For instance, there is striking contemporary relevance in the discussion around Calvin, as different evangelical traditions battled to claim or disavow his legacy. Questions of whether Calvin's theology could be separated from his behaviour as leader of Geneva bear all the hallmarks of modern discussion around separating art from artist. It is also noteworthy how explicitly many evangelicals dispensed with any part of Jesus's life other than his death on the cross. Bebbington deals very sensitively and powerfully with his study of deathbed piety of nonconformists, which provides moving insights into the thoughts, prayers, and words of the dying, as well as sketching out one of the areas of evangelical history that feels very remote today: obituaries largely concerned with the final days of evangelical lives.

Given the scope of this work and the depth of its scholarship, it feels unfair to question what Bebbington does not include here. Nevertheless, it must be noted that of nine individuals named in the titles of his essays, Bebbington fails to include a single woman. Women are not completely excluded, indeed are mentioned in many places, but Bebbington himself acknowledges this shortcoming. There are explorations of both female spirituality and public prominence, but the lack of a chapter exploring a specific figure is noticeable, as is any in-depth study of a woman in a role of leadership. Bebbington is also open about the relative neglect of international mission in his study. The main focus of this work is on the British picture, and by leaving out the work of international missionaries Bebbington misses the chance to explore a fascinating arena, as well as to touch on present debates about the complexities of imperialism and mission. With these areas acknowledged, it would be hard to suggest any essay that should have been discarded.

Overall, this work is essential reading for anyone interested in the history of evangelicalism. While Bebbington has produced a work of serious scholarship, this is not at the expense of readability. The approach of small, self-contained, essays means it can be read in whatever way is desired. Bebbington is very successful in showing, in his own words, that 'Evangelicals, for all their efforts to reproduce the pristine gospel of the first century, were bound up in the cultural settings of the eighteenth to twentieth centuries.' (Vol. 1, p.8) For all our efforts today, this is no less true of modern evangelicalism. The most effective evangelical movements have successfully balanced Bebbington's quadrilateral and there is much food for thought here over what can go wrong when one of Bible, cross, conversion, and activism is neglected. For evangelicalism to thrive once more, attention must be paid to the good and the bad records of our forebearers. If this is to be done, it would be hard to find a more helpful guide than Bebbington and these two volumes.

Marvin Oxenham, *Character and Virtue in Theological Education: An Academic Epistolary Novel* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2019), 414 pages. ISBN: 9781783686971.

Reviewed by Jan Hábl

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Dr Marvin Oxenham was born and raised in Italy. He works currently at the London School of Theology. He has also worked for the European Evangelical Accrediting Association and other international bodies, including the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education.

The author provides the reader with a unique analysis of character and virtue education and its relationship to theological education. This book helps theologians and others to see the importance of character formation in the educational process. The book not only advocates the need for transformational pedagogy, but also offers very concrete suggestions for implementing character and virtue education into educational practice. The author draws interdisciplinarily from a vast array of sources — moral philosophy, philosophy of education, pedagogy, andragogy, political science, and, of course, theology. Oxenham demonstrates a superb grasp of the sources of character education — he is not only familiar with all the major British and American players (Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, The Virtues Project, etc.), but he is also familiar with the old continental authors who pioneered character education, such as J. A. Comenius.

The book is written in the genre of the epistolary novel, as the subtitle suggests. An experienced colleague writes to a colleague, a friend whom he does not want to advise but with whom he experiences the current challenges of theological education. The author warns us in the very beginning that we must not expect any great drama; it is merely a tool to facilitate reading and awaken the imagination. Many readers will certainly be well served by this form; some academics may skip the fictional introductions to the letters. Either way, any reader will find the book serves as a uniquely holistic resource on the topic of character education. (I admit that the topic of character education was so

interesting, even thrilling to me on its own, that I tended to skip the fictional parts.)

The letters, or individual chapters, are organised into three sets. The first set presents a vision of character and virtue in theological education. The second works out a theology of character and virtue education through historical and biblical sources. The third deals with practice: how to educate character and virtues. All the letters are down to earth with the aim to provide practical instructions for any theological school that decides to make character an important aspect of its goal.

