

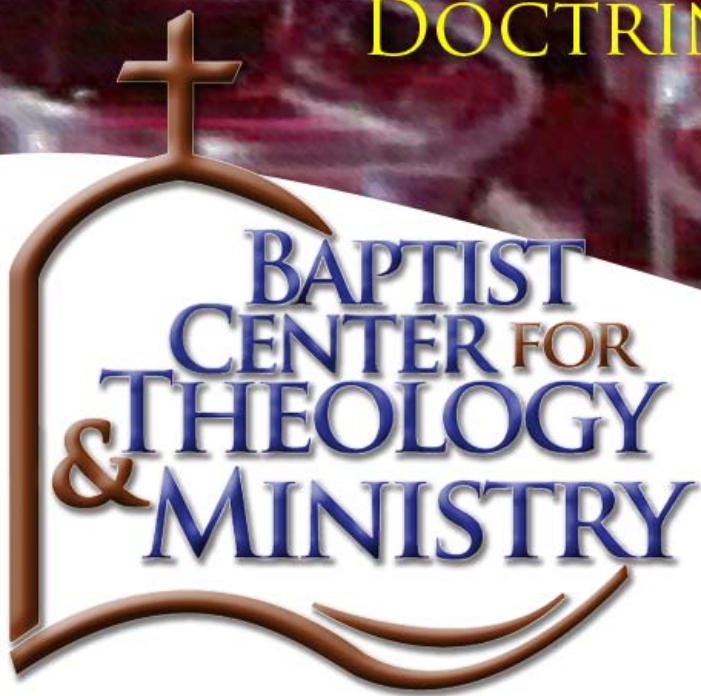
VOL. 6, NO. 1

SPRING 2009

THE JOURNAL

FOR BAPTIST THEOLOGY
& MINISTRY

FOUNDATIONS FOR BAPTIST
DOCTRINES & DISTINCTIVES



A RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF NEW ORLEANS BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THE JOURNAL

FOR BAPTIST THEOLOGY & MINISTRY

FOUNDATIONS FOR BAPTIST DOCTRINES & DISTINCTIVES

- 3 **Editorial Introduction: Foundations for Baptist
Doctrines & Distinctives**
Dr. Steve W. Lemke

SECTION 1: ORDINANCES OF THE CHURCH

- 9 ***Sacramentum*: Baptismal Practice & Theology in Tertullian and
Cyprian**
Dr. Rex Butler
- 25 **Were the First Baptists Sacramentalists?**
Dr. Lloyd Harsch
- 45 **Infant Baptism & The Half-Way Covenant**
Christopher J. Black
- 57 **Southern Baptists and Restricting the Lord's Supper: A Brief
Examination and Modest Proposal**
Jason Sampler

SECTION 2: DOCTRINES & DISTINCTIVES

- 73 **The Necessity of the Gospel in the Holy Spirit's Saving Work**
Gary L. Schultz, Jr.

- 85 **Through the Holy Spirit: His Work in Salvation**
W. Madison Grace II
- 97 **The Superiority of Christ: The Identity of Melchizedek in Hebrews**
Dr. R. Larry Overstreet
- 119 **The Development of Religious Liberty: A Survey of its Progress and Challenges in Christian History**
Dr. Malcolm B. Yarnell III

SECTION 3: THEOLOGIANS & THEOLOGICAL METHOD

- 139 **The First Baptist Treatise on Predestination: Thomas Helwys's *Short and Plaine Proofs***
Dr. Matt Pinson
- 153 **The Tension of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Prison Theology Regarding Social Reflections Concerning Race and Poverty: Provoking Action Toward Social Freedom and Justice Beyond Secular and Religious Jargon**
Craig Kyle Hemphill
- 169 **Will We Be Free Churches or Not? A Wake-Up Call to the Southern Baptist Convention**
Matthew Ward
- 190 **BOOK REVIEWS**

Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Charles S. Kelley

Executive Editor & BCTM Director

Dr. Steve W. Lemke

Assistant Editor

Christopher Black

Book Review Editors

Dr. Page Brooks

Dr. Archie England

Dr. Dennis Phelps

BCTM Fellow

Rhyne Putman

The Baptist Center for Theology & Ministry is a research institute of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. The seminary is located at 3939 Gentilly Blvd., New Orleans, LA 70126. For more information about us, please visit our website, www.baptistcenter.com or call 1-800-662-8701, ext. 3303.

The *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* is published semiannually by the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry, a ministry sponsored by the New Orleans Theological Seminary. Vol. 6. No. 1. Copyright © 2009- New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. All Rights Reserved.

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION: FOUNDATIONS FOR BAPTIST DOCTRINES & DISTINCTIVES

DR. STEVE W. LEMKE

Baptists are evangelicals, but not all evangelicals are Baptists. Baptists have different views from other evangelical groups on some doctrinal issues, and sometimes we as Baptists don't even agree among ourselves. As the old saying goes, listen to four Baptists and you'll find at least five or six different opinions!

Attention to doctrine and doctrinal distinctives have been a focal part of the mission of the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry since its inception. This issue of the *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* deals with three clusters of foundational doctrinal issues of interest to Baptists. Some of these issues define Baptists in differentiation from other evangelical groups, while on some other issues there is a range of disagreement among Baptists.

The first section of this edition of the *Journal* focuses on the church ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Both of these ordinances are confessional, since they are designed for believers to identify publicly with Jesus Christ. Both ordinances remind the participant of core truths of the Christian life -- the substitutionary atonement of Jesus and the new life that comes through Him. The proper meaning and mode of these ordinances are described in Article VII of the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*. Participation in the ordinances is inextricably tied to church membership. The *BF&M 2000* describes baptism as "prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper. Therefore, participation in these ordinances presupposes confession and covenant."

Dr. Rex Butler, Associate Professor of Church History and Patristics at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, contributes the first article on "*Sacramentum*: Baptismal Practice and the Theology of Tertullian & Cyprian." Obviously, the practice and teaching of the early church and patristic fathers on baptism is important to the practice and teaching of baptism today. Moving forward a few centuries, Dr. Lloyd Harsch contributes the article entitled, "Were the First Baptists Sacramentalists?" Harsch, who also serves as Associate Professor of Church History at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, compares the beliefs of the early Baptists with those of the Catholic and Reformed churches of that time. One of our doctoral fellows in the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry, Christopher Black, contributes "Infant Baptism and the Half-Way Covenant." Black's article utilizes the compromise within New England Puritanism in the Half-Way Covenant to discuss the role of baptism in church membership. The last article in this section is written by another NOBTS doctoral student, Jason Sampler. It concerns "Baptists and the Lord's Supper: How Confessions Can Inform Our Theology." Sampler discusses the options of "closed," "close," and "open" views of participation in the Lord's Supper, about which there is significant disagreement within Baptist life.

The second section of this issue concerns "Doctrines and Distinctives," which includes two articles addressing Soteriology and Pneumatology, an article on Christology, and an article on Religious Freedom. The articles on the work of the Spirit in salvation are

submitted by two young theologians, Gary L. Schultz, Jr. of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and W. Madison Grace II of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Although differing somewhat in perspective, these two articles reflect two well-established Baptist viewpoints on the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation. Dr. R. Larry Overstreet, a fellow of the Baptist Center and Professor Emeritus in Pastoral Theology at the Northwest Baptist Seminary, contributes an article on a Christological theme: "The Superiority of Christ: The Identity of Melchizedek in Hebrews." Dr. Overstreet surveys the exegetical options regarding the identity of Melchizedek in the book of Hebrews, and argues that the most likely reference is a preincarnate appearance of Jesus Christ. Dr. Malcolm Yarnell contributes an article on "The Development of Religious Liberty: A Survey of Its Progress and Challenges in Christian History." Yarnell, who serves as Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, Director of the Center for Theological Research, and Editor of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, is one of the most outstanding theologians in the Southern Baptist Convention. Yarnell's recent book on theological method is given an extensive review by Matthew Ward later in this issue. Yarnell's article on religious liberty reminds us that this doctrine has always been a distinctive hallmark of Baptist beliefs, and it is as important to defend it in our own day as it was for our predecessors in earlier generations.

There are three articles in the section addressing "Theologians and Theological Method." Dr. Matt Pinson reexamines the thought of one of the first English Baptists – Thomas Helwys. In "The First Baptist Treatise on Predestination: Thomas Helwys's *Short and Plaine Prooffe*," Pinson, who serves as President of Free Will Baptist Bible College, affords us a closer look at one of the first significant Baptist theologians. Craig Kyle Hemphill contributes "The Tension of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Prison Theology Regarding Social Reflections concerning Race and Poverty." The relation of orthodoxy and orthopraxy is important for any theology, and Hemphill's article challenges the reader to ponder the social implications of one's theology. Finally, Matthew Ward contributes "Will We Be Free Churches or Not? A Wake-Up Call to the Southern Baptist Convention." Ward's article ponders the implications of Malcolm Yarnell's recent book *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* for the theological method of churches in the free church tradition. There are also several excellent book reviews in this issue of the *Journal*.

The *Journal* is particularly pleased to publish several articles in this issue by outstanding Southern Baptist young scholars whose studies have focused on Theology. Christopher Black and Jason Sampler are Theology majors who have completed their course work in the Ph.D. program at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Black provides invaluable assistance to the Baptist Center, including work editing the *Journal*. He also serves as president of the Student Theological Fellowship on the NOBTS campus. He is currently researching and writing a dissertation in the field of theological anthropology. We are very pleased to include his contribution in this issue. Jason Sampler is also a Ph.D. student at NOBTS majoring in Theology. He is working in Lawrence, Kansas while completing his dissertation on Baptist views on the Lord's Supper. Gary Schultz graduated in December 2008 from Southern Seminary, having written his dissertation on *A Biblical and Theological Defense of a Multi-Intentioned View of the Atonement*. He has been serving as student associate in the Ministry Resources office at Southern Seminary. W. Madison Grace is a Theology major in the Ph.D. program at Southwestern Seminary. He serves as Assistant to the Director and Webmaster for the Center for Theological Research at Southwestern Seminary, the analog at

SWBTS to the Baptist Center at NOBTS. Grace also serves as an editorial assistant for the *Southwestern Journal of Theology*. Matthew Ward is also a student at Southwestern Seminary, and was recently selected by the Baptist Theology editorial board to present a paper at the Baptist Theology Research Award Student Symposium. Craig Kyle Hemphill is currently a student at the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University. He holds the Juris Doctorate degree from the Thurgood Marshall School of Law at Texas Southern University, where he served as editor in chief of the *Thurgood Marshall Law Review* for several years. He has served as a federal law clerk, as in-house counsel for the City of Houston, and as an associate at legal firms. He is not only licensed as a lawyer, but also as a minister by both the National Baptist and Southern Baptist conventions, and has served as a youth minister in two congregations. The *Journal* is pleased to publish these excellent articles from our next generation of leaders from four different theological institutions, which reflect a variety of perspectives. Their contributions give us greater confidence for the future of Baptist Theology!

December of 1776 was a time of crisis—one of the darkest hours in the American Revolution. The Revolution appeared to be all but lost. The British had won a series of battles on land and sea, and were firmly in control of New York City, New Jersey, and Rhode Island. The Continental Congress had fled Philadelphia, and only 3,000 troops remained from the earlier Continental Army of over 20,000 troops. Even George Washington wrote a cousin that “the game is pretty near up.” In the midst of this crisis, Thomas Paine penned these famous words in *The Crisis* on December 23, 1776: “These are the times that try men’s souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph.” Paine’s words were read to the Washington’s army before they crossed the Delaware to win the key victory at Trenton that sustained the Revolution.

As I pen these words, not only is America (and indeed the entire world) facing perhaps the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression, but Southern Baptists are also facing crises as well. We face the crises of the soul—deciding our identity (who we are) and our mission (what we do). Our crisis of identity is our struggle to determine what it means to be Southern Baptist in faith and doctrine. Our crisis of mission is our inability to reach our nation and world for Christ effectively. We have been plateaued in baptisms for over half a century, and statistics indicate that the Convention is tipping into decline. What must be done to address these crises in Southern Baptist life? Obviously, we must find ways to reach out in missions and evangelism to fulfill the Great Commission. We applaud and affirm those efforts from the depths of our being. But some will attempt to accomplish outreach at the cost of Baptist identity and doctrine. That is too high a price. These crises of mission and identity are indeed tests of the soul, tests that the summer Christian and the sunshine Baptist will flunk. But true Baptists will rise to the occasion, and by the grace of God we will prevail for His glory. This issue of the *Journal of Baptist Theology and Ministry* is dedicated to that end – of clarifying foundational doctrinal issues so that we may achieve effective evangelistic outreach without doctrinal compromise. May it be so!

Steve W. Lemke, Editor
Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry

Greer-Heard Point-Counterpoint Forum
February 26-27, 2010

The Message of Jesus



John Dominic Crossan

Professor Emeritus of Religion, DePaul University. He is the author of many books, including *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* and *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately After the Execution of Jesus*.



Ben Witherington, III

Amos Professor of New Testament for Doctoral Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary and on the doctoral faculty at St. Andrews University in Scotland. Included among his many books are *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom*, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth*, and *What Have They Done with Jesus?: Beyond Strange Theories and Bad History—Why We Can Trust the Bible*.

Other guest speakers:

Amy-Jill Levine

E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Professor of New Testament Studies at Vanderbilt University Divinity

Alan Segal

Professor of Religion and Ingeborg Rennert Professor of Jewish Studies at Barnard College, Columbia University

Darrell Bock

Research Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary

Craig Evans

Payzant Distinguished Professor of New Testament at Acadia Divinity College of Acadia University

SECTION 1

COVENANTS & ORDINANCES

“FOR I RECEIVED FROM THE LORD WHAT I ALSO PASSED ON TO YOU: THE LORD JESUS, ON THE NIGHT HE WAS BETRAYED, TOOK BREAD, AND WHEN HE HAD GIVEN THANKS, HE BROKE IT AND SAID, ‘THIS IS MY BODY, WHICH IS FOR YOU; DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME...’”

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-24

SACRAMENTUM: BAPTISMAL PRACTICE & THEOLOGY OF TERTULLIAN & CYPRIAN

DR. REX BUTLER¹

Our introduction to the extant history of North African Christianity is the *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*, the court record of twelve Christians from an obscure village that was probably near Carthage.² In their trial before the proconsul Vigellius Saturninus,³ the seven men and five women demonstrated obedience to authority, dedication to their faith, and readiness to die; in short, characteristics of *milites Christi*, soldiers of Christ.

From the beginning, militant Christianity was a hallmark of the early church in North Africa, and, in the literature of that time and setting, Christians were often described as soldiers.⁴ The military motif also was utilized through the reference to baptism as *sacramentum*. Although this term had been used to describe a military oath of allegiance, Tertullian, the prolific and rigorous Carthaginian teacher of the late second and early third centuries, appropriated it for ecclesiastical usage, making it part of the Latin theological lexicon.⁵ The other significant North African churchman and rigorist, Cyprian, also made use of the term in his writings concerning the baptismal issues of the mid-third century.

In another sense, *sacramentum* meant “something set apart as sacred,” and Tertullian used it to translate the Greek word μυστήριον for “mystery,” in such passages of the New

¹Dr. Rex Butler is Associate Professor of Church History and Patristics at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

²*The Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*, in *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, trans. with an introduction by Herbert Musurillo (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1972), xii, 168-75.

³Saturninus is mentioned by Tertullian, *Scap.* 3.4, as one who suffered after persecuting Christians: “Vigellius Saturninus, who first directed the sword against us in this place, lost his eyesight.” See also Musurillo, 87 n. 2. Unless indicated otherwise, all translations of ancient, Latin texts are mine and are based upon Latin texts in Corpus Christianorum Series Latina.

⁴For examples, see Tertullian, *Apol.* 50.1; *Cor.* 1.1; *Or.* 19.5; *Mart.* 3.1; *Exh. Cast.* 12.1; *Fug.* 10.1. See also Cyprian, *Ep.* 10.5.2; 15.1.1; 31.5.2; 37.1.1; 39.3.1. Cyprian’s epistles are numbered according to the order in *Sancti Cypriani Episcopi Epistalarum*, ed. G. F. Diercks, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996).

⁵Thomas M. Finn, *Early Christian Baptism and the Catechumenate: Italy, North Africa, and Egypt*, vol. 6, *Message of the Fathers of the Church*, ed. Thomas Halton (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 115.

Testament as Eph. 1:9-10, 3:8-9, and 5:32.⁶ When Paul spoke of the “mystery of His will,” the “administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God,” and the fact that the “mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church,”⁷ he referred to God’s hidden plan of salvation through Christ for the church. For Tertullian, however, the saving work of Christ is revealed to the church through rites such as baptism, laying on of hands and anointing with oil, and the Eucharist. Therefore, he combined the ideas of the sacred act and the oath of allegiance to introduce to the church the concept of the sacrament.⁸

Other words and phrases were used to describe baptism, and *sacramentum* signified other Christian rites, especially the Eucharist. This term, however, provides an appropriate starting point for a study of baptismal practice and theology in third-century North Africa because it originated with Tertullian⁹ and because it relates etymologically to the sacramentalism that dominated the Latin fathers’ understanding of baptism. The key sources for research into this area are the writings of Tertullian and Cyprian and others within their circle and range of influence.

TERTULLIAN

The earliest surviving monograph on Christian baptism is Tertullian’s treatise *De Baptismo*,¹⁰ written around the turn of the third century.¹¹ As will be seen, he also wrote about baptism elsewhere, but this treatise provides an outline for his overall thought on the subject.

⁶Tertullian, *Marx.* 5.17.1; 5.18.2, 5.18.9; *An.* 21.2; *Ieiun.* 3.2. See also Joseph Crehan, *Early Christian Baptism and the Creed: A Study in Ante-Nicene Theology*, vol. 13, The Bellarmine Series, ed. Edmund F. Sutcliffe (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1950), 103.

⁷Unless indicated otherwise, all translations from the Bible are from the New American Standard Bible (The Lockman Foundation, 1995).

⁸Crehan, 103.

⁹J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 193.

¹⁰Melito of Sardis (d. c. 190) wrote a treatise *On the Laver*, which may have influenced Tertullian, but too little of it has survived to know to what extent. Tertullian, *Bapt.* 15.2, wrote a baptismal treatise in Greek prior to the one in Latin, but it is lost. Ernest Evans, ed., *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism* (London: Society for the Preservation of Christian Knowledge, 1964), xi.

¹¹Timothy David Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 55, dated the treatise between 197 and 203.

Ostensibly this work was occasioned by the teaching of a woman missionary from the Cainite sect,¹² who argued that the rite of baptism was materialistic and, therefore, unspiritual and trivial. Tertullian, evidently, presented this material originally in a series of lectures delivered to both catechumens and those recently baptized.¹³ Ernest Evans summarized the treatise in three parts:

Chapters 1-9 are controversial and doctrinal, beginning with a defence of the sacrament against heretical denials of its utility, and proceeding to an explanation of the significance of the several parts of the baptismal rite. Chapters 10-16 treat of a number of questions . . . which were under debate at the time. Chapters 17-20 are again didactic, laying down practical rules for the administration of the sacrament.¹⁴

In the opening chapters, Tertullian responded to the heretical attack on baptism with a defense “concerning our sacrament of water” (*De sacramento aquae nostrae*) (*Bapt.* 1.1), supporting his argumentation with a variety of types (*figurae*) of water drawn from the biblical record. Water is prominent in the account of creation, and the Holy Spirit, who hovered over the water, sanctified it (*Bapt.* 3.2, 4.1). The Israelites were set free from Pharaoh at the Red Sea, as Christians are set free from the devil at the baptismal waters. The water which the Israelites drank during the Exodus came from the rock, which represents Christ the Rock, or was sweetened by Moses’ tree, also representing Christ (*Bapt.* 9.1-3). The baptism by John (*Bapt.* 6.1) and the baptism of Jesus were types of Christian baptism as were the many experiences with water in Jesus’ life (*Bapt.* 9, 19).¹⁵

¹²The Cainites, who were a Gnostic sect, disdained physical matter and regarded God, who created the world, as responsible for its evil. As a result, they elevated those biblical characters that resisted God, such as Cain, Esau, and Korah. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2d ed., s.v. “Cainites.”

¹³Jerome, *Vir. Ill.* 53, attested to Tertullian’s status as a priest, but Barnes, 11, disproved that misconception based on Tertullian’s own testimony that he was a layperson in *Exh. Cast.* 7.3; *Mon.* 12.2. Nonetheless, Barnes, 117, speculated that Tertullian indeed delivered these lectures on baptism. Due to his rare and valuable literary ability, Tertullian would have been a leader of his Christian community in Carthage and would have had ample opportunity to teach. For a discussion of literacy in this period and the system of house churches in Carthage, see William Tabbernee, “To Pardon or not to Pardon?: North African Montanism and the Forgiveness of Sins,” in *Studia Patristica*, vol. 36, ed. M. F. Wiles and E. J. Yarnold (Leuven: Peeters Press, 2001), 375-86.

¹⁴Evans, xii.

¹⁵Jesus’ experiences with water include changing water to wine (John 2:1-11); inviting those who are thirsty to drink of him and to receive living water (John 7:37-38); promising a reward to those who give a cup of cold water in his name (Matt. 10:42); offering living water to the woman at the well (John 4:1-38); walking on the water (Matt. 14:22-33); crossing the sea (Matt. 8:23-27); pointing out the place for the celebration of the Passover by the sign of water being carried by a man (Mark 14:13); and washing his disciples’ feet (John 13:5-11).

Tertullian defended baptism not only with the biblical typology of water but also by his emphasis on the simplicity of the rite and the material nature of water. Citing 1 Cor. 1:27, he insisted that God has chosen foolish things to shame the wise, referring to the Cainite woman and others who had disparaged baptism because it involved a material substance like water.¹⁶ The Gnostics disdained matter, but Tertullian claimed that the physical substances and actions used in baptism – water, oil, gestures, words – effected salvation.¹⁷

In his treatise *De Baptismo*, Tertullian provided a description of the baptismal rites in the Carthaginian church, which is further supplemented by incidental allusions in other writings. He indicated that the candidates received pre-baptismal instruction (*Bapt.* 18.4) but gave no clue to its duration. Prior to the ceremony, the candidate engaged in prayer, fasting, humility, a nightlong vigil, and confession of sin (*Bapt.* 20). The final step before baptism was the renunciation of Satan (*Cor.* 3.2).