Coming from a non-theological university setting, I can furthermore confirm that if we drop the 'theological' adjective from the book, everything the book offers applies perfectly well to any type of school. Every educator who identifies with the motto 'character matters' is excited by the author's opening questions like: 'What kind of learning will transform character? How can we structure education so that *being* rises to a place of prominence alongside *doing* and *knowing*?' (p.16)

In my opinion, this book is excellent, readable, thoroughly supported by sources, and lays emphasis on one of the most important topics in contemporary (not only theological) education.

Hwa Yung, *Leadership or Servanthood? Walking in the Steps of Jesus* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2021), 166 pages. ISBN: 9781839735769.

Reviewed by David Dunlop

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In this very helpful, provocative, and timely book, Yung challenges and calls into question the increasing and questionable emphasis on leadership development courses and programmes within the church, which are more influenced by the secular, corporate, and academic fixation on leadership than on biblical teaching, priorities, and models. Yung is not suggesting that leadership and leadership skills are unnecessary in today's church, but he is highlighting that the key emphasis in scripture is that we are called first and foremost to be

servants and not leaders. In fact, he goes so far as to say that we do not find a single verse in the Bible telling us to train leaders for God's work, and that the heart of the New Testament understanding of ministry is primarily about servanthood and not leadership.

As the subtitle indicates, Yung builds a case for servanthood and not leadership as the fundamental character for Christian life and ministry by profiling and stressing the example and teaching of Jesus. I did find myself wondering if this was another, or the latest, book on the whole idea/subject of 'servant leadership' but, early on, Yung addresses that popular term and basically dismantles it by saying that it confuses our thinking about the fundamental nature of Christian ministry, which he strongly believes, and goes on to explain, is servanthood.

Using the example of Jesus, Yung demonstrates how he had authority as a servant via his total submission to the Father, and that a second critical aspect of Jesus's servanthood was his clear sense of identity, as the beloved Son of the Father. And for us as servants, in and of the church today, those two realities are essential: to live in submission to God the Father, and to live in the awareness and security of Abba's deep love.

Another important feature of servanthood that Yung underscores is Christian character, and in one of my favourite chapters, he identifies five marks of what being a true servant meant for one particular New Testament servant and their implications for us.

As I have mentioned, Yung does not dismiss or undermine the need for real leadership in the church today, but in his own words: 'leadership in the cause of Christ does not come from striving to be leaders but is the by-product of a life of humble service to Him and others' (p.129). Leadership as a by-product of servanthood is an interesting and potentially transforming perspective.

As local chair of a Christian leadership development programme, I initially found this book quite uncomfortable, but having read on and engaged further, I also found it insightful, thought-provoking, and extremely relevant.

Harvey Kwiyani, *Multicultural Kingdom — Ethnic Diversity, Mission and the Church* (London: SCM Press, 2020), 256 pages. ISBN: 9780334057529.

Reviewed by Andrea Klimt

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The kingdom of God is multicultural and therefore local congregations should not be monocultural in structure. This is Harvey Kwiyani's basic conviction in his discussion of ethnic diversity and mission. Kwiyani, originally from Malawi, is the founder of the Missio Africanus learning community and taught African Christianity and Theology at Liverpool Hope University. He is now CEO of the United Kingdom network *Global Connections*.

The UK is now home to people from many nations. Many of the immigrants have established their own ethnic churches. There are good arguments for this. Life in a monocultural community is easier. People who come from the same culture do not need to cross cultural boundaries to be converted. As a result, these communities initially grow faster. However, they do not mirror the kingdom of God as it appears in the New Testament. Already in the Acts of the Apostles it becomes clear that the church is made up of different cultures — Jews and Greeks. And in the eschatological kingdom of God people from all nations will worship together.