According to Tertullian, there was no difference between water that was running or still, outside or indoors (*Bapt.* 4.3). After the invocation of God, the baptismal water was consecrated by the descent of the Spirit, who imparted to the water the sacramental power to sanctify the one who was immersed therein (*Bapt.* 4). Indeed, baptism was conducted by triple immersion in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit while those being baptized responded with “a slightly broader answer than the Lord has commanded in the Gospel” (*Cor.* 3.3; *Bapt.* 6.2).¹⁸ According to Tertullian, the primary authority for baptism belonged to the bishop, but that authority could be delegated to priests and deacons or even laymen – but certainly not laywomen! (*Bapt.* 17.1-2, 4-5) Tertullian was the first author to record the presence of sponsors, who attended at least as witnesses but possibly also as sureties (*Bapt.* 18.4; cf. 6.2).

After emerging from the baptismal water, the one newly baptized was anointed with consecrated oil (*Bapt.* 7), was signed with the cross (*Res.* 8.3), and had the administrator’s hands imposed in welcome of the Holy Spirit (*Bapt.* 8.1). After the descent of the Spirit and the ascent of the baptizand from the font, the time had come to ask for the *charismata* (*Bapt.* 20).¹⁹ The new members of the church then joined the congregation for prayers (*Bapt.* 20.5)

Even during Christ’s passion, water is evident when Pilate washes his hands and when the soldier’s lance brings forth water from Christ’s side. Finn, 117.

¹⁶Ernest Evans, xii; Finn, 116.

¹⁷Finn, 8.

¹⁸See Hippolytus, *Apos. Trad.* 21, for a complete presentation of the ceremonial use of the baptismal creed.

¹⁹In *Passio de Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, Perpetua reported her experience with the Spirit following baptism: “The Spirit directed me to request nothing else after the water except endurance of the flesh” (*Pass. Pert.* 3.5). Her experience reflected Tertullian’s exhortation to catechumens in his treatise *De Baptismo*: “Therefore, blessed ones, . . . when you ascend from that most holy bath of new birth and spread out your hands for the first time, . . . ask from

and for their first celebration of the Eucharist, at which time they were given a drink of milk and honey, which symbolized the Promised Land (*Cor.* 3.3).

Later, in his treatise *De Resurrectione Carnis*, Tertullian expressed the theological basis for this baptismal practice: “flesh is the hinge upon which salvation turns” (*Res.* 8.2).²⁰ He expanded this thought with the following summary of the ceremony: “the flesh is washed so that the soul also might be purified; the flesh is anointed with oil so that the soul also might be consecrated; the flesh is inscribed so that the soul also might be fortified; the flesh is shaded by the laying on of hands so that the soul also might be illuminated by the Spirit; the flesh feeds on the body and blood of Christ so that the soul also might be fattened upon God” (*Res.* 8.3). He said something similar in the treatise *De Baptismo*: “the oil runs on our flesh but benefits us in the spirit; in the same way also, although the act of baptism itself is carnal in that we are immersed in water, the effect is spiritual in that we are liberated from sins” (*Bapt.* 7.2).²¹

The elaborate ceremony which Tertullian described is far removed from the simple observances recorded in the New Testament. Tertullian admitted that Scripture did not prescribe all of the rituals that were performed but that tradition and custom provided their precedents (*Cor.* 3.1-2). In his study of *A History of Christian Thought*, Justo González came to this conclusion concerning baptism in the early church: “Not only in their understanding of baptism, but also in their total theological outlook, one senses a distance between the Christianity of the New Testament – especially that of Paul – and that of the Apostolic Fathers.”²² This distance widened in the following years, and Gonzalez’ observation is even truer of Tertullian and later church fathers.

The baptismal theology that informed the baptismal practice was sacramental. Tertullian believed and taught that the water of baptism provided four benefits: the remission of sins, deliverance from death, regeneration, and the bestowal of the Holy Spirit (*Marc.* 1.28.2).²³ Thomas Finn takes particular note of “Tertullian’s sacramental conviction, namely, that water is capable of regenerating the candidate because of God’s spirit, which it bears. The very fact that water can penetrate to the hiddenmost inner recesses of the physical world discloses that it penetrates to the very spirit of the baptismal candidate. Thus,

the Father, ask from the Lord, to receive personal resources of grace and distributions of gifts” (*Bapt.* 20.5).

²⁰*caro salutis est cardo*. See also Evans, xx.

²¹Translation by Ernest Evans, 17.

²²Justo González, *A History of Christian Thought*, vol. 1, *From the Beginnings to the Council of Chalcedon* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), 96.

²³Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 163; Kelly, 209.

the candidate's spirit is physically washed, while the body is spiritually cleansed in the very same waters."²⁴

By the third century and earlier, the symbolism of baptism as the believer's identification with the death and resurrection of Christ, as taught by Paul, was seemingly forgotten and replaced by sacramentalism which assigned salvific power to the baptismal act itself.²⁵ Tertullian still recognized the role of faith in salvation but taught that faith was incomplete, or "bare (*nuda*)," without the clothing of baptism (*Bapt.* 13.2). The reasons for this trend toward sacramentalism are not readily apparent, but an examination of Tertullian's use of sacred writings and of the milieu of the early church may yield possible hints.

Tertullian seems to assume baptismal regeneration rather than to argue for it from sacred writings of his day. Only rarely did Tertullian quote or allude to passages that are cited most frequently today in support of baptismal regeneration – Mark 16:16; John 3:5; Acts 2:38; Tit. 3:5; and 1 Pet. 3:21²⁶ – and only one of those citations was given in argumentation for his sacramental view.²⁷ In the treatise *De Baptismo*, he argued for the necessity of baptism with an abbreviated quotation from John 3:5: "Unless someone is born of water, that person has not life" (*Bapt.* 12.1). Overall, he used Jewish and Christian sources extensively but largely to support his view with types of baptism.

A possible influence toward sacramentalism from outside the church came from the many mystery religions that were attracting adherents during the early centuries of Christianity. Tertullian listed several of these religions that included washings that effected regeneration and remission of sins:²⁸ the cult of Isis,²⁹ Mithraism,³⁰ the worship of Aphrodite,

²⁴Finn, 117. See also Tertullian, *Bapt.* 4.5.

²⁵González, *A History of Christian Thought*, 96. See also Adolf Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, trans. and ed. James Moffatt, with an Introduction by Jaroslav Pelikan (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), 230.

²⁶Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1985), 1097-9. See the scriptural indices in *Tertulliani Opera*, vol. 2, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954), 1457-93.

²⁷Possibly, Tertullian made two allusions to Tit. 3:5 – "the font of your new birth (*lauacrum noui natalis*)" (*Bapt.* 20.5) and "the font of regeneration (*lauacrum regenerationis*)" (*Pud.* 1.5) – but both references were assumptive rather than argumentative.

²⁸Arthur Darby Nock, *Early Gentile Christianity and its Hellenistic Background* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964), 60-62, doubts the accuracy of some of Tertullian's information.

²⁹In Egypt, the worship of Isis involved the waters of the Nile River. André Hamman, ed., *Baptism: Ancient Liturgies and Patristic Texts*, trans. Thomas Halton, ALBA Patristic Library, vol. 2 (Staten Island, N.Y.: ALBA House, 1967), 34 n. 6.

and the Cybelene cult.³¹ He also cited other pagan rituals whereby expiation of sins, even murder, was achieved by water (*Bapt.* 5.1). According to Tertullian, the reason for the similarities was that the devil, in the false religions that he inspired, imitated the things of God (*Bapt.* 5.3).³²

Historians have debated the influence that early Christianity and the mystery religions exerted upon each other. Everett Ferguson questioned the impact of the mysteries upon the origins of Christianity and considered it possible that the mysteries borrowed from Christianity. He was convinced, however, that later Christianity did derive from the mysteries and pagan religions certain gestures, terminology, artistic motifs, ceremonies, and other ideas and practices. Although he insisted that there are “no true parallels to baptism in the mysteries,” he pointed to several similarities: baptism was conducted as an initiation into certain cults; water was applied for purification; the benefit of baptism was effective through its operation (*ex opere operato*); and, in the case of the Dionysiac mysteries, the initiation of children was practiced.³³

Although the influence of mystery religions on the origin of baptism can be refuted,³⁴ their influence on the development of sacramentalism during the postbiblical centuries must be taken into consideration. Adolf Harnack freely described baptismal practice and theology in the early church in terms of a mystery and even claimed that “magical ideas were bound up from the very first with baptism.”³⁵ The sacrament played an important role in the expansion of the church because of its visibility and tangibility; it appealed to many who were seeking comfort in mysteries but would not be “satisfied with a purely spiritual

³⁰One step of initiation into Mithraism was purification by water. Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 277.

³¹The statues of Aphrodite and Cybele were bathed during ceremonies associated with each cult. Hamman, 34 n. 7.

³²According to Ferguson, 279, “The Christian writers of the early centuries may have exaggerated the similarities, either from defensiveness or . . . because they could make apologetical capital for the truth of Christianity by claiming demonic imitations in paganism.”

³³*Ibid.*, 279-80; cf. 248.

³⁴G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (London: MacMillan & Co., 1963), 1-44, lists four antecedents of Christian Baptism: lustrations in the Old Testament, Jewish baptizers and the Qumran Community, Jewish proselyte baptism, and the baptism of John the Baptist.

³⁵Harnack, 388 n. 1.

religion.”³⁶ Harnack saw in Tertullian’s writing a description of baptism in an advanced stage of sacramentalism, amplified with new ceremonies added to the original, simple bath.³⁷

Harnack referred to the visibility and tangibility of the sacrament. The physical actions involved in the baptismal ceremony described by Tertullian became pictures to the catechumens and the Christians in the congregation, most of whom were illiterate.³⁸ The actions, then, as described above, became more than just signs to the participants and the spectators; they came to effect what they signified,³⁹ namely the washing away of sin and the anointing with the Holy Spirit.

This trend was exacerbated by the lack of leadership during the century between the apostles and Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement, and Hippolytus. Without exceptional spiritual and intellectual leadership, Christian congregations, whose members came from the lower middle class, “were set in the confused religious milieu of the Gentile world, side by side with . . . the devotees of the numerous mysteries.”⁴⁰ From this pagan environment, in which they lived and worked, they brought many ideas which affected their baptismal theology. “It was in this age of confusion, while the Church was still evolving the means by which this confusion was soon to be reduced to order . . . that the liturgical tradition took shape.”⁴¹ By the end of the second century, the church fathers seemed blind to this process, and Tertullian, as has been seen, actually contributed to the trend.⁴²

One likely way in which baptismal practice and theology developed through a popular movement in the church can be seen in Tertullian’s discussion of infant baptism. He advocated postponement of baptism of children and asked, “Why does the innocent age of life hurry toward the remission of sins?” (*Bapt.* 18.5) His argumentation, however, indicated that infant baptism was being practiced or, at least, requested by parents and others in his congregation. Appeal was made to Jesus’ words, “Do not forbid them to come to me” (Matt. 19:14, cited in *Bapt.* 18.5). In reply, Tertullian discouraged the baptism of children, insisting instead, “Let them come, then, when they grow up, when they are learning, when they are taught where they should come; let them become Christians when they are able to know

³⁶ Ibid., 388-9.

³⁷ Ibid., 390.

³⁸ William Tabbernee, “To Pardon or not to Pardon? North African Montanism and the Forgiveness of Sins,” *Studia Patristica* 36 (2001): 380-81.

³⁹ Finn, 13.

⁴⁰ G. W. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit: A Study in the Doctrine of Baptism and Confirmation in the New Testament and the Fathers*, 2nd ed. (London: Society for the Preservation of Christian Knowledge, 1967), 97-8

⁴¹ Ibid., 102. See also Beasley-Murray, 354-5.

⁴² Beasley-Murray, 357.

Christ” (*Bapt.* 18.5). At this time in North Africa, this baptismal expression of sacramental theology had not yet received the support of ecclesiastical leadership. Fifty years later, quite the opposite was the case.

An issue that did arise from the doctrine of baptismal regeneration was the question of post-baptismal sin: If baptism cleanses one from past sins, how is one cleansed from sins committed after baptism? In his treatise *De Paenitentia*, written about the same time as *De Baptismo*,⁴³ Tertullian allowed a second but final opportunity for repentance and forgiveness of sin committed after baptism. The penitent must undergo a process known as *exomologesis*, which included prostration before the elders of the church in sackcloth and ashes, fasting, praying, and confessing before the congregation. Though strict, this penitence afforded absolution for both spiritual and carnal sins (*Paen.* 7.10; 9.1-6; 3.8).

About a decade later, Tertullian wrote *De Pudicitia*, a treatise that expounded a decidedly more severe restriction on post-baptismal forgiveness. In its introduction, he repudiated his earlier views and insisted instead that indulgence must not be granted to believers who commit the most extreme sins, such as adultery and fornication (*Pud.* 1.6). In his offensive against such practices, he condemned the *Shepherd of Hermas*, which he named “Shepherd of adulterers (*Pastore moechorum*)” (*Pud.* 20.2), because it permitted one opportunity for repentance after baptism.⁴⁴ Later, he included apostasy, murder, and idolatry in the list of sins that were unpardonable by the church (*Pud.* 22.11).

The severity of such baptismal doctrine led many seekers in the third century to postpone baptism, sometimes even until immediately before death.⁴⁵ Tertullian encouraged such practice to some extent, at least, in the case of those who are not married (*Bapt.* 18.6) and encouraged all baptismal candidates to learn sinless living before baptism so that they would not require repentance afterward (*Paen.* 7.1). At the same time, he deplored those catechumens who, like soldiers on furlough, used the time before baptism as an opportunity for sinning rather than for learning the discipline of sinlessness (*Paen.* 6.3). The problem of delaying baptism continued to spread and became a source of serious concern in the church.

⁴³ Tertullian also insisted in *On Baptism* that only once are one’s sins washed away: “Happy water, which *once* washes away” (*Bapt.* 15.3).

⁴⁴ *Shepherd of Hermas*, Mandate 4.3.1-7; cf. 4.1.1-10. See also Cahal B. Daly, *Tertullian the Puritan and His Influence: An Essay in Historical Theology* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1993), 128-9.

⁴⁵ Harnack, 391.

Tertullian did acknowledge a second baptism, the baptism of blood, or martyrdom.⁴⁶ From 195 on, Christians in North Africa suffered sporadic persecutions,⁴⁷ as evidenced by Tertullian's treatises *Ad Martyras* and *Apologeticum*, written from 197-8.⁴⁸ Seeking encouragement from Christian writings, Tertullian found motifs that united baptism and suffering. Jesus himself had come "by water and blood" (1 John 5:6, cited in *Bapt.* 16.1) and had predicted, "I have to be baptized with a baptism" (Luke 12:50, cited in *Bapt.* 16.1). Tertullian saw in the water and blood that poured from Jesus' pierced side a figure of the two baptisms, one of water, the other of blood. The latter "brings about at once the bath of the laver even when it has not been received and restores it when it is lost" (*Bapt.* 16.2). Thus, the baptism of blood remitted sins for the convert who had not yet been baptized and provided cleansing even for post-baptismal sins.

CYPRIAN

In 248, about fifty years after Tertullian wrote *De Baptismo*, Cyprian was elected bishop of Carthage, thereafter becoming the leading North African churchman of the mid-third century. According to Jerome, Cyprian daily read from the works of Tertullian, whom he called "my master,"⁴⁹ but Cyprian was less theological and more practical in his writings, which consisted of several short treatises and a broad correspondence.

As did Tertullian, Cyprian glorified the ideal of the Christian militia⁵⁰ and often used the term *sacramentum* as a synonym for baptism.⁵¹ His sacramental theology can be seen readily in his description of his own salvation as being "reborn and endowed with new life

⁴⁶In 203, only a few years after Tertullian wrote *De Baptismo*, four young catechumens and their teacher received the baptism of blood in the Carthaginian amphitheater. Their story was recorded by an eyewitness and preserved in *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*. E. C. E. Owen, introduction to *Passion of SS. Perpetua and Felicitas in Some Authentic Acts of the Early Martyrs*, trans. by E. C. E. Owen (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1927), 75-7, alleged that Tertullian was the eyewitness and editor of the *Passio* and cited as one of his reasons the use of the term "second baptism" by both Tertullian and the editor. All that can be known certainly is that Tertullian was familiar with the story of Perpetua (*An.* 55.4). For a discussion of the identity of the editor of the *Passion*, see Rex D. Butler, *The New Prophecy and "New Visions": Evidence of Montanism in "The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas"* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006).

⁴⁷W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 293.

⁴⁸Barnes, 55.

⁴⁹Jerome, *Vir. Ill.* 53.

⁵⁰See footnote 3 above.

⁵¹See, for examples, Cyprian, *Ep.* 30.7.1, 45.1.2, 55.21.2, 54.2.4, 64.4.3, 72 passim, 74 passim.

by the laver of saving water.”⁵² Furthermore, “afterwards, when the stain of my earlier life had been washed away with the aid of the water of regeneration, a light from above poured itself upon my heart that is made righteous and pure; afterwards, when I had drunk up the heavenly Spirit, the second birth remade me as a new person.”⁵³ For Cyprian, remission of past sins and regeneration came to him in the baptismal waters; the Spirit, in the confirmation that followed.⁵⁴

Cyprian also followed Tertullian in his teaching that faith was insufficient for salvation unless completed by baptism. In his own testimony, he implied his eventual faith when he expressed his original doubt: “It was very difficult and hard to believe . . . that divine mercy was promised for my salvation.”⁵⁵ He described the ultimate goal of his belief, however, in the sacramental terms cited above. Elsewhere, he recognized saving faith in Cornelius and the Gentiles, who were “heated with the fire of faith, believing in the Lord with their whole heart; . . . nevertheless, the blessed Apostle Peter, mindful of the divine precept and the gospel, instructed that those same men, who already had been filled with the Holy Spirit, should be baptized, in order that nothing should seem to be neglected so that they might observe the apostolic directions through every divine precept and the law of the Gospel” (*Ep.* 72.1.2). Again, from another story from the Acts of the Apostles, he related that “those who had believed in Samaria had believed in the true faith and had been baptized by Philip the deacon, whom the same apostles [Peter and John] had sent, within the church, which is one and to which alone it is permitted to grant the grace of baptism and to forgive sins” (*Ep.* 73.9.1). Other than these examples and few others, Cyprian focused on sacrament rather than faith.

By the mid-third century, the trend toward infant baptism, spurred on by such sacramentalism, had advanced to the place where it was no longer only a popular demand but had become an episcopal requirement. Fidus, one of Cyprian’s fellow bishops, had written his opinion that an infant should be baptized on the eighth day, according to the ancient law of circumcision. Cyprian, with the support of a council, responded that an infant should be baptized within the first two or three days because God’s grace should be denied to no one born (*Ep.* 64.2.1-2). The rationale for the decision was that even the greatest sinners were granted remission of sins through baptism and grace, so infants, who have not sinned at all but have been infected with Adam’s sin through birth, should receive the remission of sins that are not his or her own but belong to another (*Ep.* 64.5.2). Cyprian saw further justification for infant baptism in his observation that “immediately at the first moment of their birth, weeping and wailing, they [infants] are able to do nothing except beg” for the sacrament (*Ep.* 64.6.2).

⁵²Cyprian, *Epistula ad Donatum* 3.

⁵³Cyprian, *Epistula ad Donatum* 4.

⁵⁴Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 118.

⁵⁵Cyprian, *Epistula ad Donatum* 3.

Clearly the practice of infant baptism advanced rapidly in North Africa during the first half of the third century but could not have been widespread previously since Tertullian discouraged it as a novelty. Questions about the origin of infant baptism as well as its rise and universal adoption, as reflected in Cyprian and others, cannot be answered definitively, but investigation may yield clues.

G. R. Beasley-Murray, in his thorough and systematic survey of *Baptism in the New Testament*, developed the thesis that “infant baptism originated in a capitulation to pressures exerted upon the Church both from without and from within.”⁵⁶ According to Beasley-Murray, those pressures included: “[t]he participation of children at an early age in the Greek cults (to secure for them the benefits of the sacrifices, etc.), the analogy of circumcision and the baptizing of children of proselytes in Judaism,”⁵⁷ and the increasing emphasis of the sacramental-magical element in the popular understanding of baptism. Developed through such sub-Christian or non-Christian influences, infant baptism signified “a falling away from apostolic Christianity.”⁵⁸

Even paedobaptists partially agreed to such an assessment of infant baptism. Albrecht Oepke, an advocate of infant baptism and baptismal regeneration, admitted, “From the beginning, the sacrament in Christianity is a hybrid creation: half spiritual symbolism and half primitive magic.”⁵⁹ The implication of such a statement is that this “half-primitive magic” made possible the rise of infant baptism.⁶⁰ H. J. Evander, another proponent of infant baptism, saw “no font for small children” in “Paul’s baptistery” but added that the way for paedobaptism was prepared by the influences listed above – the development of the sacramental-magical character of baptism, the influence of mystery cults, the comparison to circumcision – as well as by “the conception of the Church as the exclusive institution of salvation, into which one came through baptism and from which it was desired not to exclude the infants.”⁶¹ This final suggestion by Evander points back to Cyprian, the great champion of the exclusivity of the Church.⁶²

⁵⁶Beasley-Murray, 352.

⁵⁷Ibid., 353. See also Hans Windisch, “Zum Problem der Kindertaufe im Urchristentum,” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 28 (1929): 124

⁵⁸Windisch, 142. See also Beasley-Murray, 352-3.

⁵⁹Albrecht Oepke, “Urchristentum und Kindertaufe,” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 29: (1930), 100.

⁶⁰Beasley-Murray, 353.

⁶¹H. J. Evander, *Det kristna dopet, dess uppkomst och betydelse: Några synpunkter till ledning för diskussionen vid prästmötet i Lund den 20, 21 och 22 September 1938* (Lund, 1938), 92, cited by Beasley-Murray, 354.

Much of Cyprian's baptismal doctrine was hammered out on the anvil of the controversies that followed the Decian persecution.⁶³ During the persecution, many Christians had lapsed and had submitted to the worship of the Roman deities, while others merely pretended to do so by purchasing certificates of compliance. As for Cyprian, he went into exile, but, when the persecution ended with Decius' death, he returned to Carthage, where he confronted a variety of difficult issues and schisms.

The request of the lapsed to rejoin the church was met with two extreme reactions. One party, led by some confessors who had resisted the persecution and survived, desired to forgive the lapsed and readmit them to the church with no penance other than renewed declarations of allegiance to Christ. A group of presbyters who had opposed Cyprian's election as bishop joined this community. Another party, which was more rigorous and resisted allowing the lapsed to return to the church, was led by Novatian, a Roman presbyter and rival of Cornelius, bishop of Rome.⁶⁴ Although Novatianism began in Rome, it spread to North Africa through missionaries, who established a competing church (*Ep.* 59.9.2).⁶⁵

Cyprian, as bishop of Carthage and leader of the Catholic Church in North Africa, opposed both the laxist and rigorist churches. In his treatise *De Lapsis*, he counseled penance and readmission for those who had purchased certificates but had not actually worshiped the Roman deities and for those who had apostatized only after severe tortures. Those who had fallen voluntarily had violated their "oath of allegiance to Christ (*Christi sacramentum*)" (*Laps.* 7), and, therefore, he required them to do penance throughout their lifetimes and allowed restoration only on their deathbeds. Furthermore, lapsed clergy were to be deposed.⁶⁶

⁶²Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 2, *Ante-Nicene Christianity A.D. 100-325* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 263-4.

⁶³When Decius instigated the persecution of the church in 250, Cyprian had been bishop of Carthage scarcely a year or two. The imperial policy required every person to worship the ancient Roman gods through a libation, burning incense, and eating sacrificial meats. Those who complied received a certificate. Among those who refused, some were imprisoned; some were deprived of the necessities of life; some were tortured. Under such suffering, some died, and others recanted and offered the required evidences of worship. Because Christian bishops were targeted especially, Cyprian decided that his duty was to flee into exile, from which he could direct his church through secret correspondence during the crisis. J. Patout Burns, Jr., *Cyprian the Bishop* (London: Routledge, 2002), 1-2; González, *A History of Christian Thought*, 245. See also Cyprian, *Ep.* 20.

⁶⁴Justo González, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 1, *The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1984), 88-90.

⁶⁵Burns, 100.

⁶⁶Roy Joseph Deferrari, introduction to *On the Lapsed*, in *Saint Cyprian: Treatises*, 56; González, *A History of Christian Thought*, 246.

Although this treatise and the Council of Carthage of 251, which followed its recommendations, settled the controversy for the Catholic Church, the schismatic churches continued to coexist.⁶⁷ In response to such divisions, Cyprian issued his treatise *De Ecclesiae Catholicae Unitate*. One aspect of ecclesiastical unity is baptism, which Cyprian calls the sacrament of unity (*sacramentum unitatis*), citing “the blessed Apostle Paul”: “One body and one Spirit, one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God” (Eph. 4:4-6, cited in *Unit.* 4). In contrast, the false baptism of the schismatics divides:

Although there cannot be another baptism except the one, they suppose that they are able to baptize; although they have forsaken the font of life, they promise the grace of life-giving and saving water. Their people are not cleansed but instead are soiled, nor are their sins purged but, on the contrary, are heaped higher. That birth begets offspring not for God but for the devil. Being born through a falsehood they do not receive the promises of truth; begotten from faithlessness they lose the grace of faith. They cannot come to the gift of peace who have violated the peace of the Lord by the insanity of discord (*Unit.* 11). In a summary, Cyprian asserted that the unity of the church comes from the divine sacraments, which cannot be broken or separated (*Unit.* 6).

Along with Cyprian’s insistence on the unity of baptism, a new controversy developed among Catholics concerning the validity of baptism in schismatic churches. Tertullian, also citing Eph. 4:4-6, had already condemned heretical baptism (*Bapt.* 15.1-2), as had a council held in Carthage about 230 and led by Agrippinus, who was the bishop at that time (*Ep.* 71.4.1).⁶⁸ Neither Tertullian nor Agrippinus’ Council would accept a candidate baptized in a heretical community into the Catholic Church without rebaptism,⁶⁹ although that term was not used because heretical baptism was no baptism at all.⁷⁰ To some, however, schismatic baptism did not seem to be the same error, since it was conducted by those who shared the same faith and who themselves had been baptized by the same ritual (*Ep.* 70.1).⁷¹ The questions, then, involved the method and purpose of instatement and the status of the baptismal candidate: imposition of hands upon penitents to restore them to

⁶⁷González, *The Story of Christianity*, 89.

⁶⁸Graeme W. Clarke, ed., *The Letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage*, vol. 4, *Letters 37-82*, vol. 47, *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, ed. Walter J. Burghardt and Thomas Comerford Lawler (New York: Newman Press, 1989), 196-8; Burns, 102-3.

⁶⁹Edward White Benson, *Cyprian: His Life, His Times, His Work* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1897), 335-6.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 353.

⁷¹Burns, 103.

membership in the true church; imposition of hands upon previously baptized candidates to confer the Holy Spirit; or the full ritual of baptism upon newly converted catechumens.⁷²

In response to the controversy, Cyprian argued that only the bishops who had succeeded the apostles had the power, handed down from Christ, to sanctify the baptismal waters (*Ep.* 70.1.3), to consecrate the post-baptismal chrism, and to make holy those who come to them to be baptized (*Ep.* 70.2.2-3).⁷³ Furthermore, he was appalled that his fellow bishops had failed to defend the exclusivity of their authority, since only apostolic bishops with the power to forgive could baptize (*Ep.* 69.10.2; 70.3). Recognition of rival bishops' baptism would acknowledge another source of the authority to forgive, such as the patronage of confessors, and would contradict Cyprian's claim that "there is no salvation outside the Church" (*Ep.* 73.21.2).⁷⁴

In his exposition of the rebaptism controversy, J. Patout Burns outlined two stages: "the first involved a clarification of the practice and the reasons for applying it; the second brought sharp conflict over requiring or even allowing it. The first remained largely within Africa and must have focused primarily on the reception of laxists. The second introduced a debate over Novatian and entailed a bitter dispute with the bishop of Rome over the power of schismatics to perform sacred functions."⁷⁵ The Roman Bishop Stephen insisted that his policy followed the apostolic tradition of the church to receive into communion any heretics, including schismatics, with the imposition of hands only, without the necessity of baptism (*Ep.* 74.1.2). The conflict between Stephen and Cyprian threatened the communion between the Roman and African churches (*Ep.* 74.8.2; 75.25.1-4) and lasted until Stephen's death, which was followed by Cyprian's martyrdom the next year.⁷⁶

Opposition to Cyprian's policy of rebaptism, however, did not come only from across the sea but also from within his own country. An anonymous treatise *De Rebaptismate* was written, most likely by a Numidian or Mauretanian bishop,⁷⁷ and circulated early in the dispute, probably during its first phase before Stephen entered the fray.⁷⁸ Evidently aiming at

⁷²Ibid., 102.

⁷³Clarke, 192.

⁷⁴Burns, 103-4.

⁷⁵Ibid., 104.

⁷⁶Ibid., 10.

⁷⁷Michael M. Sage, *Cyprian*, Patristic Monograph Series, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1975), 305-6 n. 5; Benson, 393-4. Translations of quotations from *On Rebaptism* are based on the text in *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 3.

⁷⁸Benson, 392, 398-9, suggested that this treatise was sent to Cyprian along with a letter from Jubaian (*Ep.* 73.4.1). Clarke, 219, 223, posited May/June 256 as a date for Cyprian's response to Jubaian but doubted that the treatise mentioned was *De Rebaptismate*.

Cyprian, the author described his target as “one man” who was “proclaimed vaingloriously among certain unstable men to be of great wisdom and steadfastness” but who was instead “endowed with the stupidity of heretics” (*Rebapt.* 1). Then the author began the treatise with the argument that rebaptism violated tradition and “ought not . . . to be inflicted shamelessly like a blot on the Mother Church” (*Rebapt.* 1).

According to the author, baptism of water could be effective simply when administered in the name of Jesus (*Rebapt.* 6) and would not depend upon the moral character of the baptizer, who could be a heretic or a schismatic (*Rebapt.* 6-7, 10), if the person baptized later came to the true faith and received the Holy Spirit through the laying on of the bishop’s hands (*Rebapt.* 6). In such a case, repetition of baptism would bring dishonor to Jesus and his name (*Rebapt.* 10). Thus, the author placed the locus of salvation in the imposition of the bishop’s hands, which conferred the Holy Spirit (*Rebapt.* 4-6). However, baptism alone, when administered in the unity of the church, could be sufficient in cases where the baptizand died before confirmation because, in such a case, Christ himself would stand in the bishop’s stead to confer the Spirit (*Rebapt.* 3-5). Therefore, the author of this treatise disagreed with Cyprian on the necessity of rebaptizing a heretic or schismatic, but they both agreed on the necessity of the sacraments of baptism and laying on of hands.⁷⁹

The controversies over rebaptism developed as a result of the sacramentalism of third-century North Africa. The insistence that salvific grace was conferred by a sacrament moved the soteriological focus from the faith of the convert to the accompanying rituals and ultimately, in the case of Cyprian, to the ecclesiastical organization. He insisted that “the church is one” (*Ep.* 69.2.1) and that only those who are baptized within the one Catholic Church can receive life and sanctification from the water (*Ep.* 69.2.3). Outside the Catholic Church, neither the baptizand can receive forgiveness based upon his or her faith alone (*Ep.* 73.4.1-2), nor does the baptizer have the power to baptize and to grant forgiveness (*Ep.* 73.7.2). The central concern in Cyprian’s sacramental theology, therefore, was not the sacrament or even the administrator but the administrator’s relationship to the Catholic Church.⁸⁰

CONCLUSION

The description of the elaborate baptismal ceremony of third-century North Africa reveals rich imagery of salvation: the candidate renounces Satan and pledges allegiance to Christ; the water cleanses from sin; the triple immersion emphasizes the operation of the Trinity; the imposition of hands calls down the indwelling Spirit; the oil seals the believer; spiritual gifts are granted; the new member of the body of Christ partakes of the bread and wine of the Eucharist; and the drink of milk and honey is served to the new citizen of the Promised Land. Each ritual seems to paint a picture of the believer’s journey of faith.

⁷⁹For discussions of the anonymous treatise *On Rebaptism*, see Burns, 124-6, 128, 130; Sage, 305-8; and Benson, 390-401.

⁸⁰Sage, 304-5.

The faith represented by these signs, however, received little attention in discussions of baptism by Tertullian and Cyprian as the signs came to be regarded as sacraments that caused what they signified.⁸¹ Possible reasons for the development of sacramentalism were influences from mystery religions; beliefs about magic; misunderstanding of the physical actions of baptism by largely illiterate participants; lack of leadership in the second-century church; and, specifically in the case of infant baptism, the comparison of baptism to circumcision as an initiatory rite. The results of sacramentalism include elaboration of the baptismal ceremonies; controversies over post-baptismal sin and forgiveness; postponement of baptism; conflict in the church over rebaptism of those baptized by heretics and schismatics; and the movement away from believer's baptism to infant baptism.

Although the role of faith may have been minimized in the writings about baptism considered in this paper, the expression of faith through what became known as the second baptism, or the baptism of blood, was extolled. Tertullian made the observation that “the blood of Christians is the seed” of the church (Ap. 50.13).⁸² Cyprian himself endured the second baptism when he became the first bishop in North Africa to shed “the blood of martyrdom” (Vit. Cyp.). Each of these milites Christi, soldiers of Christ, followed in the footsteps of the early North African Christians, the Scillitan martyrs, and fulfilled his or her sacramentum, the oath of allegiance to Christ.

⁸¹Finn, 12.

⁸²This axiom proved true when the suffering of Perpetua and her companions led to the attraction of their jailer Pudens to their faith (*Pass. Pert.* 9.1, 16.4, 21.1).

WERE THE FIRST BAPTISTS SACRAMENTALISTS?

DR. LLOYD HARSCH*

From their earliest days, Christians have expressed their understanding of theology and polity into confessions of faith and doctrinal treatises. Baptists have been no exception to this practice, particularly when stating their views on baptism. Recently, a dispute has arisen among Baptists regarding the how the first Baptists understood the purpose of baptism.

It has long been a commonly accepted belief that Baptists observe ordinances, not sacraments. Within the past decade, some Baptists have questioned the historical accuracy of that belief and introduced a new perspective on the ordinances. Known as Baptist Sacramentalists, these advocates assert that early Baptists were more sacramental in their understanding of baptism than has been commonly accepted among modern Baptists. They contend that this view was lost in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, only to be recovered in the latter part of the twentieth century.¹

Two leading North American advocates of Baptist Sacramentalism are Americans Philip E. Thompson and Stanley K. Fowler. Fowler is Professor of Theology at Heritage Theological Seminary in Cambridge, Ontario, where he has taught for the past quarter of a century. He has received degrees from Purdue University (B.S.), Dallas Theological Seminary (Th.M.), and Wycliffe College University of Toronto (Th.D.).² Fowler's comprehensive work, *More Than a Symbol: The British Baptist Recovery of Baptismal Sacramentalism*, is the leading authority on the subject.

Thompson earned his degrees from Mars Hill College (B.A.), Union Theological Seminary in Virginia (M.Div.) and Emory University (Ph.D.) and is currently Associate Professor of Systematic Theology and Christian Heritage at North American Baptist Seminary in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.³ He has written several articles on the issue and is

*Dr. Lloyd Harsch is Associate Professor of Church History at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

¹Stanley K. Fowler, *More Than a Symbol: The British Baptist Recovery Baptismal Sacramentalism*, with a Foreword by William H. Brackney, Studies in Baptist History and Thought Series (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2002), 4.

²Heritage Theological Seminary, "Heritage Faculty," [world wide web page online]; available from http://www.heritage-theo.edu/Faculty/Stan_Fowler.html; accessed 8 March 2004; Internet.

³North American Baptist Seminary, "Faculty," [world wide web page online]; available from <http://www.nabs.edu/academics/index.php?id=71&entryid=48>; accessed 31 October 2004; Internet.

one of the series editors of the “Studies in Baptist History and Thought”, published by Paternoster Press, which produced *More Than a Symbol*.

William H. Brackney, in his foreword to *More Than a Symbol*, concisely describes the viewpoint of this emerging movement.

[Fowler’s] thesis is that in the twentieth century leading British Baptist pastors and theologians recovered an understanding of baptism that connected experience with soteriology, and focused on the forgiveness of sins rather than a witness of the completed experience of union with Christ.⁴

The two sources for information on the theological perspective of early Baptists are their confessions of faith and their doctrinal writings. This paper will first examine early Baptist confessions of faith, followed by a study of select doctrinal writings of some of the earliest Baptists and their detractors. The focus will be upon the ordinance of baptism because that was the subject on which Baptists spent the most time delineating their beliefs.

DEFINITION OF ORDINANCE AND SACRAMENT

Augustus H. Strong describes the traditionally accepted Baptist position by distinguishing the meaning of “symbol,” “rite,” and “ordinance.”

A *symbol* is the sign, or visible representation, of an invisible truth or idea . . . A *rite* is a symbol which is employed with regularity and sacred intent. Symbols become rites when thus used. . . An *ordinance* is a symbolic rite which sets forth the central truths of the Christian faith, and which is of universal and perpetual obligation. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are rites which have become ordinances by the specific command of Christ and by their inner relation to the essential truths of his kingdom. No ordinance is a sacrament in the Romanist sense of conferring grace; but, as the *sacramentum* was the oath taken by the Roman soldier to obey his commander even unto death, so Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are sacraments, in the sense of vows of allegiance to Christ our Master.⁵

Baptists observe baptism because Jesus ordained their observance, not to receive an additional measure of grace.

The term “sacrament” conveys different meanings within the various Christian denominations. Broadly defined, “sacraments are acts of worship that are understood by the worshipers to give access to an intimate union with the divine and to be efficacious for

⁴William H. Brackney, forward to *More Than a Symbol: The British Baptist Recovery Baptismal Sacramentalism*, by Stanley K. Fowler, Studies in Baptist History and Thought Series (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2002), xiii.

⁵Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology: A Compendium Designed for the Use of Theological Students*, 3 volumes in 1 (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1907), 930.

salvation.”⁶ Fowler states that “to say that baptism is ‘sacramental’ is to say that it mediates the experience of salvific union with Christ, i.e., that one submits to baptism as a penitent sinner in order to experience the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, rather than as a confirmed disciple in order to bear witness to a past experience of union with Christ.”⁷ Therefore, *More Than a Symbol* is an apt title for his work since he argues that baptism was more than a symbol to early British Baptists. It is the efficaciousness for salvation that Baptists have generally opposed.

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

The majority of Baptists’ earliest writings focused primarily on the proper subject and mode of baptism, with little space given to how God operated within the ordinance. Therefore, doctrinal statements that do expound on the meaning of baptism carry substantial weight. In addition, Fowler observes that “ordinance” and “sacrament” were used interchangeably by early Baptist writers. Because of this, he argues that a sacramental meaning cannot be dismissed simply due to the replacement of term “sacrament” with “ordinance.”⁸

General Baptists

John Smyth is credited with forming the first congregation from which the General Baptists eventually emerge. His congregation cannot truly be considered Baptist since it did not practice believer’s baptism by immersion. However, since the movement which he began eventually adopted immersion, the views of these early proto-Baptists can be instructive.

In 1610, Smyth came to the conclusion that he should not have baptized himself and sought membership with the Waterlander Mennonites in Amsterdam.⁹ To that end, the Mennonites requested that Smyth’s congregation review their confession, drawn up in 1580 by Lubbert Gerrits and Hans de Ries.

The result was almost total agreement with the confession. Article 30 relates to baptism. Fowler focuses on the last sentence of the article:

⁶Mircea Eliade, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1987), s.v. “Sacraments: Christian Sacraments,” by Monika K. Hellwig.

⁷Fowler, 6.

⁸Fowler, 14.

⁹William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1959; rev. ed., 1969), 97-102. Background information comes from this source unless otherwise noted.

The whole dealing in the outward visible baptism of water, setteth before the eyes, witnesseth and signifieth, the Lord Jesus doth inwardly baptize the repentant, faithful man, in the laver of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, washing the soul from all pollution and sin, by the virtue and merit of his bloodshed; and by the power and working of the Holy Ghost, the true heavenly, spiritual, living Water, cleanseth the inward evil of the soul, and maketh it havenly, spiritual, and living, in true righteousness or goodness. Therefore, the baptism of water leadeth us to Christ, to his holy office in glory and majesty; and admonisheth us not to hang only upon the outward, but with holy prayer to mount upward, and to beg of Christ the good thing signified.

Fowler suggests that the phrase “leadeth us to Christ” implies a vital connection between baptism and the person’s experience of salvation, which for him indicates a sacramental understanding of baptism.¹⁰ However, it seems more in context to see the connection as symbolic. The powerful imagery of baptism illustrates what has already happened (witnesseth and signifieth). It leads one to Jesus and encourages the one baptized not to rely upon the outward symbol of baptism as the anchor of one’s faith, but to earnestly seek a deeper relationship with the risen Savior.

General Baptists in London responded to the growing Quaker influence among their ranks by issuing as their own, a confession previously prepared by Thomas Lover, *The True Gospel-Faith Declared According to the Scriptures*.¹¹ Article XII states: “That God gives his Spirit to believers dipped through the prayer of faith and laying on of hands.” Fowler is uncertain of its meaning, suggesting that while the phrase may describe one’s initial salvation, it might also relate baptism to a further empowering of the Holy Spirit.¹² A more likely context is an expression of the emerging Six Principle movement which would soon become prevalent among General Baptists. Six Principle Baptists used Hebrews 6.1-2 as a basis for their practice of laying hands on new members for the reception of the Holy Spirit. The six principles are: repentance, faith, baptism, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, eternal life.

The General Assembly of General Baptists issued the *Standard Confession* in 1660 to calm the fears of the king of the newly restored monarchy, Charles II.¹³ Fowler suggests a connection between the laying on of hands and baptism as a means of sanctification.¹⁴ The portion of the confession in question (Article XII) reads:

¹⁰Fowler, 13.

¹¹Lumpkin, 188-95.

¹²Fowler, 14.

¹³Lumpkin, 219-35.

¹⁴Fowler, 15-16.

That it is the duty of all such who are believers *Baptized*, to draw nigh unto God in submission to that principle of Christs Doctrine, to wit, Prayer and Laying on of Hands, that they may receive the promise of the holy spirit, . . . whereby they may *mortifie the deeds of the body*, . . . and live in all things answerable to their professed intentions, . . .

This connection seems tenuous. The laying on of hands was an encouragement to live by the Holy Spirit's power whose coming was promised by Jesus (John 14.26).

One year after the Particular Baptists issued their *Second London Confession* (1677), General Baptists set forth their *Orthodox Creed*.¹⁵ Written to counter Matthew Caffyn's Hoffmanite Christology, the confession spends considerable time on the trinity. It also loosely follows the *Westminster Confession* (see below). Using "sacrament" and "ordinance" interchangeably, the confession states in Article XXVIII:

Baptism is an ordinance of the new testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, to be unto the party baptized, or dipped, a sign of our entrance into the covenant of grace, and ingrafting into Christ, and into the body of Christ, which is his church; and of remission of sin in the blood of Christ, and of our fellowship with Christ, in his death and resurrection, and of our living, or rising to newness of life.

Fowler acknowledges that there is no sacramental meaning here.¹⁶

Particular Baptists

England in the 1640s was in turmoil. Civil war was breaking out between King Charles I and Parliament. It was during this time that seven Particular Baptist congregations issued the *First London Confession*.¹⁷ Modeled after the Separatist Ancient Church's *True Confession*, it is the first confession to specify immersion as the proper mode of baptism and uses "ordinance" in place of "sacrament".

Of even greater importance is the revision of the confession in 1646. This revision was presented to Parliament in the hope of receiving legal toleration. In spite of this, the article on baptism is even clearer on the symbolic nature of baptism.

THAT the way and manner of dispensing this ordinance, is dipping or plunging the body under water; it being a sign, must answer the things signified, which is, that interest the saints have in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ: And that as certainly as the body is buried under water, and risen again, so certainly shall the bodies of the saints be raised by the power of Christ, in the day of the resurrection, to reign with Christ.¹⁸

¹⁵Lumpkin, 295-334.

¹⁶Fowler, 19.

¹⁷Lumpkin, 144-71.

This is particularly significant when this edition is compared with the *True Confession* on which it is modeled. The *True Confession* (Article 35) describes baptism as “signes and seales of Gods euerlasting couenant, representing and offring to all the receiuers, but exhibiting only to the true beleeuers the Lord Iesus Christ and all his benefits vnto righteousness, sanctification and eternall lyfe, through faith in his name to the glorie and prayse of God.”¹⁹

In order to present Particular Baptists in the best possible light to Parliament, one would expect that baptism would be described in clearly Calvinian terms. Instead, the phraseology is quite different and clearly symbolic.

Scarcity of copies and ignorance of the document coupled with a desire to show doctrinal unity with their fellow Dissenters in the face of renewed persecution during Charles II's reign led Particular Baptists to pen the *Second London Confession* in 1677.²⁰ Its chief editor/author was Benjamin Keach and was modeled after the Presbyterian's *Westminster Confession of Faith* as modified by the Congregationalists in the *Savoy Confession*.