Kwiyani emphasises his credo in a variety of ways throughout his book. He highlights the great change in British society through migration (chapter 1). He traces the history of mission, focusing on the major mission conferences in Edinburgh 1919 and 2010 and the major changes in mission between these conferences (chapter 2). Kwiyani points out that church growth is predominantly in the countries of the South, while church membership in Europe is declining and society is becoming more and more secularised (chapter 3). Through the current migration movement, world Christianity has arrived in Europe (chapter 4). Multiculturalism is the appropriate way to treat each other as equals (chapter 5). For a real multicultural interaction, mutual respect and welcoming the stranger are necessary (chapter 6). Multiculturalism is

theologically well founded in the theology of Creation, Trinitarianism and Christology (chapter 7). Therefore, there must also be a multiculturally oriented ecclesiology (chapter 8). Humans like to associate with their peers; that is the principle of homogeneous unity. But in ecclesiology we should reflect a principle of heterogeneous unity (chapter 9). 'Oasis International', a kind of Pentecostal church, wants to be a house of prayer for the nations and practises multiculturalism through hospitality, mutual learning, and cross-cultural relationships (chapter 10). Life and mission in monocultural churches seems easier, but it is not consistent with the New Testament (chapter 11).

To support his basic premise, the author takes a long journey. He substantiates his arguments from theology and the history of mission, reporting very knowledgeably on the current social and ecclesiastical situation in Great Britain. His thesis is well-founded and convincing, his reasoning makes sense, but his evidence is rather repetitive. In contrast, the ideas for practical implementation seem very thin. However, they can be taken as a suggestion to follow the basic conviction with one's own implementation.

For me personally, Kwiyani's perspectives were an eye-opener, because it becomes clear that ethnic Christians and their churches will no longer remain a marginal phenomenon in our European society, but will make up the majority of the number of Christians in a few decades as secularisation progresses. Therefore, the question of the multiculturalism of churches and congregations is becoming increasingly relevant.

Laura Schmidt Roberts, Paul Martens & Myron A. Penner (eds), *Recovering from the Anabaptist Vision: New Essays in Anabaptist Identity and Theological Method* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2020), 189 pages. ISBN: 9780567692740.

Reviewed by David McMillan

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This book was the first publication in the T&T Clark Studies in Anabaptist Theology and Ethics initiated by faculty at the Anabaptist

Mennonite Biblical Seminary. Its origins lie in an Anabaptist Theology Project established by the Humanitas Anabaptist-Mennonite Centre at Trinity Western University.

The main purpose of the book is set out by Paul Martens in the opening chapter 'Challenge and Opportunity: The Quest for Anabaptist Theology Today'. Martens outlines the challenges that have arisen for Mennonites and those of an Anabaptist disposition following the exposure of the full extent of John Howard Yoder's sexual violence and the consequent difficulties in regard to the appropriation of this theology, which was fundamental to twentieth-century Anabaptist self-understanding and identity. Martens argues that releasing the Yoder hold on Anabaptist theology opens up the opportunity for a greater range of voices to engage in Anabaptist theological reflection on a greater range of contemporary and pressing issues.

Martens is one of nine contributors to the book and his fellow contributors explore new possibilities for Anabaptist theology engaging with tradition, text, narrative identity, feminist, queer, and trauma-informed theological methods, as well as ecumenical and intercultural theological dialogue and engagement. It is left to Paul Doerksen to conclude the discussions. Doerksen recognises that theology conceived within an ecclesial or religious identity can by default have a 'grasping quality', seeing to its own needs even if claiming to be for the benefit of the wider church. Doerksen addresses this by proposing a theological method of restlessness: '[…] restlessness as theological method in the Mennonite context implies that our theological work be pursued by a community of penitents that resists doing its work through grasping modes of domination' (p.167).

The great strengths of the book are, on the one hand, the very public and honest engagement in a process of re-evaluation of much that the contributors have held dear as part of their sense of identity. On the other hand, the book does not degenerate into an introspective retrospective, but models engagement with a broader contemporary agenda from a diverse community of Mennonite scholars. The editors have ensured that diversity is not merely alluded to but embraced within the range of approaches to theological method included.

I appreciated the opportunity this book affords to listen in to conversations that express and address the pain of betrayal or of exclusion, but do so by seizing, in a very positive way, the opportunity upheaval creates. That the book models a process of interrogating the taken-for-grantedness of identity and convictions makes it much more than just a window into Mennonite struggles; it serves as an illustration of the non-grasping, restless theological method described by Doerksen.