The *Savoy Confession* is a modification of the *Westminster Confession* as amended by Parliament. For the most part, changes made at Savoy were retained by the Baptists who then made additional alterations. Most of the changes are minor editorial modifications where some sections are reworded, merged, rearranged or added for clarification or emphasis.

The Savoy closely mirrors Westminster regarding the sacraments. The Second London diplomatically renames chapter XXVIII, “Of the Sacraments,” as “Of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.” However, it omits sections 1, 2, 3, and 5 which refer to the sacramental elements and their meaning.

The Second London changes references to baptism as a “sign and seal of the Covenant of Grace” to a “sign of his fellowship with [Christ], in his death and resurrection” (XXIX.1). It rearranges sections 2-4, restricting the recipients to adult believers only and presenting immersion in water as the correct method. The Savoy and Westminster allow pouring or sprinkling. The Second London also omits sections 5-7 which state that it is a sin to omit baptism, that it does convey grace, and is given only once in life.

Fowler acknowledges the importance of any changes in the Westminster or Savoy made by the Baptists. He notes the change from “sacrament” to “ordinance” and the clear

¹⁸“First London Confession of Faith - 1646 Edition” [world wide web page online]; available from <http://www.geocities.com/sovgracenet/1646.html>; accessed 10 March 2004; Internet.

¹⁹Lumpkin, 79-97.

²⁰Ibid., 235-95.

omission of sacramental language.²¹ In response, he reminds his readers that these terms were used interchangeably by Baptists of that era and cautions that this change not lead to an “assumption that there is a conscious rejection of any sacramental idea.”²² He then notes that the Baptists retained the spiritual presence language when describing the Lord’s Supper. Since this is not a purely symbolic understanding of this ordinance, he argues unconvincingly that “there is no reason to think that an instrumental understanding of baptism would be foreign to the mind-set of the confession.”²³

DOCTRINAL WRITINGS

Baptists began writing specifically about baptism in the 1640s. The earliest writings focused primarily on the proper subject and mode of baptism, with little space given to how God operated within the ordinance. However, doctrinal statements that expound on the purpose of baptism lie buried within this larger discussion and deserve close attention.

The first such work in English was Edward Barber’s 1641 work, *A Small Treatise of Baptisme, or, Dipping: Wherein is Clearely Shewed that the Lord Christ Ordained Dipping for Those Only that Professe Repentance and Faith*.²⁴ This General Baptist’s brief monograph initiated a pamphlet war on the subject. Parliament’s authorization of the Westminster Assembly in 1643 opened the door to an even wider discussion on the topic.

While the first generation of Baptists present an initial glimpse of foundational Baptist theology, the second generation will provide a maturing view and providing an indication of the trajectory of Baptist thought on the issue. After examining three first generation Baptists, two leading second generation Baptists will be studied. These latter writers are both claimed by either implication or direct argument as sacramentalists by proponents of Baptist sacramentalism.

Edward Barber

Edward Barber described himself as a “Citizen and Merchant-Taylor of London; late Prisoner, for denying the sprinkling of Infants . . .”²⁵ He argues forcefully that the only

²¹Fowler, 14-15.

²²Ibid., 15.

²³Ibid., 17.

²⁴Lumpkin, William L., *A History of Immersion: Scanning Christian History to Show that Immersion Has Ordinarily Been Recognized as the Normal Mode of Baptism* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1962), 33-34.

²⁵Edward Barber, *A Small Treatise of Baptisme, or Dipping. Wherein Is Cleerely shewed that the Lord Christ Ordained Dipping for those only that professe Repentance and Faith* ([London]: np, 1641), [vi].

proper subjects for baptism are believers. “Thus it is cleere, that the Institutions of Christ, as also the practise of the Apostles, concerning Dipping, was only to administer it upon such, and such onely as did manifest faith and Repentance, desiring it, and this is cleere in the Apostles words, Heb. 6.1.2.”²⁶ Barber emphasizes that the proper subjects for baptism are “persons of yeares” (7) and “a Beleever of ripe yeeres” (26), not infants.

If taken out of context, some of his comments can be misunderstood as supporting a sacramental view. Barber states, “God doth by this holy ordinance, assure, and manifest, that he hath washed us from all our sinnes, by the blood of Jesus Christ, Acts 22.16. And doth truly and visably receive us into the Covenant of grace, . . .”²⁷ However, the context shows that Barber’s intent was to demonstrate that baptism signifies something that has already taken place. He later describes “dipping of Infants” as “that false Constitution of Rome to beget grace”.²⁸ This clearly separates grace from baptism.

Of baptism, Barber states that “their outward washing is but a signe . . .”, not a seal of the a covenant of grace.²⁹ He unambiguously asserts that “the faithfull . . . ought to dip those, and those onely that profess repentance, and faith at the command of Jesus Christ; and that because Christ hath commanded it, Matth. 28.19, 20.”³⁰ In addition, Barber uses the term “ordinance” throughout his work. He never refers to baptism as a sacrament.

This inaugural work does not does not present a sacramental view of baptism. To the contrary, it sets the stage for subsequent, stately non-sacramental essays.

Thomas Lamb

Thomas Lamb (or Lambe) was a chandler and soap-boiler who later became pastor of the General Baptist congregation at Bell Alley in London.³¹ He is also one of the earliest General Baptists to write on baptism by immersion.³² Two of his extant works are written debates on baptism published by his critics. They were printed in 1644 and 1645, in the earliest years of Baptist life.

²⁶Ibid., 3-4.

²⁷Ibid., 11.

²⁸Ibid., 12.

²⁹Ibid., 14.

³⁰Ibid., 19.

³¹Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978; reprinted 1992), 71, 112.

³²William H. Brackney, *Historical Dictionary of the Baptists*. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1999), 247.

In both of these discussions, Lamb is criticized for his non-sacramental understanding of baptism. In *The Anabaptists Groundwork for Reformation*, Lamb spars with John Etherington. The arguments deal with the subject and mode of baptism but give a clear indication of their views on what happens either before or during baptism. Lamb contends that baptizands described in the Bible “did professe they had justifying faith.”³³ He later states that believers “must manifest repentance for every evill known, before they be received to baptism.”³⁴

Lamb is clear that baptism be administered only to those who have already experienced salvation. Etherington is equally clear that baptism conveys saving grace to the recipient, though not in the Catholic sense where baptism is necessary to salvation. He remarks, “whosoever is so circumcised, or baptized, hath put on Christ, is regenerate, and shall be saved.”³⁵

In *The Lawfulness of Infants Baptisme*, Robert Fage lists, then responds to, Lamb’s views on baptism. To Lamb’s claim that infants were not fit subjects for baptism because they could not confess their sins, Fage asserts that “submission to Baptisme was itselfe a Confession of sin, and profession of Repentance . . .”³⁶ Fage further asserts that “*being* beleevers Infants *profession of faith and repentance may be appropriated unto them visibly . . .*”³⁷

The discussion then shifts to the proper understanding of the covenant of grace. For Lamb, one entered the covenant of grace when one intentionally placed one’s faith in Jesus for salvation. He asserts that baptizing infants “overthrows the nature of the covenant of grace, because persons have interest therein no otherwise then by faith . . . anything else concluded so, makes the promise or covenant void.”³⁸ This echoes an earlier Particular Baptist, Thomas Kilcop (or Killcop), who discounted “that the child thus baptised is regenerate and borne anew: and that Jesus Christ hath sanctifi[ed] the river Jordan, and all

³³John Etherington and Thomas Lamb, *The Anabaptists Ground-work for Reformation, or, New Planting of Churches, That no man, woman, nor child, may be baptized, but such as have justifying Faith, and doe make profession thereof, before, to the Baptizer, Found false, with all things depending thereon*. (London: M. Simmons; Imprimatut: James Cranford, 1644), 4.

³⁴Ibid., 10.

³⁵Ibid., 24.

³⁶Robert Fage, Jr. *The Lawfulness of Infants Baptisme. Or an Answer to Thomas Lamb his eight Arguments, entitled, ‘The unlawfulness of Infants Baptisme.’ And may serve also to the false minors, an old out-worne Arguments in the late booke of C. Paul Hobson, till a more particular and compleat Answer come forth to anatomise the fallacies of the said Booke, intituled, ‘The fallasie of Infants Baptisme’* (N.p.: W. Wilson, 1645), 7.

³⁷Ibid., 12 (emphasis original).

³⁸Ibid., 9-10.

other waters to the washing away of sins, which is horrible blasphemy, attributing that to water which is peculiar to the blood of Christ.”³⁹

Fage responds by restating a sacramental understanding of the covenant of grace. Infants are part of the covenant of grace because “*when God draws a people from the world into fellowship with himselfe, their little children are distinguished from the world, as so many perfecters of the praise of God . . . and are owned freely in his Son Christ before faith or workes manifested actually in their owne persons.*”⁴⁰ The same emphasis on the sacramental understanding of the covenant of grace undergirds a reaction to Francis Cornwall’s defense of believer’s baptism.⁴¹

Fage concludes by stating: “*Those who deny the infants of beleevers thus to be in Gods visible house, must necessarily hold justification not to goe before actuall faith, which is Arminius tenet, or deny originall sin, or conclude al infants damned, or else that those who are saved, are saved some other way then by the Gospel.*”⁴² As a General Baptist, Lamb did in fact adhere to an Arminian understanding of scripture, but even Particular Baptists believed that faith preceded justification.

It seems clear that Lamb’s critics believed they needed to emphasize the sacramental nature of baptism when responding to his arguments. This would hardly have been necessary if he held a sacramental position.

John Tombes

John Tombes was an Anglican priest who became a Particular Baptist pastor.⁴³ As he wrestled with the issue of infant baptism, he submitted his objections to the Westminster

³⁹Thomas Kilcop, *A Short Treatise of Baptisme: Wherein is declared that only Christ’s Disciples or beleevers are to be baptised. And that the baptising of Infants hath no footing* (1640), 5-6. Handwritten copy of original in possession of the Rare Books Collection of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

⁴⁰Fage, 11 (emphasis original).

⁴¹*A Declaration against Anabaptists: To stop the Prosecution fo their Errours, falsly pretended to be a Vindication of the Royall Commission of King Jesus, as they call it. Briefly and fully answering all their Allegations, and clearly proving the Anabaptisticall Doctrine to be against the glory of God, the honour of Christ and his Church, against the Covenant of grace, and against the word of God, and priviledges of the Church made over to them by promise; And also against the Solemne League and Covenant of the three Kingdomes. In Answer to a booke, by Francis Cornwall presented to the house of Commons, on Friday last, for which he is committed.* London: Ja:Cranford; Printed for R.W., 1644.

⁴²Fage, 11 (emphasis in original).

⁴³William Cathcart, *The Baptist Encyclopædia: A Dictionary of the Doctrines, Ordinances, Usages, Confessions of Faith, Sufferings, Labors, and Successes, and of the General History of the Baptist Denomination in All Lands: with Numerous Biographical Sketches of Distinguished American and Foreign Baptists, and a Supplement* (Philadelphia: L. H. Everts, 1881), 2:1156-7.

Assembly of Divines for consideration. While the Assembly took little notice of his efforts, others responded vigorously to his positions.

Tombes directs his arguments to the notion that infants are participants in the “Gospel-covenant” and are fit recipients of baptism. In the process, he gives a useful historical overview of who should be baptized and when. As with others, Tombes believes the covenant of grace is established when adults are saved by grace through faith.

Tombes is quite comfortable referring to baptism as a sacrament. The issue is what he means by that term. He bluntly states, “The grace of God is not tied to Sacraments, neither do Sacraments give grace by the work done, and therefore grace is not restrained, though Sacraments be never granted, . . .”⁴⁴ His seventh argument against infant baptism lists four errors which the practice birthed or fostered. The first two of these are:

1. That Baptisme conferres grace by the work done.
2. That Baptisme is Regeneration.⁴⁵

Tombes asserts the traditional understanding of ‘sacrament’ as inadequate. He notes, “And here I think it is to be minded, that the usuall description of a Sacrament, and such as are like to it, That it is a *visible signe of invisible grace*, hath occasioned the misunderstanding of both Sacraments, as if they signed a divine benefit, not our duty, to which in the first place the Institution had respect.”⁴⁶ It appears obvious that while Tombes uses the term ‘sacrament’, he understands it to mean ‘ordinance.’

Stephen Marshall⁴⁷ and Thomas Blake⁴⁸ voice the same complaint against Baptists such as Andrew Ritor and Tombes respectively. William Hussey emphasizes his belief about the sacramental nature of baptism throughout his response to Tombes. “Now, sacramentally men are ingrafted into Christ by baptism, . . .”⁴⁹ Hussey also highlights his contention that

⁴⁴John Tombes, *An Exercitation About Infant Baptisme; Presented in certaine Papers, to the Chair-man of a Committee of the Assembly of Divines, Selected to consider of that Argument, in the years, 1643, and 1644. With some few Emendations, Additions, and an Answer to one new Objection.* Translated out of Latine, by the author. (London: M.S. for George Whittington, 1646), 8.

⁴⁵Tombes, 30.

⁴⁶Ibid., 34 (emphasis original).

⁴⁷Stephen Marshall, (B D. Minister of the Gospel, at Finchfield in Effex), *A Sermon of the Baptizing of Infants. Preached in the Abbey-Church at Westminster, at the Morning Lecture, appointed by the Honorable House of Common.* (London: Printed by Richard Cotes for Stephen Bowtell, 1644).

⁴⁸Thomas Blake, *Mr. Blakes Answer, to Mr. Tombes his Letter. In Vindication of the Birth-Privilege, or Covenant holinesse of Beleevers, and their Issue, in the time of Gospel. Together with the right of Infants to Baptisme* (London: Printed by R. L. for Abel Roper, 1646).

children of believers belong to the covenant of grace. “Now I conceive both circumcision and baptism doe signe or seale sacramentally, and by divine institution; . . .”⁵⁰ Hussey counters Tombes’s conception of baptism by stating it cannot be symbolic and repeats this assertion in several other places. Hussey would not go to such great lengths to redefine Tombes if it was not clearly understood that Tombes was advocating a non-sacramental position. In fact, Hussey acknowledges Tombes’s non-sacramental position outright when he complains that Tombes denies “sacraments to be visible signes of grace, . . .” and that “Mr. Tombes doth prove that men must confesse their faith before baptisme, because baptisme is a signe that the baptized sheweth himself a disciple, and confesseth himselfe a disciple.”⁵¹

Benjamin Keach

Benjamin Keach was a multi-faceted leader among Particular Baptists. He wrote on a wide variety of subjects, including baptism, produced catechetical works for new believers and was the primary shaper of the *Second London Confession of Faith*. Strongly Calvinian in his theology, Keach would be a likely prospect for bringing Calvin’s sacramental theology into Baptist life. Fowler sees four areas where “modest but clear evidence for a sacramental understanding of baptism” can be found in Keach’s monograph on baptism, *Gold Refin’d; or Baptism in its Primitive Purity*.⁵²

First, Fowler states that when Keach refers to “the special ends of this holy Sacrament”⁵³ that Keach does not contrast ordinance and sacrament. The passage which Fowler cites is in the chapter title which reads in whole, “Proving Believers the only true Subjects of Baptism from the special ends of this holy Sacrament.”⁵⁴ There are several problems with this modest evidence. Keach regularly employs the language of his opponents when addressing them directly. Such seems to be the case here. When describing his own views, Keach employs much different language. In the final chapter, where Keach

⁴⁹William Hussey, *An Answer to Mr. Tombes his Scepticall Examination of Infants-Baptisme: Wherein Baptisme is declared to ingraft us into Christ, before any preparation: And the Covenant of the Gospel to Abraham and the Gentiles is proved to be the same, extended to the Gentiles children, as well as to Abrahams: Together with the Reason, why Baptize children, is not so plainly set down in the Gospel, as Circumcise children, in the Law, and yet the Gospel more plain then the La.* (London: [Printed for] John Saywell, 1646), iii-iv.

⁵⁰Hussey, 15.

⁵¹Hussey, 57.

⁵²Fowler, 29.

⁵³Benjamin Keach, *Gold Refin’d; or Baptism in its Primitive Purity* (London: Nathaniel Crouch, 1689), 78. While type face was updated to a modern font in the following quotations, original spelling and capitalization have been retained.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

summarizes his points, he uses “ordinance” almost exclusively, amounting to some twenty-eight times.⁵⁵ In contrast, “sacrament” appears only nine times: six in quotes of others and three as Keach addresses paedobaptists in their own terms. Keach then proceeds to explain that the special ends of baptism are outward representations of what has already taken place in salvation. He states, “Another End of Baptism is, (as one well observes) to evidence present Regeneration; whereof, saith he, it is a lively Sign or Symbol — Hence ‘tis called *the Washing of Regeneration*; . . .”⁵⁶

Keach’s use of “washing of regeneration” suggests to Fowler a second way in which Keach may be sacramental. However, for Keach, baptism is the “washing” that symbolizes that one’s sins were already washed away at salvation. His discourses on believers as the proper subjects of baptism bear this out.

Fowler supports his third point, that for Keach, “baptism looks forward to salvation as its goal,”⁵⁷ by quoting parts of two paragraphs. Here Keach lists three promises to believers seen in baptism: Jesus’ presence, salvation (remission of sins) and the Holy Spirit. He concludes with, “See what great Promises are made to Believers in *Baptism*.”⁵⁸ Earlier, Keach discusses Abraham, circumcision and the covenant of grace. He argues that circumcision was a seal of a pre-existing faith. “Circumcision was only a Seal to *Abraham’s* Faith, or a Confirmation of that Faith he had long before he was Circumcised; . . .”⁵⁹ As for a seal in the New Testament, Keach contends, “we know nothing called a Seal of the New Covenant, but the holy Spirit, which the Saints were said to be sealed with after they believed . . . unto the day of Redemption; God by setting his Seal upon us assures us that we are his, and that we shall have Eternal Life.”⁶⁰ In fact, in the sentence prior to the section Fowler quotes, Keach calls baptism “a Badg of Christian Profession . . .”⁶¹ Keach does not see baptism looking forward to salvation. On the contrary, baptism looks *back* to one’s salvation.

Fowler’s last assertion stems from Keach’s positive assessment of a portion of Puritan Stephen Charnock’s work on regeneration. Fowler correctly observes that Keach was arguing that baptism does not mechanically bring regeneration to its subjects. Fowler concludes that Keach “argued this point, with Charnock’s help, by asserting that the true

⁵⁵ Ibid., 171-83.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 83 (emphasis original).

⁵⁷ Fowler, 29.

⁵⁸ Keach, *Gold Refin’d*, 173, (emphasis original).

⁵⁹ Ibid., 104, (emphasis original).

⁶⁰ Ibid., 106.

⁶¹ Ibid., 173.

way in which baptism works is as an instrument of the Spirit who sovereignly employs it in the regeneration of conscious believers.”⁶²

While this may be Charnock’s position, it is not Keach’s. Keach immediately follows this quote with, “*Amesius saith, outward Baptism cannot be a Physical Instrument of Infusing Grace, because it bath it not in any wise in it self.*”⁶³ Keach quotes a portion of Charnock’s passage again later, noting that adults are the proper subjects for baptism because they have already experienced regeneration. Keach contends:

8. Has God ordained Baptism to be an Ordinance to save the Souls of any Persons, either the Adult or Infants? is the *Opus operatum* of Baptism, think you, a likely way or means to beget or bring forth Children to Christ, or make Disciples of them? Baptism signifies no thing (it being but a Sign) where the inward Grace signified by it is wanting.⁶⁴

Keach is not approving Charnock’s sacramental theology. His pleasure is in finding an ally who discounts the efficaciousness of infant baptism on all recipients. For Keach, grace is conveyed in salvation by faith prior to baptism. He explains: “The Apostle in the fourth of the *Romans* shews, that *Abraham* was not justified by Works, nor by Circumcision, but by Faith, which he had long before he was circumcised; and so but a Seal or Confirmation of that Faith he had before, and to assure him of the Truth of the Promises made to him and to his Carnal and Spiritual Seed.”⁶⁵

Removing all doubt about his position, Keach bluntly states: “Doth Baptism confer Grace or regenerate the Child? Though some have ignorantly asserted that, yet we find many of you of another mind.”⁶⁶ Later on he asserts, “Baptism cannot be a Fundamental of Salvation . . .”⁶⁷ This calls into question Thompson’s assertion, largely based upon Keach, that “the Baptists esteemed the ordinances called sacraments as the means of grace appointed by God to strengthen the faith of believers, . . .”⁶⁸ It is clear that Keach was not sacramental in his theology.

⁶²Fowler, 30.

⁶³Keach, *Gold Refin’d*, 129 (emphasis original).

⁶⁴ Ibid., 167.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 105.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 124.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 175.

⁶⁸Thompson, “People of the Free God”, 233.

Thomas Grantham

A pastor and messenger among General Baptists, Thomas Grantham is one of the more difficult writers to understand. His language seems clearly sacramental, a fact which Fowler and Thompson readily recognize. This is easily seen in Grantham's influential work, *Christianus Primitivus*, written in 1678. This volume expounded his theology in a systematic manner but requires careful reading to avoid misunderstanding the author's meaning.

Thompson draws upon Grantham almost exclusively in his article on how early Baptists viewed their relationship with adherents of other traditions.⁶⁹ In an earlier essay, Thompson makes wide-spread use of Keach and Grantham, particularly when examining early Baptists' understanding of the ordinances.⁷⁰ Fowler, writing at a later date, builds upon the foundation which Thompson laid.

Fowler quotes a section on the necessity of baptism which begins, "And thus was our Lord himself the chief founder of the Gospel in the Heavenly Doctrine of *Faith*, *Repentance* ann [sic] *Baptism for the remission of sins*."⁷¹ The phrase "baptism for the remission of sins" seems clearly sacramental.

The passage later continues with: "2. This Baptism is joyned with this Gospel repentance, that as repentance being now necessary to the admission of Sinners into the Church of Christ, even so Baptism being joyned thereto, by the will of God, is necessary to the same end."⁷² Fowler notes, "The impression given . . . is that repentance, faith, and baptism are all related to forgiveness and church membership in the same way."⁷³ However, Grantham's succeeding remarks focus on baptism as a necessary sign for membership in a local congregation. One could interpret Grantham to mean that just as repentance and faith are necessary for joining the universal church, so baptism is necessary for joining the visible church. Grantham notes the existence of universal and local expressions of the Church at the beginning of this part of the book.⁷⁴ With this understanding, baptism is not practiced in

⁶⁹Thompson, "New Question".

⁷⁰Thompson, "People of the Free God".

⁷¹Fowler, 27-28 cite of Grantham, Book II, part 2, chapter 1, section 5, page 19 (emphasis original).

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Fowler, 28.

⁷⁴Thomas Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus: or, the Ancient Christian Religion, in its Nature, Certainty, Excellency, and Beauty, (Internal and External) particularly Considered, Asserted, and Vindicated, from The many Abuses which have Invaded that Sacred Profession, by Humane Innovation, or pretended Revelation, Comprehending likewise The General Duties of Mankind, in their respective Relations; And Particularly, the Obedience of all Christians to Magistrates, And the Necessity of Christian-*

order to obtain the remission of sins, but in recognition that this act has already taken place. Repentance, faith and baptism are related, but not in the same way.

Thompson refers to a second description of regeneration by Grantham, in which the original reads:

*Of regeneration there are two parts; Mortification, and Vivification, that first is called burial with Christ; the second, a rising with Christ; the Sacrament of both these is Baptism, in which we are overwhelmed or buried, and after that do come forth and rise again; It may be said indeed, but Sacramentally, of all that are Baptized, that they are buried with Christ, and raised with him, yet really only of such as have true Faith, mark that!*⁷⁵

The problem here is that these are not Grantham's words. He is quoting Zanky's remarks regarding Colosians 2.12. Grantham notes that the language clearly suggests immersion, the application of which eludes Zanky. In immersion, "burial with Christ" and "rising with Christ" are vividly portrayed. Grantham comments, "strange it is that men of such wisdom should not be more consistent in their practise with their own Doctrine."⁷⁶

It must be acknowledged that Grantham makes free use of the term, "sacrament." He places a strong emphasis upon the necessity of the physical operation of the ordinances. Again, context is important. Grantham was writing to people for whom the term "sacrament" had meaning. He was also writing with one eye firmly on the Quakers, who spiritualized the ordinances, eschewing their practice. There can be a tendency to overstate one's position in order to drive home a point. In such a situation, the use of sacramental language is more understandable.

CONCLUSION

It is refreshing and encouraging to see Baptists actively examining and interacting with their heritage. As Thompson has suggested, I welcome further dialog on this issue.⁷⁷ He is correct when he states that understanding the past gives insight to the present. Too often we assume our theological positions spring fully formed out thin air or that all Baptists in all times have held the same beliefs as do modern Baptists.

It seems clear that from their infancy, Baptists have been non-sacramental in their understanding of baptism. Their confessions of faith intentionally distance themselves from the prevailing sacramental view. Early doctrinal writings are consistent with this stance.

Moderation about things Despicable in Matters of Religion, with Divers Cases of Conscience Discussed and Resolved (London: Francis Smith, 1678), 2-3.

⁷⁵Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus*, Book II, part 2, chapter 2, section 4, page 29 (emphasis in original to indicate quotation).

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Thompson, "People of the Free God", 223.

Lamb and Tombes, first generation General and Particular Baptists, are decidedly non-sacramental in meaning and application.

One point that Fowler repeatedly makes is that the terms “ordinance” and “sacrament” were used interchangeably by seventeenth-century Baptists. Therefore, one should not automatically rule out a sacramental understanding of the text. His point is well taken. However, the reverse is also true. Just because the terms were used interchangeably does not automatically imply that Baptists understood sacrament in the same way as did the Presbyterians or Congregationalists.

There are explanations other than a sacramentalism for retaining the term, sacrament. Keach often presents arguments in the sacramental language of his opponents. In some cases the journey from Anglican or Reformed Separatist to Particular Baptist was a continuing process. The nomenclature may not have advanced as quickly as the theology. Tombes is a good example of this. For others, sacramental theology may have been an issue with which they were still struggling. It is important to note in the trajectory of the Baptist movement that “sacrament” does fall out of usage, leaving “ordinance” as the pre-eminent term among Baptists.

Continued investigation will be significant for understanding Baptist identity and distinctives. Such studies have implications for the origins of modern Baptists. English Separatists, out of which Baptists emerged were Calvinistic. A sacramental view would have been quite natural for them as they brought their theology from their Separatist past into Baptist life. However, if as the evidence currently suggests, that even the earliest Baptists espoused a non-sacramental view, then the question arises, “From where did this theological modification come?”

Baptist Sacramentalists write confidently of a sacramental view of the ordinances among early British Baptists. Their contention that early Baptists espoused a sacramental view of baptism invites further study. However, based upon the evidence, it seems that support for a distinct sacramental theology emerging from seventeenth-century Baptists is lacking.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barber, Edward. *A Small Treatise of Baptisme, or Dipping. Wherein Is Cleerely shewed that the Lord Christ Ordained Dipping for those only that professe Repentance and Faith.* [London]: np, 1641.

Blake, Thomas. *Mr. Blakes Answer, to Mr. Tombes his Letter. In Vindication of the Birth-Priviledge, or Covenant holinesse of Beleevers, and their Issue, in the time of Gospel. Together with the right of Infants to Baptisme.* London: Printed by R. L. for Abel Roper, 1646.

Brackney, William H. Forward to *More Than a Symbol: The British Baptist Recovery Baptismal Sacramentalism*, by Stanley K. Fowler. Studies in Baptist History and Thought Series. Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2002.

Briggs, John H. Y. In *Baptists Around the World: A Comprehensive Handbook*, ed., Albert W. Wardin, 182-6. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995.

Cathcart, William. *The Baptist Encyclopædia: A Dictionary of the Doctrines, Ordinances, Usages, Confessions of Faith, Sufferings, Labors, and Successes, and of the General History of the Baptist Denomination in All Lands: with Numerous Biographical Sketches of Distinguished American and Foreign Baptists, and a Supplement*. Philadelphia: L. H. Everts, 1881.

A Declaration against Anabaptists: To stop the Prosecution fo [sic] their Errours, falsly pretended to be a Vindication of the Royall Commission of King Jesus, as they call it. Briefly and fully answering all their Allegations, and clearly proving the Anabaptisticall Doctrine to be against the glory of God, the honour of Christ and his Church, against the Covenant of grace, and against the word of God, and priviledges of the Church made over to them by promise; And also against the Soleme League and Covenant of the three Kingdomes. In Answer to a booke, by Francis Cornwall presented to the house of Commons, on Friday last, for which he is committed. London: Printed for R.W., 1644.

Eliade, Mircea, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1987. S.v. "Sacraments: Christian Sacraments," by Monika K. Hellwig.

Ellis, Christopher. "Baptism and the Sacramental Freedom of God." In *Reflections on the Water: Understanding God and the World through the Baptism of Believers*, ed. Paul S. Fiddes, 23-45. Oxford: Regent's Park College and Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing.

Etherington, John and Thomas Lamb. *The Anabaptists ground-work for Reformation, or, New Planting of Churches, That no man, woman, nor child, may be baptized, but such as have justifying Faith, and doe make profession thereof, before, to the Baptizer, Found false, with all things depending thereon*. London: M. Simmons; Imprimatut: James Cranford, 1644.

Fage, Robert, Jr. *The Lawfulness of Infants Baptisme. Or an Answer to Thomas Lamb his eight Arguments, entitled, 'The unlawfulness of Infants Baptisme.' And may serve also to the false minors, an old out-worne Arguments in the late booke of C. Paul hobson, till a more particular and compleat Answer come forth to anatomise the fallacies of the said Booke, intituled, 'The fallacie of Infants Baptisme'*. N.p.: W. Wilson, 1645.

"First London Confession of Faith - 1646 Edition" [world wide web page online]. Available from <http://www.geocities.com/sovgracenet/1646.html>. Accessed 10 March 2004. Internet.

Fowler, Stanley K. *More Than a Symbol: The British Baptist Recovery Baptismal Sacramentalism*. With a Foreword by William H. Brackney. Studies in Baptist History and Thought Series. Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2002.

Garrett, James Leo, Jr. *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*. 2 volumes. 2d ed. North Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL Press, 2000-2001.

Grantham, Thomas. *Christianismus Primitivus: or, the Ancient Christian Religion, in its Nature, Certainty, Excellency, and Beauty, (Internal and External) particularly Considered, Asserted, and Vindicated, from The many Abuses which have Invaded that Sacred Profession, by Humane Innovation, or pretended Revelation, Comprehending likewise The General Duties of Mankind, in their respective Relations; And Particularly, the Obedience of all Christians to Magistrates, And the Necessity of Christian-Moderation about things Despensible in Matters of Religion, with Divers Cases of Conscience Discussed and Resolved*. London: Francis Smith, 1678.

Heritage Theological Seminary. "Heritage Faculty" [world wide web page online]. Available from http://www.heritage-theo.edu/Faculty/Stam_Fowler.html. Accessed 8 March 2004. Internet.

Hussey, William. *An Answer to Mr. Tombes his Scepticall Examination of Infants-Baptisme: Wherein Baptisme is declared to ingraft us into Christ, before any preparation: And the Covenant of the Gospel to Abraham and the Gentiles is proved to be the same, extended to the Gentiles children, as well as to Abrahams: Together with the Reason, why Baptize children, is not so plainly set down in the Gospel, as Circumcise children, in the Law, and yet the Gospel more plain then the Law*. London: [Printed for] John Saywell, 1646.

Keach, Benjamin. *Gold Refin'd; or Baptism in its Primitive Purity*. London: Nathaniel Crouch, 1689.

Lumpkin, William L. *Baptist Confessions of Faith*. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1959; rev. ed., 1969.

_____. *A History of Immersion: Scanning Christian History to Show that Immersion Has Ordinarily Been Recognized as the Normal Mode of Baptism*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1962.

Kilcop, Thomas. *A Short Treatise of Baptisme: Wherein is declared that only Christ's Disciples or beleivers are to be baptised. And that the baptising of Infants hath no footing*. 1640. Handwritten copy of original in possession of the Rare Books Collection of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Marshall, Stephen (B D. Minister of the Gospel, at Finchingfield in Effex). *A Sermon of the Baptizing of Infants. Preached in the Abbey-Church at Westminster, at the Morning Lecture, appointed by the Honorable House of Commons*. London: Printed by Richard Cotes for Stephen Bowtell, 1644.

North American Baptist Seminary. "Faculty," [world wide web page online]; available from <http://www.nabs.edu/academics/index.php?id=71&entryid=48>; accessed 31 October 2004; Internet.

Payne, Ernest A. *The Baptist Union: A Short History*. London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1958.

R[itor], A[ndrew]. *A Treatise of the Vanity of Childish-Baptisme: Wherein the deficiency of the Baptisme of the Church of England is considered in five particulars thereof. And wherein also is proved, the Baptizing is Dipping, and Dipping Baptizing*. London: N.p., 1642.

Strong, Augustus Hopkins. *Systematic Theology: A Compendium Designed for the Use of Theological Students*. 3 volumes in 1. Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1907.

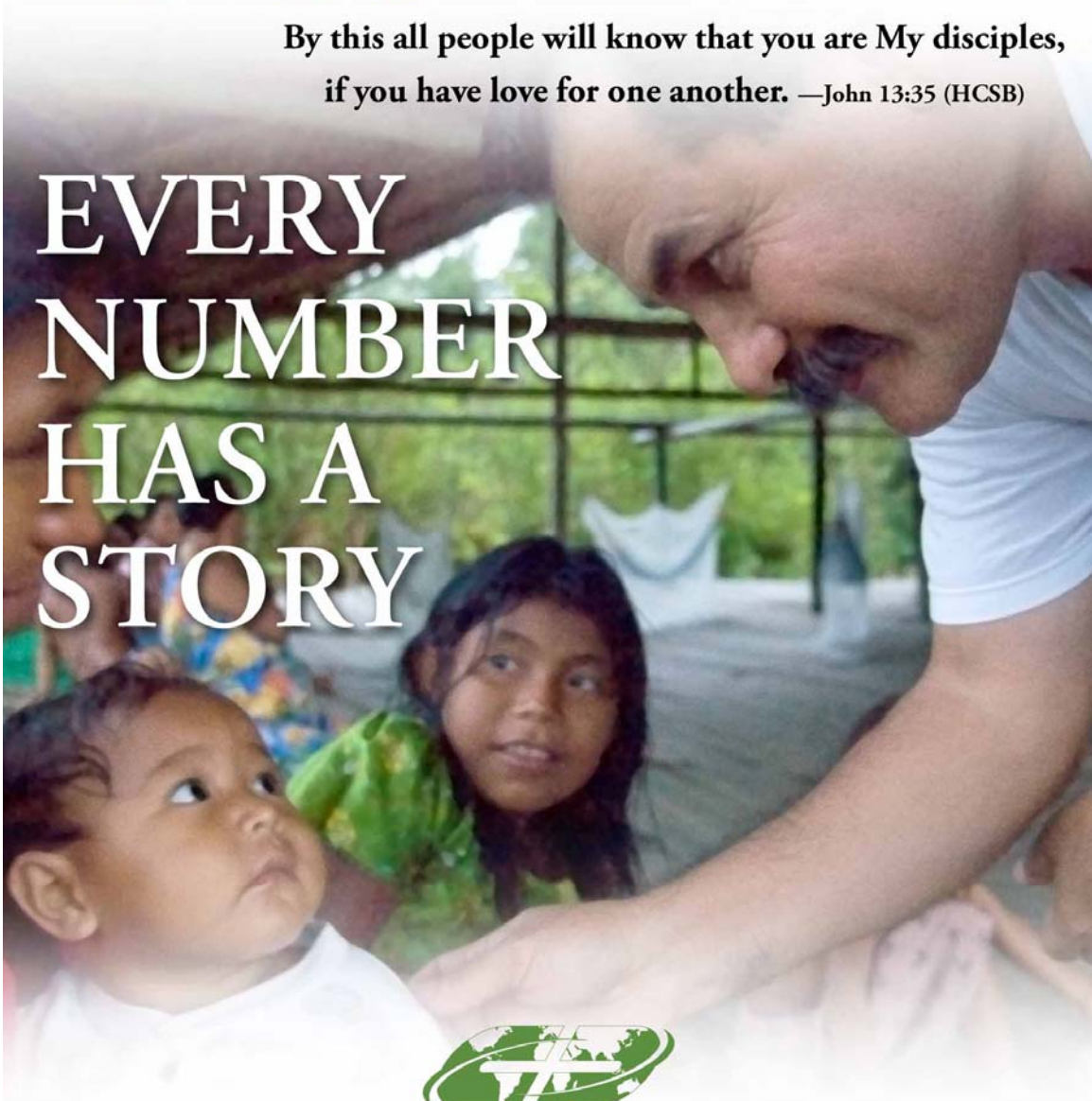
Tombes, John. *An Exercitation About Infant Baptisme; Presented in certaine Papers, to the Chair-man of a Committee of the Assembly of Divines, Selected to consider of that Argument, in the years, 1643, and 1644. With some few Emendations, Additions, and an Answer to one new Objection*. Translated out of Latine, by the author. London: M.S. for George Whittington, 1646.

Watts, Michael R. *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978; reprint 1992.

13:35

By this all people will know that you are My disciples,
if you have love for one another. —John 13:35 (HCSB)

EVERY
NUMBER
HAS A
STORY



COOPERATIVE PROGRAM

Love In Action

www.sbc.net/cp

INFANT BAPTISM & THE HALF-WAY COVENANT

CHRISTOPHER J. BLACK¹

INTRODUCTION

Believer's baptism may be the most prominent of Baptist distinctives, however, during the founding of America, when the Puritans held sway, infant baptism was the norm. The sacramental attitude toward baptism by the Puritans produced a dangerous schism in the American colonies. In 1662 the Christian leaders in New England created a document that would come to be known pejoratively² as the Half-way Covenant. This document would effectively change the course of the development of the burgeoning nation. Most leaders realized that some sort of compromise was necessary or the whole noble experiment might be lost. The desire to build an actual theocracy, free from "episcopal, legislative and monarchical approval" was failing.³ The situation was crying out for someone to do something. The solution eventually agreed upon was seen as a measure that would allow the theocracy to continue.

The new covenant was not decided upon easily or quickly. The road to compromise was a long and difficult path. Eventually, however, the vast majority came to realize that the New England Way was no longer viable. Effectively, the result was a new covenant that was a compromise half way between full- and non-membership in the Church. Kenneth Scott Latourette reports that even during the founding generations' lifetime few people held church membership: "In spite of the part which Christianity had in initiating and shaping the Thirteen Colonies, in 1750 the large majority of the white population were without a formal church connexion. It has been estimated, although this may be excessively low, that in 1750 only about five out of a hundred were members of churches."⁴ By the midway point of the

¹Christopher J. Black is a Ph.D. candidate (A.B.D.) at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He also serves as the Assistant Editor for the *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry*.

²Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity: Reformation to the Present, Volume II*, revised ed. (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1953, 1975; reprint, Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2005), 955.

³David A. Weir, *Early New England: A Covenanted Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 19, 23.

⁴Latourette, 954.

eighteenth century Colonial leaders were realizing that changes were needed if they were to save their society. The discussion in this article will offer a brief glimpse into the struggles early colonials had over the issue of baptism.

THE NEW ENGLAND CHURCH

The Puritans, believing in the autonomy of individual churches, instituted a church polity that would provide the freedom they sought. John Cotton dubbed this form of polity 'Congregational.' This system was integral to the New England Way.⁵ However, this new polity did not mean that each church was completely freestanding. The faithful needed a venue for covenanting with God, fellow believers, and society. The idea of the church, for the Puritans, grew from their traditional, Old England views of a national institution. "The notion of a particular church covenant emerged only slowly from the practice of England's comprehensive national church, and New England Puritans instinctively maintained that national element, even as they established particular churches."⁶ For the Puritans, the church, local and national, was instrumental for the proper functioning of society.

As exemplified in the Bay Colony, Ahlstrom defines the New England Way as resting "on the conviction that the entire commonwealth was intended to be as faithfully 'under God' as it could possibly be."⁷ This understanding manifested itself in three ways important to this discussion. First, the church was to function as the central conduit through which the civil authorities would affect society. Second, full church membership was reserved only for the regenerate. Third, only those who clearly demonstrated regeneration were accepted as full members of the church.

The church functioned as a means through which the civil authorities exercised their offices. Only full members were permitted the vote on church matters;⁸ and since the society was functioning as a theocracy, church membership included certain civic privileges. Not only was citizenship tied to church membership, but also, as Donna Campbell explains, members of the church would play an important role in the running of the town: "In each town, male church members could vote to elect 'selectmen' to run the town's day-to-day affairs, although town meetings were held to vote on legislation."⁹ To be outside the full membership of the church was to be outside of society.¹⁰

⁵Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 17.

⁶Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 38.

⁷Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 149.

⁸E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 54.

The church only permitted the elect to enter into full membership of the church. One of the most recognizable features of the New England Way was its emphasis on participation. The understanding was that true believers would show clearly demonstrable signs of their conversion. Harry Stout holds up John Cotton's 1636 sermon in Salem as an outline of the Puritan system. Since the Church was for the regenerate alone, the Church required that the existing membership demonstrate their personal experiential piety in order to enter into the membership of the church.¹¹ These visible saints were the only ones permitted full participation in the church.

Only those who were able to pass the scrutiny of the membership committee were permitted full membership. Robert Pope explains the seriousness of the membership process: "The 'morphology of conversion,' initially developed by English Puritan divines as a guide for individual souls, was transformed into a yardstick for measuring the faithful. Saving faith, as distinguished from historical faith—an intellectual assent to the doctrines of Christianity—and from a simple belief in Christ, was the achievement of man. No matter how well intentioned or how respectable, those who desired entry into the churches of New England had to wait for the Lord's quickening of the spirit." The interviewers rejected many who, despite good character and professions of faith, failed to clearly demonstrate a regenerate nature. Pope continues, "The Puritans readily admitted that testified regenerate membership was not an infallible test: dissemblers and hypocrites could and did breach the portals of the church, despite the probing questions of elders and members; and perhaps even some of the elect were left outside. But within human limits Congregationalists had done their best to separate the wheat from the chaff."¹²

Membership was important for one other reason, access to the two main sacraments of the church—baptism and the Lord's Supper. Both remained important parts of church life. Prior to the Reformation the sacraments were seen as conveying grace, but afterward Protestants held them as less salvific. Despite loosing the patina of salvation, however, the two sacraments retained much of their prior status.

The Lord's Supper remained much the same as before the Reformation. Even though they opposed any Anglican innovations when it came to the application or understanding of Communion, the doctrine of transubstantiation remained ever-present with the New England Puritans. For this reason, participation in the Lord's Supper was restricted to the church membership only.¹³

⁹Donna M. Campbell, "Puritanism in New England" *Literary Movements* [internet journal article]; <http://www.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/purdef.htm>; accessed 20 April 2006.

¹¹Stout, 19; John M. Mulder, "Half-Way Covenant," *The Westminster Handbook to Reformed Theology*, Donald K. McKim, ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 99.

¹²Robert G. Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant: Church Membership in Puritan New England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 5-6.

The other sacrament, baptism, became a much more hotly debated issue. Like the Lord's Supper, the institution of baptism retained much of its former importance throughout the Reformation. The sacrament, though no longer thought to be salvific, remained the embodiment of regeneration.¹⁴ The Puritans believed that their baptisms in infancy brought them into a relationship with the church and were somehow helpful in ushering them into the Kingdom later in life. For them, paedobaptism remained integral to church life. Within the restrictions of the New England Way, only church members were allowed to baptize their infants, which would be the source of trouble in generations to come.¹⁵

THE NEW ENGLAND DISSENTERS

Not everyone agreed with the way colonial life was evolving. Some stepped well outside the societal boundaries, while others made only minor moves. Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson were both banished for straying too far from the center of the covenant.¹⁶ In 1631, Williams arrived in the Bay Colony as the Boston Church minister. When he arrived he found that the church had not separated from the Church of England and had not repented of its past affiliation to the mother Church. By 1635, he had so continuously disrupted the peace of the colony that the General Court of Massachusetts moved to have him deported. In order to avoid a return trip to England, Williams fled, founding Providence, Rhode Island in 1636.¹⁷ Hutchinson was seen as an antinomian and a threat to the stability of the colonies. Her assertion that keeping the law was secondary for those under grace undermined the security of the embryonic colonies. She eventually was forced out of the colony into the wilderness. Noll places the threat presented by these dissidents into perspective:

As the history of Jonathan Edwards and the Great Awakening would show, Hutchinson's kind of grace-inspired conventualism, rather than Williams's moral scrupulosity, was always the most volatile threat to the Puritan scheme. Yet Williams and Hutchinson found out what later American dissidents would also discover: to strike at the reigning sacred synthesis anywhere was to call it into question everywhere. Their banishments showed both friends and foes of the New England Way that firm discipline was required to protect the covenant people.¹⁸

¹³Ahlstrom, 153-54; Weir, 160.

¹⁴Weir, 160.

¹⁵Pope, 13.

¹⁶Noll, 40.

¹⁷Ahlstrom, 154.

¹⁸Noll, 40.

The rigorous restrictions imposed by the community were seen as necessary for the protection of society. For those unwilling or unable to conform to the strict regulations, removal from the group was seen as critical to survival.¹⁹

Some separatists, however, remained loyal to the idea of the New England Way. In 1634 Thomas Hooker moved his congregation west, planting Hartford and many other towns in the lower Connecticut valley. His goal was to find land and a place where he was free to pursue his own brand of Puritanism. “The need for greater freedom, a wider franchise, and more restricted exercise of the magistrate’s authority seems also to have figured in the decision.”²⁰ In the Hartford church, freemen were not required to be members, and the test of internal conversion was not as stringently applied. Despite the softening application, Hooker remained a staunch proponent of the New England Way, opposing those who would challenge its basic principles.²¹

Other, non-Puritan, Christians also had some difficulties with the New England Way. The issue was over the strict membership requirement insisted upon by the Puritans. If the church had not required a certain level of personal piety, demonstrable in the life of the elect, then the issue of paedobaptism would not have been an issue.²² The non-Puritan Christians watched with anticipation. The Presbyterians appreciated how the Puritans did not require believer’s baptism as a membership requirement, but saw their emphasis on personal religious experience as negating the role of baptism in the life of the believer. The Baptists, on the other side of the spectrum, appreciated the Puritan’s steadfastness toward restricting church membership to regenerate believers only, but their insistence on paedobaptism was unacceptable. According to Ahlstrom, as a result of pressure from the other Christian sects within New England, the Puritans “compromised by limiting infant baptism to the children of parents who had owned the covenant.”²³ In other words, only the parents who were church members were allowed to baptize their children.

This compromise created an unstable and confusing situation within the Puritan Church. The result was that some churches defected to the Baptists, while a great number of churches remained Puritan but made excuses and did as they pleased.²⁴ The situation was growing dire, but the attention of the church was on paedobaptism, not the strictness of their membership requirements.

¹⁹Stout, 23.

²⁰Ahlstrom, 152.

²¹Ibid., 152-53.

²²Pope, 13.

²³Ahlstrom, 158.

²⁴Ibid., 158-59.

THE NEW ENGLAND BAPTISM

The New England Way and its policy of visible faith as a witness to conversion were placing the colonies in an untenable position. All was well with the first generation of Puritans. Fleeing from England because of religious persecution was a good indicator of an inner conversion. The problem became evident with the third generation: the founders' grandchildren.

With the Reformation, the sacraments—baptism and the Lord's Supper—had their functions redefined. For the Puritans, the Eucharist remained the center of the mass and baptism still promoted salvation. They both maintained much of their magical properties. Although the salvific qualities formerly associated with the sacraments were diminished, they lurked in the background of many believers' personal theology.²⁵

The role of the Lord's Supper in the church remained at the core of the worship service, but the role of baptism was somewhat less secure. Most reformers understood that baptism sealed the covenant of grace, but were reluctant to imply that grace was received through baptism or that baptism guaranteed future salvation. They needed to clarify their position. The question was: In what way did baptism seal the covenant of grace in the person being baptized?²⁶

The Puritan minister John Hooker, in his book, *Covenant of Grace Opened*, separates the covenant into the inner and the outer covenants. The inner covenant was reserved for the elect, who, during baptism, were sealed into the covenant of *salvation*. The outer covenant was for the non-elect, who, during baptism, were sealed into the covenant of the *church*. In this way he was able to avoid overstating the power of baptism while retaining its ability to seal the covenant.²⁷

Holifield explains the confusion felt by New England ministers: "It sometimes appeared that the ministers could say only that baptism was a pledge and engagement to obedience, but they never intended to deny that baptism was a means of grace."²⁸ The concept that baptized infants were provided with a greater opportunity for salvation because of their baptism was presented in the 1648 *Cambridge Platform*. For this reason—the hope that through baptism their children would have the best chance for salvation—paedobaptism remained a critical sacrament within the Puritan Church.²⁹

²⁵Weir, 160.

²⁶Holifield, 53.

²⁷John Hooker, *Covenant of Grace Opened*, 20; quoted in Holifield, 53.

²⁸Holifield, 53.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 53-54.

THE HALF-WAY COMPROMISE

Two factors conspire at this point to plant the seeds of controversy. The first factor is that only church members can present their children for baptism. The second factor is that baptism is understood by most New England Puritans to be critical in the process of salvation for their children. Although not all Christians are able to become church members—having failed to demonstrate to the satisfaction of their church elders a visible Christianity—they still desperately desired baptism for their children. A growing number of grandchildren of the founding fathers were prevented from the benefit of baptism, and the problem was not restricted to the established New England families. During this time immigrants continued to flood into the colonies, and because of the high standard of personal piety demanded by the church, many were not able to attain the membership needed to have their children baptized. An ever-increasing anxiety within families, affected by the strictness of the New England Way, was beginning to spread.³⁰

The worry over the eternal security of their children began to take its toll. The issue began to come to a head 1634 when a church member brought his grandchild to Pastor John Cotton for baptism. The child's parents were not church members so stood outside the covenant. When Cotton allowed the baptism on the condition that the grandfather raise the child, he created an exception to the rule that the infant's right to baptism came from one or both of the immediate parents. This exception allowed other such baptisms to take place. Holifield points out how "the problems intensified when many of the baptized grew to adulthood without attesting that God had converted their hearts."³¹ Cotton's exception opened Pandora's Box, and like the myth, once opened, the box could not be closed.

The situation continued to worsen. The clergy demanded the answers to certain questions: Who could bring children for baptism? Who was responsible for the children brought by people other than the parents? Was membership necessary for parents to bring their children for baptism?³² Initially several ministers, realizing where the brewing crisis was heading, "advocated, not the elimination of regenerate membership, but new ways to extend church discipline."³³

Holifield lists three issues that divided the churches. First was whether paedobaptism conveyed permanent membership to the infant. Those ministers who advocated infant baptism held that baptism was a permanent seal of personal membership. The opponents claimed that the baptized infants were only mediate members who needed to demonstrate a visible faith in order to become members. Second was whether baptism conveyed a promise or covenant to the infant. The proponents claimed that the promise held to at least the second generation, while the critics emphasized not the promise but the obligation signified

³⁰Ahlstrom, 158.

³¹Holifield, 54.

³²Noll, 40.

³³Pope, 14.

by baptism to various baptismal duties, which the unregenerate failed to fulfill. Third was whether baptism was typologically equivalent to circumcision. Proponents held that since baptism is the same as circumcision the privileges that circumcision seals are also sealed at the time of baptism. The critics failed to see the typological connection, so found the proponents' point moot.³⁴

One of the most successful solutions came from Richard Mather, who, in 1645, suggested that the children and even the grandchildren of church members should be permitted baptism. Pope adds, "Peter Bulkeley of Concord and George Phillips of Watertown shared his view. Both conceived of the covenant as continuing unto a thousand generations; cutting it off at the third was unthinkable."³⁵ Whether to the third generation or the thousandth, many conservative Puritans found the mere thought of opening the church up to include the unregenerate to be anathema.

For Puritans, membership was only for the regenerate. To open up baptism to everyone threatened the sanctity of the church. Eventually, two parties formed. The Congregationalist party disagreed with the idea that opening baptism would pollute the church, but the Conservative party refused to believe that change was necessary so put pressure on those calling for change. In September of 1646, John Davenport, the main leader of the conservative movement pressured the Commissioners of the United Colonies into warning each colony's General Court to permit only those into membership who demonstrated an effectual calling and to allow baptism of only those children who were the immediate offspring of a member.³⁶ The New England Way was reinforced.

THE HALF-WAY COVENANT

The ruling of the General Courts did not deter the Congregationalists. Eventually, the matter came to the attention of the Massachusetts General Court, who called for an official synod. The Cambridge Synod spent little time debating the issue of baptism, but did appoint Ralph Partridge of Duxbury and Richard Mather of Dorchester to prepare a response to the question.³⁷ Both strongly recommended the extension of baptism. The response, which was primarily the work of Mather, was named the *Cambridge Platform* when presented to the Synod at the session held in 1648.³⁸ The reforms in the platform failed.

³⁴Holifield, 54-55.

³⁵Pope, 14.

³⁶Ibid., 15.

³⁷Ibid., 18; Alstrom, 158; Although Pope lists only Partridge and Mather as the men selected by the Synod, Walker includes John Cotton in the list. Williston Walker, "The Services of the Mathers in New England Religious Development." *Papers of the American Society of Church History* 5 (1893): 61-85. [internet edition]; <http://www.dinsdoc.com/walker-1.htm>; accessed on 20 April 2006, 66-67.

³⁸Pope, 18; Walker, 66-67.

The Congregationalists did salvage some success from the Cambridge Synod. Many of the small churches that previously were reluctant to extend baptism found that they were not alone in the struggle. In fact they found that they were actually in the majority. Richard Mather became a figurehead for those wanting change. He took the reins of the movement and guided it with skill and wisdom. His hard work was not in vein. Slowly, more churches began seeing the wisdom of expanding baptism. In 1650 the two largest churches in Connecticut entered into discussions with Mather about the consequences of accepting the proposed polity changes. The dialogue lasted over six years, but the churches eventually came to accept the inevitable tide of change. By 1656 the tide had indeed turned. In that year the Connecticut General Court sought help from the Massachusetts Court in order to resolve issues regarding baptism. In response to Connecticut's request, Massachusetts called for a Ministerial Assembly to be held in Boston, June 4, 1657.³⁹

With much of the conservative party occupied with business in their home colonies, the Ministerial Assembly took only two weeks to complete its business and forward its findings to the General Courts. Richard Mather submitted the main proposal, which he published under the title *A Disputation Concerning Church Members and Their Children in Answer to XXI Questions*. Mather most certainly wrote this document, basing it on his work used in the *Cambridge Platform* of 1648, for it retains much of the earlier document's language.⁴⁰

The Congregationalists were vindicated. Their policies were recognized and endorsed. The General Court of Massachusetts gave baptized parents who did not have church membership the right to have their children baptized. In this way, all non-members, who themselves were baptized as infants, retained the right, through their baptism, to have their children baptized.⁴¹

Even with all the progress that was made, little was done to resolve the actual issue. Dissension remained, unity continued to be threatened, and "to compound the difficulty, the restoration of Charles II in 1660 jeopardized the Puritan cause everywhere. Now more than ever New England had to close ranks. That marvelous intellectual construct, the New England Way, was foundering on the rocks of baptism."⁴² Something more substantial was needed to draw the matter to a close. Mere legislation would not suffice.

Realizing that the issue over baptism remained critical, the Massachusetts General Court took action in December of 1661. Hoping that a full-scale synod would finally settle

³⁹Pope, 22-29.

⁴⁰Ibid., 29-30.

⁴¹Holifield, 54.

⁴²Pope, 42.

the matter, they called one for the following March to be held in Boston. The question for debate was “Who are the subjects of baptism?”⁴³

THE HALF-WAY SYNOD

In March 1662 eighty ministers and laymen from most of the thirty-four Massachusetts churches arrived at Boston’s First Church to debate the pressing issue of baptism. Representatives from the other colonies failed to arrive. One notable loss was the absence of the lead conservative voice in the colonies, John Davenport, who was dealing with important matter in the colony he founded and sustained. According to royal charter, New Haven was being absorbed into Connecticut. This political turmoil may have played some role in why the ministers of Connecticut also did not attend. The Massachusetts Congregationalists regretted the absence of their support. Massachusetts was left on its own to find a solution that affected all of New England. With each messenger, no matter his status, having one vote, the matter was far from certain.⁴⁴

The synod elected a moderator “and introduced for the synod’s consideration seven propositions based on the conclusions reached by the Ministerial Assembly.” After eleven days of debate, the first session concluded with a split vote, “but the lines of debate, had they ever been in doubt, were now clearly drawn.”⁴⁵ The synod was adjourned until the tenth of June. The three-month break allowed the conservatives time to lobby support and to prepare a response.⁴⁶

When the synod returned in June, the debate was renewed. At the next vote, the conservatives were surprised to find that they had lost significant ground. Pope describes the situation, “What appeared to be a formidable number of opponents in March was reduced to one man in eight by June.”⁴⁷ The tide had turned.

By late September the seven proposals, which were formalized and presented to the synod, passed the final vote. Pope summarizes the proceedings: “The question, ‘Who are the subjects of baptism,’ had been answered and Massachusetts had a new orthodoxy. The Cambridge Synod had evaded the issue; the Ministerial Assembly had outlined the principles; the Half-Way Synod placed the full weight of a synodical decision behind the extension of

⁴³*Massachusetts Records*, 4, Part 2, 38; quoted in Pope, 42.

⁴⁴Pope, 43-44.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 44.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 45.

baptism and gave new meaning to the church covenant.”⁴⁸ After a fifteen-year campaign, Richard Mather was finally vindicated.⁴⁹

The Half-Way Synod upheld the ruling of the Ministerial Assembly, in a sense ratifying that decision. While the children of church members were to be considered under the constant supervision of the church, non-members were permitted to have their infants baptized. In order to maintain the exclusivity within the church role, non-members, although now permitted the privilege of baptism, were still not permitted the other rights of membership, especially access to the Lord’s Supper. Communion was preserved as a right for only the regenerate because it symbolized the new birth in Christ. Therefore, non-members, even if confessing Christians, remained outside of the church unless they were able to successfully demonstrate a visible faith. In this way, church life functioned after the Half-Way Synod much as it did before.⁵⁰

CONCLUSION

The Puritans’ desire to ‘purify’ the Church of England led them to the New World, which they saw as the New Promised Land. Access to the sacraments remained vital to them, but with successive generations, an increasing number of New England Puritans were being excluded from them. Their form of polity was known as the New England Way.

Anxiety began to grip the colonies as many of the second generation Puritans who had been baptized but had not demonstrated a visible faith were not able to baptize their children. Non-members did not have the privilege of paedobaptism, so members began bringing their grandchildren for baptism. When John Cotton allowed this exception, the problem seemed to be solved. However, when many of these third-generation infants grew into an unregenerate adulthood, the Church began questioning the wisdom of such a course.

Three options were available to the New Englanders. The first was to open the Church to the unsaved. The second was to continue to exclude all but the membership to the rights and privileges of the church. Both of these options were unacceptable. The third solution was to reach some sort of compromise. In 1647, the Cambridge Synod asked Richard Mather and others to draft a solution to this matter. The blueprint of his ‘Model of Church Government’ became the basis for the response, and was entitled, the *Cambridge Platform*. When the problem persisted, a Ministerial Assembly was held in 1657, but the situation remained. Finally, in 1662, the Congregationalist, those pushing for the expansion of the right to baptism, won a lasting victory at the Half-Way Synod. The resulting half-way principles allowed those baptized as infants the right to baptize their children—half-way membership—but they were not allowed access to any other rights or privileges of the

⁴⁸Ibid., 49.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰James Thomas Meigs, “The Half-Way Covenant: A Study in Religious Transition,” *Foundations* 13 (April-June 1970): 148; Noll, 40-41; Mulder, 99.

Church. This solution provided the necessary avenue for non-members wanting to provide their children with the means to salvation, while continuing to preserve the exclusiveness of full Church membership.

Noll summarizes the situation: “The need to improvise a Half-Way Covenant after only one generation in the new world revealed faults within the New England Way, but also the capacity of Puritan leaders to maintain the tension between, as Robert Pope once wrote, ‘a moral, covenanted society’ (including every citizen) and ‘truly reformed churches’ (made up only of the elect).”⁵¹

By holding onto a sacramental view of baptism, the Puritans placed themselves into a difficult situation. They wished to keep the Church holy by restricting membership to the converted. For them, one’s faith must be demonstrable; thus the subjectivity of the system took its toll, reducing the church membership over time. If nothing changed, the church would disappear. People began panicking when members of their family were prevented from baptism. Without baptism, surely they would never be saved. In this way, the struggle over baptism forced the development of a half-way compromise. But this new approach was only a temporary fix to the bigger issue of sacramentalism.

⁵¹Noll, 40; Pope, 261.

SOUTHERN BAPTISTS AND RESTRICTING THE LORD'S SUPPER: A BRIEF EXAMINATION AND MODEST PROPOSAL

JASON SAMPLER¹
NEW ORLEANS BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

INTRODUCTION

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, numerous incidents have caused Southern Baptists to re-examine long-standing beliefs concerning the doctrines of baptism and the Lord's Supper. These reinterpretations have come in multiple venues and from different groups of people. Neither time nor focus permits a discussion of the changing paradigms of baptism within Southern Baptist life.² However, there have been two specific incidents in the last decade in which Southern Baptists have sought to redefine their beliefs on the Lord's Supper, and specifically, who is qualified to participate in this ordinance.

First, at the June 2000 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in Orlando, FL a discussion concerning the adoption of a revised version of the *Baptist Faith and Message 1963* (BF&M 1963) occurred.³ During the discussion, messenger Jim Goodroe requested that Article VIII "Baptism and the Lord's Supper" be revised from its previous form. In the BF&M 1963, the article's language on the Lord's Supper stipulates: "Being a church ordinance, [baptism] is a prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper." This meant that the SBC's confessional position on the Lord's Supper

¹Jason Sampler (Th.M.) is a Ph.D. Candidate at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

²For further information on how some Baptists are reinvestigating their theology of baptism, we point readers to Henderson Hills Baptist Church (SBC) in Edmond, OK and Bethlehem Baptist Church (Baptist General Conference) in Minneapolis, MN. These churches demonstrated a desire to remove the restriction of believer's baptism by immersion as a qualification for church membership. To date, however, neither church has officially changed the historical doctrine of believer's baptism by immersion as a prerequisite for church membership. Seeking to redefine baptism more restrictively, trustees of the International Mission Board of the SBC have defined proper baptism as requiring the baptizing church to affirm the doctrine of eternal security. Also, popular Baptist theologian Wayne Grudem has all but rejected his earlier hopeful view of reconciliation among paedobaptists and credobaptists concerning baptism in his *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994; reprint, 2007), 982-83.

³Afterwards, we will refer to this work with the abbreviated BF&M. There are three versions of the BF&M. Each version will be differentiated by its corresponding year of adoption by the SBC: 1925, 1963, and 2000.

was one of moderate restriction, or a position known as intercommunion.⁴ Goodroe noted that he had been in the churches of at least four members of the Revision Committee when the Lord's Supper had been taken, and in all four cases, the churches had practiced open communion and not intercommunion. In essence, he felt that the theology, or at least the practice, of the Lord's Supper within SBC churches had shifted from what the *BF&M 1963* specified. He called for the *BF&M 2000* to reflect or at least permit the practice of open communion by taking out the phrase "and to the Lord's Supper."⁵

Second, messengers to the 2007 Arkansas Baptist State Convention meeting in Van Buren, AR heard discussion on a proposed amendment to its by-laws. The amendment called for the removal of the phrase "the Baptist Faith and Message shall not be interpreted as to permit open communion and/or alien immersion" from their Articles of Incorporation. Although the vote to accept open communion and alien immersion garnered a majority support (383 of 608 ballots), the proposition fell 24 votes short of the super-majority (67%) needed to enact a by-law change. The amendment failed, but their ability to sway a substantial number of votes demonstrates that many messengers from Arkansas SBC churches no longer found intercommunion to be the only acceptable position for understanding Table fellowship.⁶

⁴Unfortunately, Baptist theologians have often interchanged terms such as closed, transient, consistent, and close communion when discussing various forms of Table restriction. There is really no *set* definition(s) for each of these terms, as writers often provide their own definitions. For this reason, we want to make sure the reader is clear as to how specific terms will be used in this article. A working definition for open communion is that all professing believers have access to the Lord's Supper, regardless of whether they have or have not received baptism. We define intercommunion as the practice of restricting the participation in the Lord's Supper to those who have received believer's baptism by immersion. Similarly, we define intracommunion as the practice of restricting participation in the Lord's Supper to those who have received believer's baptism by immersion and whose membership is in the specific church celebrating the ordinance.

For this article, we will use the term intercommunion when discussing the position that requires believer's baptism by immersion before being allowed to participate in Table fellowship in a SBC church. To be faithful, however, to the research materials employed in this article, when other authors have used different terms to convey this position, we have left their words in tact.

⁵Credit for this story is given to Stephen E. Farish, "The Open Versus Close Communion Controversy in English and American Baptist Life: An Overview of the History and Evaluation of the Issues" (M.A. Thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2002), 3-4.

⁶Robert Marus, "Arkansas Baptists Narrowly Reject Opening on Communion, Baptism," *Associated Baptist Press*, November 9, 2007. The article can be found online at: http://www.abpnews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2961&Itemid=120.

These two instances support the claim that some Southern Baptists are reconsidering longstanding beliefs on the doctrine of intercommunion. For this reason, we will conduct a critical investigation of Baptist confessions and modern Baptist writings as they pertain to the restriction of the Lord's Supper. Our purpose is to determine from these writings if restricting Table fellowship from non-baptized believers is a necessary component of Baptist ecclesiology. Baptist confessions will be examined to determine the prominence of the doctrine of intercommunion from an historical perspective. We will also investigate current Baptist writings on the question of restriction. Finally, we will address the question of whether intercommunion is a necessary element for a distinctive Baptist ecclesiology.⁷

BAPTIST CONFESSIONS AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

Since their beginning, Baptists have been unashamed to record their cherished doctrines in the form of confessions. From John Smyth's *Short Confession* in 1609 to the SBC's *BF&M 2000*, Baptists have provided numerous documents that help inform and educate both Baptists and non-Baptists of core doctrines.⁸ A quick perusal of Baptist confessions will note that the overwhelming majority of confessions have at least something to say concerning the doctrine of the Lord's Supper; unmistakably, this ordinance has been a vital component of Baptist ecclesiology. Not all confessions, however, reflect the same amount of consideration for the ordinance. For instance, while the *Second London Confession of Faith 1677/1689* (henceforth SLC) devotes eight paragraphs to the Lord's Supper, the *BF&M 2000* appropriates only one sentence. Even more minute is the *Standard Confession's* four-word affirmation that churches should continue in "the breaking of bread."⁹ While Baptist confessions have not always demonstrated equality in the length of their treatments of the Lord's Supper, they most always discuss the issue of restricting the Table.¹⁰

⁷The method we employ in this article does not purport to be a comprehensive examination of the issue of open communion versus intercommunion within Baptist ecclesiology. Space restrictions limit the scope of research and we have chosen confessional documents and modern SBC writers to comprise the source materials for this investigation. To answer the question more comprehensively, further research must be done on nineteenth and twentieth century Baptist theologians. This article is a result of the reading completed so far in the research for a dissertation to be presented to the faculty of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

⁸For a more fully orbbed discussion of the purpose(s) of Baptist confessions, see H. Leon McBeth, *Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman, 1986), 68-9.

⁹Unless otherwise noted, quotations from confessions are taken from William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1959; revised, 1969).

¹⁰When discussing Table restrictions, the discussion inevitably drifts towards the issue of believer's baptism. However, there are other prerequisites (or restrictions) to the Lord's Table that Baptists have agreed upon which are often overlooked in this discussion. First, Baptists have advocated that the Lord's Supper is for believers only. Second, in keeping with Paul's instructions in First Corinthians 5:1-13 and 11:27-29, believers walking in gross disobedience are also disqualified from Table fellowship.

Confessions and Intercommunion

Examining Baptist confessions, one finds the majority of these documents place a particular restriction on persons eligible to participate in the Lord's Supper, specifically a restriction that relates to the issue of believer's baptism. Overwhelmingly, almost all Baptist confessions affirm the doctrine of intercommunion.

Confessions that require intercommunion argue for this position both directly and indirectly. While the original form of the 1644 *First London Confession of Faith* (henceforth FLC) states nothing about the issue of communion, the 1646 revision provides an emendation to Article XXXIX. The 1644 FLC reads: "That Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, given by Christ, to be dispensed only upon persons professing faith, or that are disciples, or taught, who upon a profession of faith, ought to be baptized." The 1646 edition expanded the end of the article by adding: "and after to partake of the Lord's Supper." Therefore, these early British Baptists felt it necessary to provide a greater distinction concerning who was welcomed to the Lord's Table within their congregations, that is, those having been baptized as believers.

Thomas Helwys' *A Short Confession of 1610* says: "The Holy Supper, according to the institution of Christ, is to be administered to the baptized; as the Lord Jesus hath commanded that whatsoever he hath appointed should be taught to be observed." The most succinctly articulated direct argument for intercommunion is found in *The Principles of Faith of the Sandy Creek Association, 1816*: "That the church has no right to admit any but regular baptized church members to communion at the Lord's Table." Other confessions that directly call for intercommunion include *Propositions and Conclusions, 1612*, and the *BFC&M 1925, 1963, and 2000*.

In addition, some confessions teach intercommunion indirectly, presenting their case as a logical progression of thought. This is the case in such confessions as Smyth's *Short Confession, 1609*, when he equates persons worthy of participating in the Supper with those who are members of the church. For Smyth, church membership is dependent upon believer's baptism. It stands to reason that the only persons qualified to take the Supper are those having already received believer's baptism. This is also the message proclaimed by Helwys' *Declaration of Faith of English People, 1611*, the *Somerset Confession*, the *Elkborn and South Kentucky Confession 1801*, and the *New Hampshire Confession 1833*. For these confessions, church membership is prerequisite to participation in the Lord's Supper and none but those baptized by immersion as believers qualify to be members. Historically, most Baptist confessions have vigorously guarded the Table from allowing anyone but believers baptized by immersion to their fellowship.

Confessions and Open Communion

There are primarily two Baptist confessions that do not restrict the Table to "rightly" baptized persons.¹¹ The first is the *Second London Confession of Faith* of 1677/1689 (henceforth

¹¹Technically there are three, as the *Philadelphia Confession, 1744* is an exact replica of the *SLC*, except with added articles advocating hymn singing and the laying on of hands.

SLC). The second is the *Kebukey Baptist Confession*, which William Lumpkin describes as most likely the first Baptist associational confession to be composed on American soil, written in 1777.¹²

Lumpkin notes that the *SLC* is “one of the most important of all Baptist confessions” because of its apologetic and educational influence throughout much of Britain and America.¹³ As mentioned previously, it contains the longest treatment of the Lord’s Supper within Baptist confessions.¹⁴ Missing, however, is any statement of the relationship between believer’s baptism and the qualifications for receiving the Lord’s Supper. Instead of following the precedent set by the revised *FLC* of 1646, these British Baptists were insistent on not making intercommunion a test (or mark) of associational fellowship. Although some have argued that the absence of a clear position for intercommunion in the *SLC* does not entail an acceptance of open communion, such is not the case.¹⁵ In an appendix attached to *SLC*, the signers affirmed that there were many items of doctrine that were not settled among these Baptist churches. While they did not specify each of these doctrinal differences, the writers were clear to take the time to express their thoughts on one important doctrinal difference—whether or not believer’s baptism is a prerequisite for participation in the Lord’s Supper:

We are not insensible that as to the order of God’s house and entire communion therein there are some things wherein we (as well as others) are not at a full accord among our selves, as for instance the known principle and state of the consciences of diverse of us that have agreed in this Confession is such, that we cannot hold church-communion with any other then baptized believers, and churches constituted of such. Yet some others of us have a greater liberty and freedom in our spirits that way; and therefore we have purposely omitted the mention of things of that nature that we might concur in giving this evidence of our agreement, both among ourselves and with other good Christians in those important articles of the Christian Religion, mainly insisted on by us.¹⁶

¹²Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 354.

¹³*Ibid.*, 239. This is true not only for its impact in England, as the document underwent multiple editions into the next century, but also because it formed the basis of the *Philadelphia Confession of Faith*, 1744, which was the most dominant Baptist confession in America until the composition of the *New Hampshire Confession of Faith*, 1833.

¹⁴Six of the eight paragraphs contain their repudiation of the doctrine of transubstantiation.

¹⁵Nathan Finn, “Baptism as a Prerequisite to the Lord’s Supper,” Center for Theological Research, September, 2006, <http://baptisttheology.org/documents/BaptismasPrerequisiteforSupper.pdf>, 8-9. In a discussion with Finn, he admitted he had no knowledge of the Appendix to the *SLC* at the time he wrote his paper.

¹⁶Fred Malone, “Appendix D: Appendix to the 1689 London Baptist Confession” in *The Baptism of Disciples Alone: A Covenantal Argument for Credobaptism Versus*

For these Baptists, baptism for believers only was a doctrine worth splitting from paedobaptist congregations for the establishment of credobaptist fellowships. However, they still considered paedobaptists worthy of sharing in communion to the extent that they would be welcomed to Table fellowship at their credobaptist churches. Not all churches that subscribed to the *SLC* practiced open communion. However, they did not make it a test of fellowship within their association. Believer's baptism by immersion was an ecclesiastical distinctive, but these British Baptists did not believe that intercommunion was an ecclesiological necessity in order to keep their "believer's-only" churches pure.

A second example of open communion confessions comes from early Baptists in North Carolina. The Kehukee area churches stated the following concerning the ordinances: "12. We believe baptism and the Lord's Supper are gospel ordinances both belonging to the converted or true believers; and that persons who are sprinkled or dipped while in unbelief are not regularly baptized according to God's word, and that such ought to be baptized after they are savingly converted into the faith of Christ."

There are many things in this statement worth noting that are pertinent to their understanding of communion. First, it describes the ordinances as 'gospel ordinances' instead of 'church ordinances'. This is unfamiliar language to modern Southern Baptists, who have denoted baptism as a church ordinance. For these early American Baptists, the ordinances were not confined to local congregations, but they belonged to those who professed faith in Jesus. Second, and similarly, the ordinances belong to 'true believers'. This indicates that all true believers were welcomed to participate in both ordinances. The only restriction to participating in the ordinances was faith in Christ. Third, while they are unwavering in their insistence that anything other than believer's baptism by immersion is not true baptism, they never make the claim that believer's baptism by immersion is a prerequisite to the Lord's Table. It was thus possible for them to keep the doctrine of believer's baptism as a requirement for church membership and open the Table to non-immersed believers without the fear of compromising the purity of the congregation. These two examples comprise clear confessional testimony that at least some Baptists, both British and American, believed open communion could be consistently practiced without compromising the ecclesiastical distinctives of a credobaptist church.

Paedobaptism, 263-64. In a footnote providing a brief description of the appendix, Malone notes that he updated the spelling of certain words, but "retained the awkward grammar of the original document, for historical interest" and that the appendix was "included in the original 1677 publication of the confession, although its authorship remains unknown" (253, n257). For an online version that retains more Elizabethan grammar and syntax, see "The Appendix to the Second London Confession (1689 Confession)," <http://www.reformedbaptistinstitute.org/?p=46>.

MODERN THEOLOGIANs AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

In recent years, there has been a reinvigoration of the concept of what Baptist identity means.¹⁷ With that has come the explosion of writings on various doctrines from a Baptist perspective, especially Baptist ecclesiology. Recent years has produced many articles argue for intercommunion.¹⁸ There also are those, equally conservative, advocating less restrictions and more unity among the body as it pertains to the Lord's Supper.

¹⁷For instance, see R. Stanton Norman, *More Than Just a Name: Preserving Our Baptist Identity* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2001). For a more popular treatment of the movement, see Tom J. Nettles and Russell D. Moore, eds., *Why I Am a Baptist?* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2001).

¹⁸For example: Emir Caner, "Fencing the Table: The Lord's Supper, Its Participants, and Its Relationship to Church Discipline," and Thomas White, "A Baptist's Theology of the Lord's Supper," both chapters in *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches*, eds. Thomas White, Jason G. Deusing, and Malcolm Yarnell III, 163-78 (Grand Rapids: Kregal, 2008); Mark E. Dever, "The Doctrine of the Church," in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, 766-856 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007); Finn, "Baptism as a Prerequisite to the Lord's Supper," and John S. Hammett, "Article VII Baptism and the Lord's Supper," in *Baptist Faith and Message 2000: Critical Issues in America's Largest Protestant Denomination*, eds. Douglas K. Blount and Joseph D. Wooddell, 71-81 (Lanham, MY: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007); idem, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregal, 2005); Russell D. Moore, "Baptist View: Christ's Presence as Memorial," in *Understanding Four Views on the Lord's Supper*, ed. John H. Armstrong, 29-44 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007); and R. Stanton Norman, *The Baptist Way: Distinctives of a Baptist Church* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005).

Hammett (*Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*) provides the most convincing and well-reasoned argument while Moore and Norman give only a passing defense of the doctrine of intercommunion in their works. Disappointingly, Dever devotes only one sentence to the issue, and he provides no support for it: "Because faith is required for those who celebrate the Lord's Supper, the table must be reserved for those who have been baptized" (791). This is a strange statement. Does Dever actually believe paedobaptists have no 'faith' or that it is baptism and not the Holy Spirit that produces faith necessary for remembering the body and blood?

Modern Theologians and Intercommunion

There are four basic arguments for restricting Table fellowship among current Southern Baptist writers who advocate intercommunion.¹⁹ First, “[A]ll denominations agree that baptism should precede the Lord’s Supper.”²⁰ For intercommunionists, the real divide between open communionists and intercommunionists has to do with one’s view of baptism, rather than the Lord’s Supper. Since Baptists consider infant baptism to be no baptism at all, allowing paedobaptists admission to the Lord’s Table would be allowing unbaptized persons to participate in the Supper. Put differently, to accept paedobaptists at the Table would be, as Thomas White claims, “to affirm knowingly a theologically errant view.”²¹ One of the most commonly used scriptural justifications for baptism as a necessary prerequisite comes from the Great Commission, where the command to baptize precedes the phrase “teaching them to observe all I have commanded.” A similar argument is found in Acts 2. They posit that Jesus gives a well-regulated order of obedience. For intercommunionists, baptism is both the initiatory and prerequisite ordinance for all other forms of church participation.

Second, these Baptists believe intercommunion “is a logical outgrowth of the Baptist view of the church and the Lord’s Supper as an ordinance for the church.”²² Most Baptists argue that the Lord’s Supper (along with baptism) is “a church ordinance” that belongs exclusively to the local congregation, although, technically, no Baptist confession describes the Lord’s Supper as being “a church ordinance.”²³ Only those persons who qualify as

¹⁹Hammett, “*Article VII Baptist and the Lord’s Supper*,” 78. There is a fifth argument used more in 19th century writings against open communion. Hammett (*Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 287) mentions that the logic of open communion can lead to open membership. Such was the case for John Bunyan’s Bedford church; however, open membership plagued neither Charles Spurgeon’s Metropolitan Tabernacle nor modern SBC churches that practice open communion.

²⁰Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 283.

²¹White, “A Baptist’s Theology of the Lord’s Supper,” 157. He goes on to claim that persons who reject eternal security would not be allowed to join a Baptist church because he does not agree with them, and unless two agree they cannot walk together. Should this person be allowed to join, it would be incumbent upon the church to begin immediate correction for improper doctrine. If the person refused to change his beliefs after being clearly shown from Scripture, then church discipline would follow and the person would not be allowed to partake of the Lord’s Supper. This would be the case if paedobaptist joined a Baptist church.”

²²Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 284.

²³*Ibid.*, 261; Norman, *The Baptist Way*, 153-55. Technically, no Baptist confession ever describes the Lord’s Supper as being “a church ordinance.” For instance, according to the *BF&M 2000*, baptism is “an ordinance of the church” but that language is absent in the section dealing with the Lord’s Supper. According to Article VI “The Church,” New Testament churches “observ[e] the two ordinances,” but the Lord’s Supper does not

members of the church qualify to partake of the Lord's Supper. White agrees: "I will contend that the proper recipient *must* be a person who could be accepted into the membership of that Baptist church."²⁴ This is not the same as saying the person must be a member of the church, but only that she could be accepted into the congregation. Paedobaptists do not meet the qualifications necessary to become members of Baptist churches due (at least) to their improper baptism, and therefore do not qualify to participate in the Lord's Supper.

Third, "closed communion is supported by the relational aspect of the Lord's Supper. It is not just about renewing our commitment to the Lord, but also to the body of believers."²⁵ Hammett seems most concerned with this aspect of the Supper. He sees tremendous implications for the unity that is found within a local congregation: "But one who is not baptized, and therefore not a member of the church, cannot renew her or his unity with or commitment to the body."²⁶ There is no doubt that part of the Lord's Supper is a call to unity and purity; First Corinthians 5.7 teaches this concept. Intercommunionists believe that unity is achieved in part through a common baptism. Therefore, paedobaptists cannot be in union with credobaptists since they do not share the same baptism. Despite the call by paedobaptists that open communion demonstrates greater unity, Russell Moore claims that "[c]hurches that recognize the importance of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper for Christian identity have far more prospect for eventual unity than churches that seek to find unity in carefully written manifestos or carefully orchestrated press conferences."²⁷

technically belong to the church. Other Baptist confessions employ such verbiage as "gospel ordinance," "ordinance of the Lord," or "ordinance of Christ," but never label the Supper as "an ordinance of the church." For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see Jason Sampler "Looking to the Past to Guide the Present: Baptist Confessions and the Doctrine of the Lord's Supper," 12-13, a paper presented to the Southeast Region of the Evangelical Theological Society, Cordova, Tennessee, on March 15, 2008.

²⁴White, "A Baptists's Theology of the Lord's Supper," 154. Italics added for emphasis.

²⁵Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 285.

²⁶Ibid. However, such an emphasis on this point would tend to lead one towards intracommunion, a practice Hammett rejects. The believers at Troas did not consider the Lord's Supper to demand a commitment to unity of that particular congregation, as they allowed Paul and his companions to "break bread" on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7), a seemingly clear inference to taking the Lord's Supper together. Even J. M. Pendleton, a leader in the Landmark movement of the nineteenth century, rejected fellow Landmarker J. R. Graves' insistence upon intracommunion as the only consistently logical form of communion for Baptists. See J. M. Pendleton "Letter on the Extent of Landmarkism; Disagreement with Graves: Letter to J. J. D. Renfro, April 5, 1882," in *Selected Writings of James Madison Pendleton*, vol. II, compiled and edited by Thomas White, 407-10 (Paris: AR; The Baptist Standard Bearer, 2006).

²⁷Moore, "Baptist View: Christ's Presence as Memorial," 43.

Fourth, those who support intercommunion see “open communion as denigrating the importance of obedience to Christ’s command to be baptized.”²⁸ According to this argument, if churches admit unscripturally baptized persons to the Lord’s Table, then what need do they have to submit to baptism? If they are already participating in the ‘continuing rite,’ then why will they submit to the ‘initiator rite?’ Intercommunion Baptists do not wish to be inhospitable to paedobaptists when they keep them from the Table. They simply wish to be consistent in their form of ecclesiology.

Modern Theologians Advocating Open Communion

Intercommunionists give a variety of reasons for why some Baptists practice open communion. John Hammett notes that there has been a renewed opposition to intercommunion, especially among some Moderate Baptists.²⁹ Nathan Finn claims such reasons include a desire to be ecumenical, to include Reformed Christians, or simply from “theological ignorance or methodological laziness.”³⁰ However, both Hammett and Finn fail to consider the fact that some Baptists oppose intercommunion because they find no New Testament justification for restricting the Table on the grounds of believer’s baptism.

Two modern day Baptists that advocate open communion include systematic theologians Millard Erickson and Wayne Grudem. Although neither theologian is *Southern Baptist*, both are Baptists and, as authors of two of the most often used systematic textbooks by SBC seminaries, hold immense sway over Southern Baptist theological education. While neither has written a long treatment on open communion, their views are accessible through their respective systematic texts.

In Erickson’s discussion concerning proper recipients, he claims there are only two requirements for the Lord’s Supper that can be clearly affirmed from reading the New Testament, regeneration and right living: “Nowhere in Scripture do we find an extensive statement of prerequisites for receiving the Lord’s Supper. Those we do have we infer from Paul’s discourse in First Corinthians 11 and from our understanding of the meaning of the sacrament.”³¹ Missing, however, is any conditional need for baptism. The only necessary conditions for participation in this ordinance are the belief that Jesus is Lord and the absence of flagrant sin.

Erickson holds a high view of the unity of the church, which means an issue such as baptism (while important) is not enough to divide believers when it comes to gathering around the Table: “In other cases, however, since we do not know what the requirements for membership in the New Testament churches were, it is probably best, once we have

²⁸Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 285.

²⁹Hammett, “*Article VII Baptist and the Lord’s Supper*,” 81 fn. 15. He lists such moderate Baptists as John Tyler, G. Todd Wilson, Thomas Clifton, and Fisher Humphreys.

³⁰Finn, “Baptism as a Prerequisite to the Lord’s Supper,” 5-6.

³¹Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2d ed (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 1132.

explained the meaning of the sacrament and the basis of partaking, to leave to the individuals themselves the decision as to whether to participate.”³² He does not go so far, however, as to endorse a mixed congregation of both credobaptists and paedobaptists. A Baptist church is still composed only of believers baptized by immersion.

Wayne Grudem does not specifically discuss the issue of open versus intercommunion; he does address, however, the issue of unbaptized persons and their relationship to the Supper:

A different problem arises if someone who is a genuine believer, but not yet baptized, is *not* allowed to participate in the Lord's Supper when Christians get together. In that case the person's nonparticipation symbolizes that he or she is *not* a member of the body of Christ which is coming together to observe the Lord's Supper in a unified fellowship (see 1 Cor. 10:17: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread"). Therefore churches may think it best to allow non-baptized believers to participate in the Lord's Supper but to urge them to be baptized as soon as possible. For if they are willing to participate in one outward symbol of being a Christian, there seems no reason why they should not be willing to participate in the other, a symbol that appropriately comes first.³³

For Grudem, baptism should be a natural outgrowth of a believer's spiritual maturation. Nevertheless, one who has not yet been scripturally baptized should not be barred from Table fellowship. His quotation of First Corinthians 10:17 strengthens his position. How can a church rightly deny a regenerate believer from shared proclamation of the gospel through the Supper? If through the preaching of the Word one comes to salvation in a Sunday morning service, and that church celebrates communion in the same service, must that Holy Spirit filled, regenerate child of God wait until baptism to be part of the 'one body'? For Grudem, the answer is no. Regeneration, not baptism, is the mark of membership into the body. He is quite firm that baptism *should* come first, but he is not willing to make it a *necessary* requirement for participation in the Supper. It would seem to follow that Grudem's understanding of baptism as important but not necessary for participation in the Lord's Supper would also apply to those having received infant baptism, which Grudem would define as no baptism at all. Their false baptism does not keep them from participating in Table fellowship with other believers who happen to be Baptists.

Some might wish to label these men unbaptistic for their apparent lack of regard for baptism's relationship to the Lord's Supper. However, it is helpful to remember that just recently Zondervan reprinted Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, with an updated section on baptism. Grudem's former position was that baptism did not necessarily need to be a point of division between paedobaptists and credobaptists. However, in light of recently proposed changes at Bethlehem Baptist Church, Grudem revised his thoughts on the matter and now finds that differences are too great for these two groups of believers to unite within one

³²Ibid.

³³Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 996 (1994 printing).

congregation. For Grudem, baptism is necessary for church membership in a local congregation, a defining characteristic of a conservative Baptist. In addition, one must remember that Erickson taught at a Southern Baptist seminary for a number of years as a research professor of theology. Although he since moved to Bethel Seminary and now teaches at Western Seminary, all three schools are conservative Baptist institutions of higher education.

IS INTERCOMMUNION A NECESSARY BAPTIST DOCTRINE?

Is there a distinctive theology of the Lord's Supper from a Baptist perspective that demands Baptists to restrict Table fellowship from those of differing denominations? Is open communion un-baptistic? Are Baptists giving up a part of their theological heritage by allowing paedobaptists to share in the Lord's Supper? I believe the answer to these questions is no.

First, while other Baptists groups in America long ago gave up the restrictive position of intercommunion, the SBC has been the only primary group of Baptists to continue this practice. Northern Baptists historians Norman Maring and Winthrop Hudson have stated as recently as 1991 that "the practice of open Communion is now almost universal among Baptists in the United States, although in some parts of the South closed Communion still persists."³⁴ Are those Northern and Freewill Baptists who open the Table to all believers, sub-Baptists or pseudo-Baptists? Overall, they have kept a distinctive of believer's baptism by immersion (and hopefully preserved a regenerate church membership) while also allowing baptism to be no bar to communion.

Second, why is the participation in the Lord's Supper tied to church membership? The primary argument for intercommunion is that a person must qualify to be a member of the church before one can take communion. This seems to be a position without sufficient warrant, as Baptist churches do not stipulate that persons must meet membership requirements before participating in other aspects of worship. No one argues that you must qualify for membership before you can sing, preach, or give to the building fund. Southern Baptists place no baptismal preconditions upon these things.

The difference, intercommunionists will say, is that none of the above acts of worship are ordinances, and the premise is granted. However, the Bible never mentions that the ordinances 'belong' to the church. They are to be practiced by the church, in the corporate fellowship of the church, and under the direction of the church, but they do not belong *to* the church. A case can be made that the ordinances should be practiced within the church without having to concede that ordinances can be practiced only by persons meeting the requirements for church membership. This is the case with baptism; so why not also with the Lord's Supper? A person does not join a church first and then receive baptism.

³⁴Norman H. Maring and Winthrop S. Hudson, *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Judson, 1991), 170.

Instead, the believer is first baptized and then joins the fellowship. Why must a believer be a member to qualify to participate in one ordinance (communion) but not the other (baptism)?

Third, even if most Southern Baptists wish to practice intercommunion, this could be an issue left up to individual churches. Deciding whether to restrict paedobaptists from Table fellowship is difficult for even an intercommunionist such as Hammett.³⁵ Baptist confessions that declare affirmation of intercommunion place some churches in a difficult position. For instance, in order to affirm wholly the *BF&M 2000*, a church must practice intercommunion. However, it is common knowledge that at least some SBC churches do not practice intercommunion.³⁶ Are open communion SBC churches less baptistic than those that restrict the Table?

Why must the *BF&M 2000* be so specific on the issue of intercommunion? This confession leaves substantial room to house both Calvinists and Arminians; there is space for those who accept and reject original sin. Is it not capable of accommodating both open communionists and intercommunionists?³⁷ The idea contained within the *SLC* appendix, that churches should have the freedom to decide in this matter, could work exceptionally well within the modern SBC context. Let congregations be responsible to decide who is

³⁵Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 286. He says specifically, "I regard this as a difficult decision." While he ultimately comes down on the side of intercommunion, he does not seem dogmatic or legalistic about the issue.

³⁶This was Jim Goodroe's point at the 2000 SBC Annual Convention, as mentioned above. Not even all of the members of the *BF&M 2000* committee were members (or pastors) of churches that practiced intercommunion. While no statistics are available, it is quite conceivable that a substantial number (not necessarily a majority, but maybe) of SBC churches do not practice intercommunion. In addition, Norman (*The Baptist Way*, 151) even admits that not all (Southern?) Baptist churches practice intercommunion. Although Norman is a firm advocate of intercommunion, he does not deny that there is a legitimate expression of open communion within Baptist theology.

³⁷At this point, we must take umbrage with White's claim that to affirm open communion is to affirm a 'theologically errant view.' He seems to take this position a bit far. Does he expect churches to examine a prospective member across a gamut of theological issues? If the church held cessationist views, would a continualist be accused of holding 'a theologically errant view' and considered worthy of discipline? Would a complementarian be considered 'theologically errant' within an egalitarian congregation? One wonders when the demand for conformity might end. This does not mean that a congregationally led church cannot regulate who qualifies to be a member of the assembly, but that there should be latitude in non-essential doctrines within a congregation for the sake of Christian unity.

Is a church in theological error if they have members who affirm both Calvinism and Arminianism, or cessationism and non-cessasionism? It is highly unlikely, as well, that a church that has members affirming both intercommunion and open communion are not necessarily guilty of theological error but rather have come to different conclusions on their assessments of the issue.

welcome to their Table, but let us not make it a test of fellowship by including such a restrictive position in our confessional identity. I find the arguments for intercommunion to be more consistent than open communion, but is the issue so vital that we are willing to exclude (with our documents, though often not in action) churches that differ with us?

An important major difference between the *FLC* and the *SLC* is that the 1644/1646 confession served eight churches while the 1677/1689 was signed by representatives of thirty-six congregations. We might learn something of the situation between two confessions. The more churches that are served by a common confession, the greater will be the demand for flexibility over rigidity in certain areas. If the *BF&M 2000*, which potentially serves more than forty-two thousand congregations of the SBC, is truly to be a confession for all SBC churches, it does not have enough flexibility over the issue of intercommunion and open communion.

Thankfully, we have an instructive anecdote from a revered Baptist statesman, Herschel Hobbs. In recounting his experience as chairman of the committee that composed the *BF&M 1963*:

The committee was conscious of the fact that its responsibility was to present a statement of faith for *Southern* Baptists, not simply for any single regional group of them.

For instance, late one night it [the committee] finished the statement on "Baptism." The chairman noting that the group was physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausted, suggested that it adjourn and take up the "Lord's Supper" the next morning. When the committee convened the next day one member requested the privilege of reading a proposed statement on the "Lord's Supper." It called for closed communion of the tightest sort.

Another member spoke something as follows: "That statement pleases me very much. And it would be accepted by the people of my state. For that is exactly what we believe and practice. However, we must remember that we are not preparing a statement of faith for any one state, but for all Southern Baptists. It must be broad enough for all of them to live comfortably with it."³⁸

While the situation was different then, Hobbs's story still has application for today. The *BF&M 1963* committee presented an intercommunion understanding of the Lord's Supper that suited the churches of that day. However, a number of SBC churches in the twenty-first century do not find those same restrictions to be a necessary component of Baptist ecclesiology. I hope that our next confession will be mindful of this lack of consensus within the SBC.

David Dockery, Baptist statesman and President of Union University, argues similarly for Southern Baptists of today. In his latest work *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal*, chapter three is dedicated to an examination of and proposal for Southern Baptist

³⁸Herschel H. Hobbs, "Southern Baptists and Confessionalism: A Comparison of the Origins and Contents of the 1925 and 1963 Confessions," *Review and Expositor* 76 no. 1 (Winter 1979): 60.

worship practices “then and now.” While not treating the issue of open communion and intercommunion in detail, the summary paragraph of the chapter contains a telling footnote about this matter. He writes, “Of course important questions such as closed or open communion and regulative or normative worship principles remain to be answered. I think it is important to recognize that Southern Baptists have had diverse practices on these matters, and even as we develop areas of commonality and consensus, we must agree to differ on some issues.”³⁹ In our quest to remain solidly conservative but not dogmatic about every issue, there seems to be both historical precedent and recent renewal towards a desire to allow diverse understandings and practices on the issue of open communion versus intercommunion.

CONCLUSION

Southern Baptists have a heritage and a duty to do their best to model a church built upon the foundation of the New Testament. Among other things, this means we must continue to admit into our membership only those demonstrating spiritual regeneration. Christ's bride should be pure, and unbelievers have no part in the intimacy of our fellowship. We also believe the New Testament calls Christ-followers to submit to believer's baptism by immersion. Such an act demonstrates to the outside world a person's commitment to burial and resurrection in Christ's likeness. We dare not affirm or accept other forms or meanings for baptism. We should not fail in our duty to perform needed church discipline as well. A New Testament church is a disciplining church. These are all essential characteristics of Baptist churches. However, there does not seem to be a *necessary* link between church membership (or specifically baptism) and participation in the Lord's Supper.

Paul's instructions on the Lord's Supper, the only definitive worship instructions given in all of the New Testament, say nothing of the need for baptism as a prerequisite. We have only assumed it was necessary. While this might be the case, should we be quick to reject those whom Christ has accepted? Can we excise from the body those who have already been grafted in? Are paedobaptists unable, alongside credobaptists, to proclaim the death of our Lord until His coming? Will Southern Baptists be willing to reconsider the issue of intercommunion? Early British Baptists, as well as some modern Baptists, have demonstrated that open communion does not deteriorate or denigrate a regenerate church. Open communion simply allows brothers and sisters to proclaim together the death of our Lord. Despite some ecclesiological differences between credobaptists and paedobaptists, our united proclamation would be a testimony to the overcoming power of unity that exists for those of us who are in Christ Jesus.

³⁹David S. Dockery, *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Proposal* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 129, n.37.

SECTION 2

DOCTRINES & DISTINCTIVES

“WATCH YOUR LIFE AND DOCTRINE
CLOSELY. PERSEVERE IN THEM,
BECAUSE IF YOU DO, YOU WILL
SAVE BOTH YOURSELF AND YOUR
HEARERS.”

1 TIMOTHY 4:16

THE NECESSITY OF THE GOSPEL IN THE HOLY SPIRIT'S SAVING WORK

DR. GARY L. SCHULTZ, JR.¹

Everything God does, he does as one God in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All three of the persons perform distinct activities and have distinct roles in the outworking of God's plan, but all of their activities are the actions of the one God.² All of these distinct actions are also done in and by the one will and desire of the Godhead.³ This can be seen clearly in actions such as creation and providence (John 1:1-3; Col 1:15-20; Heb 1:1-3), but it is perhaps clearest in the area of salvation.⁴ Although particular activities in God's work of salvation are attributed to the different persons of the Godhead, salvation is a unified act of the one God.⁵

¹Dr. Schultz graduated in December 2008 from Southern Seminary, having written his dissertation on *A Biblical and Theological Defense of a Multi-Intentioned View of the Atonement*. He has been serving as student associate in the Ministry Resources office at Southern Seminary.

²"The three Persons of the Godhead exhibit distinct roles in relation to one another. Distinct tasks and activities in accomplishing their common plan characterize nearly all of the work that the true and living God undertakes. Yet all the while, they carry out this work in complete harmony of activity and unity of purpose." Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 20.

³Roger Nicole, "The Meaning of the Trinity," in *Standing Forth: Collected Writings of Roger Nicole*, by Roger Nicole (Ross-Shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2002), 395.

⁴For evidence and an explanation of the working of the Trinity in creation and providence, see Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 425-30; and Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 101-06.

⁵"The real divine mystery of mission, by which it lives, is the coming of the Son, who is both sent by the Father and is the content of that mission, and, in turn, is moved by and sends the Holy Spirit. While it is possible and necessary to distinguish the persons and to ascribe to each a particular activity (*appropriationes*) as creator, redeemer, and sanctifier, it is wrong to separate these since each is involved in the work of the other. Treated under the perspective of the Trinity it means that the one undivided God is present in his mission in all three persons, though each has a particular and special work to perform in conjunction with the others. As Father, Son, and Holy Spirit it is God's will to bring salvation to humanity." John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 69.

The Bible articulates God's unity in salvation most plainly in Ephesians 1:3-14.⁶ God the Father is the source of all spiritual blessings (v. 3). He "chose us" (v. 4), "predestined us to adoption" (v. 5), lavished upon us the riches of his grace (v. 6, 8), "made known to us the mystery of his will" (v. 9), and predestined us "according to his purpose" (v. 11). These verses make it clear that God the Father is the architect and designer of salvation (cf. also Acts 2:23; James 1:18; 1 Pet 1:20).⁷ God the Son is the one in whom God the Father blesses Christians (v. 3). It is through Christ that the Father "predestined us to adoption" (v. 5). It is in Christ "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses" (v. 7). It is in Christ that all things are summed up, "things in heaven and earth" (v. 10). According to this passage of Scripture the Son is the one who accomplishes the Father's plan in salvation (cf. also 1 John 4:14).

The first chapter of Ephesians also explains the role of God the Holy Spirit in salvation. The Holy Spirit determines the character of the blessings the Father bestows through Christ (v. 3), and he seals those whom the Father has chosen and the Son has redeemed (v. 13), serving as a "pledge of our inheritance" (v. 14). These verses describe the Holy Spirit as the one who applies the salvation that the Father planned and the Son accomplished.⁸ The Holy Spirit's mission, as he is sent by both the Father (John 14:26) and the Son (John 15:26), is to work out salvation in light of the Father's intentions and the Son's accomplishments.⁹ All that Christ accomplished in the atonement the Spirit now works to apply.¹⁰ The way in which the Holy Spirit applies the saving benefits of the atonement to believers is through the proclamation of the gospel of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as a sin-bearing substitute for the sins of humanity (1 Cor 15:1-4).

⁶"The divine saving purposes from eternity to eternity which are celebrated in Ephesians 1:3-14 are clearly set forth as the work of the triune God." P. T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 91.

⁷John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 517.

⁸The Holy Spirit "applies, makes effective, and preserves the redemption Christ bought to those who believe." Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 44.

⁹For a good explanation of the Holy Spirit's procession from both the Father and the Son (the *filioque*) from a pneumatological perspective, see Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 72-78.

¹⁰The Spirit does not make much of himself, rather "the Spirit's presence and work are known as he makes much of the Lord Jesus Christ." Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 108. Similarly, "Scripture tells us that the Spirit of God does many works and that these works are indissolubly related not only to each other but also to the work and mission of the Son of God." Donald G. Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit: Work and Gifts*, Christian Foundations (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 285.

Scripture consistently presents the proclamation, hearing, and acceptance of the gospel as absolutely necessary for the Holy Spirit's work of salvation to take place. Despite several recent arguments to the contrary, the Holy Spirit does not save people through general revelation or through other religions and cultures.¹¹ The Spirit, as the Spirit of the Father (Matt 10:20; Luke 11:13; 1 John 4:2) and the Spirit of the Son (Rom 8:9; Gal 4:6; Phil 1:19; 1 Pet 1:11), only saves people by explicitly applying the atonement of Jesus Christ through the gospel of Jesus Christ. This article will establish the truth of this statement by examining each one of the Holy Spirit's acts in salvation: effectual calling, regeneration, conversion, justification, indwelling the believer, baptism in the Spirit, sanctification, preservation, perseverance, and glorification. It will be demonstrated from Scripture how all the Holy Spirit's saving works are based upon the Son's work in salvation and presuppose knowledge of this work through the gospel. The proclamation of the gospel is indispensable in God's work of salvation.

EFFECTUAL CALLING

The Holy Spirit begins to apply Christ's atonement to believers by effectually calling them to believe in the gospel. Effectual calling is the Spirit's work that causes an unbeliever who is dead in his sin (1 Cor 2:14; Eph 2:1) to understand the true meaning of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This call can be defined as "the Spirit's call to sinners to hear and to believe the gospel, rendered effectual by his supernatural enlivening work, or as the Spirit's provision of grace resulting in saving faith, rendered irresistible against all blindness, hardness, and unbelief."¹² It is always issued through the proclamation of the gospel (2 Thess 2:14), but it is distinct from the general invitation of the gospel (e.g., Isa 45:22; Matt 11:28), which goes out to all people, precisely because it always results in salvation.¹³ Effectual calling is therefore a work of the Holy Spirit that is specifically for those who believe the gospel.¹⁴

¹¹For recent inclusivistic proposals from an evangelical perspective, see R. Todd Magnum, "Is There a Reformed Way to Get the Benefits of the Atonement to 'Those Who Have Never Heard?'" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47.1 (2004), 125-34; Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Inquiry into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992); and Terrance Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?: Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004).

¹²Bruce A. Ware, "Effectual Calling and Grace," in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 204.

¹³*Ibid.*, 210-211.

¹⁴Graham A. Cole helpfully points out that there is little exegetical evidence for the Spirit's role in effectual calling. There is a strong theological argument to be made, however, that the work of effectual calling is appropriately attributed to the Holy Spirit, as he is the one who works through all stages of salvation to apply that salvation. *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 215. There is good reason,

This call is articulated perhaps most clearly in Romans 8:28-30, although it is present in a myriad of Scriptures (Luke 14:23; John 6:44; Rom 1:7; 11:29; 1 Cor 1:9, 22-24; Eph 1:18; Phil 3:14; 1 Thess 2:12; 2 Thess 2:14; 2 Tim 1:9; Heb 3:1; 2 Pet 1:10). Romans 8:30 expounds upon the idea of calling that is mentioned in Romans 8:28 by making it clear that the called are the same ones who are predestined, justified, and glorified.¹⁵ The close relationship between effectual calling and the atonement is seen when one realizes that the Holy Spirit's effectual call goes out to sinners to enable them to receive the salvific blessings and benefits of Christ's atonement.¹⁶ Sinners only receive the salvific blessings of the atonement through faith in the gospel (1 Cor 12:3; Eph 2:8), which entails knowledge of the atonement (1 Cor 15:1-4). Effectual calling awakens a person's faith so that she can be united with Christ and experience the full scope and breadth of salvation.¹⁷ Apart from the Spirit's work of effectual calling sinners would be unable to put their faith and trust in the gospel and the Son's accomplishment of salvation in the atonement would never come to fruition in the lives of believers.

REGENERATION, CONVERSION, JUSTIFICATION

Regeneration can be regarded as "that work of the Spirit at conversion that renews the heart and life (the inner self), thus restoring the person's intellectual, volitional, moral, emotional, and relational capacities to know, love, and serve God."¹⁸ Regeneration is transformational (2 Cor 5:17), it is solely a work of God, and it takes place in a person's union with Christ, and thus through his salvific work on the cross.¹⁹ Most often in Scripture regeneration is attributed to the Holy Spirit (e.g., Titus 3:5). In the seminal passage in

therefore, to begin the description of the Holy Spirit's application of Christ atonement in salvation with the work of effectual calling.

¹⁵"Calling" (*kletos*), must be understood as effectual. It is not merely an invitation that human beings can reject, but it is a summons that overcomes human resistance and effectually persuades them to say yes to God. This definition of "calling" is evident from Rom. 8:30, for there Paul says that "those whom he called (*ekalesen*) he also justified." That text does not say that "some" of those called were justified. It fuses the called and justified together so that those who have experienced calling have also inevitably received the blessing of justification. Now if all those who are called are also justified, then calling must be effectual and must create faith, for "all" those who are called are justified and justification cannot occur without faith (3:21-22, 28; 5:1). Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 450-51.

¹⁶Demarest, 211.

¹⁷"Only through the Spirit can we become one with Christ and can Christ live in our hearts." Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved By Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 54.

¹⁸Demarest, 293.

¹⁹"Regeneration means that the person who was outside of Christ is now in Christ." Hoekema, 103.

Scripture on regeneration (John 3:3-8), Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born of the Spirit in order to see the Kingdom of God. It is only the Holy Spirit who produces a new nature, who imparts eternal life, and who makes people children of God.²⁰ The Holy Spirit regenerates believers through the gospel, as he opens blind eyes and awakens dead hearts to repent of sin and put faith Christ (2 Cor 4:4-6).²¹

Regeneration always takes place simultaneously with conversion, which is “the human being’s response to God’s offer of salvation and approach to the human.”²² Conversion is made up of repentance and faith, or turning away from sin and turning toward God. Conversion is both a responsible human decision in response to the gospel and a work of the Holy Spirit through the gospel. As Graham Cole states, “To tell the story of the making of God’s people requires two tracks: the divine one of what God has done for us in Christ and in us by the Spirit; as well as the human one of how the Spirit is intimately involved in facilitating our very human, but nonmeritorious, responses of repentance and faith.”²³

Besides conversion, justification also takes place as a believer puts his faith and trust in the gospel (Rom 3:26, 28; 5:1; Gal 2:16). Justification occurs simultaneously with regeneration and conversion in that, having received new life, the believer is now declared righteous in God’s sight, her sin being forgiven.²⁴ Justification is also intimately related to effectual calling, as Romans 8:30 makes clear. While Scripture repeatedly stresses that justification is something that Christ accomplished and is something that is only done on the basis of Christ’s atonement (Rom 3:21-30), it is also a work of the Holy Spirit. First Corinthians 6:11 states that believers are “justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God,” explaining that the Spirit is the agent of justification.²⁵

²⁰For an explanation of this passage, see D. A. Carson, *The Gospel of John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 187-98.

²¹“Our regeneration and conversion, moving us to repent of sin and trust in Christ, is the work of the Spirit. The Spirit must awaken our hearts to see the beauty of Christ, fall before him, and put our hope and trust in him. God gets all the glory in our conversion.” Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 121.

²²Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1998), 955. See also Hoekema, 107.

²³Cole, 216.

²⁴Wayne E. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 722.

²⁵While the New American Standard Bible has “in the Spirit of our God,” the preposition “in” (*en*) here is better translated as “by.” Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 455.

Indwelling and Filling

As the Holy Spirit regenerates, converts, and justifies a person, he also indwells him. Although the Holy Spirit's indwelling actually takes place at the same time as his other saving work, it is a distinct ministry of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9, 11; 1 Cor 6:19-29; 2 Cor 5:5; Gal 4:6; 1 John 4:13). The indwelling of the Spirit in this present age is a result of Christ's glorification in the atonement and the resurrection as John 7:37-39; 14:17; and 16:7 make clear.²⁶ It is therefore the "Spirit of Christ" (Rom 8:9, 11) and the "Spirit of the Son" (Gal 4:6) who indwells believers, encouraging them to relate to God as Father. The Bible describes indwelling as a privilege that is only available to believers who are in Christ through the gospel (John 1:12).

The Spirit's indwelling also denotes God's abiding presence with the believer. The Spirit's indwelling is meant to result in the believer repeatedly being filled with the Holy Spirit, and therefore in sanctification and empowerment for mission.²⁷ There are several references throughout the book of Acts that depict believers being filled with the Spirit in order to do wonderful things for God (Acts 2:4; 4:8; 6:3; 7:55; 11:24; 13:9, 52).²⁸ Paul also commands believers to be filled with the Spirit in Ephesians 5:18, at least implying that some believers are not filled with the Holy Spirit at points in their lives.²⁹ Being filled with the Spirit presupposes knowledge of Christ and his work, as evidence of this filling is seen within the church in "making melody to the Lord," "giving thanks for all things in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ," and being subject to one another "in the fear of Christ" (Eph 5:18-21). The Holy Spirit's filling for empowerment also requires knowledge of the gospel, as it often results in the preaching of the gospel (Acts 2:4; 4:31; 13:9-10).³⁰

²⁶For a defense of this position, see James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God's Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2006).

²⁷The Holy Spirit's filling is "the source of all vital experience in the life of the Christian," and is therefore essential for the believer's sanctification and their empowerment for witness and service. John Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Van Kampen, 1954), 189.

²⁸Certain Old Testament saints were also periodically filled by the Holy Spirit for specific purposes (Gen 41:38; Exod 28:3; 31:3; 35:30-35; Num 11:17, 25; 27:18; Judg 3:10; 6:34; 1 Sam 10:9-10; 16:13; Dan 4:8; 5:11-14; 6:3). All New Testament believers, however, are permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit and then continually filled by the Holy Spirit on the basis of that indwelling. See Walvoord, 155-56.

²⁹James Leo Garrett, *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical Volume 2* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 175-76. There are some who see the command in Ephesians 5:18 to be filled with the Spirit as referring to the congregation and not to the individual. Therefore this passage is not about sanctification or empowerment, but rather about ecclesiology. See Cole, 243-44; and Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Filled with the Holy Spirit?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40.2 (1997), 233-34. Either way the Spirit's filling as described in Ephesians 5:18-21 depends upon knowledge of the gospel.

Baptism into the Body of Christ

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is one of the most controversial issues in contemporary evangelical pneumatology, due to the different ways that people interpret their experience in light of biblical concepts.³¹ However, when Holy Spirit baptism is seen in light of New Testament teaching, it seems to be limited to one particular experience, which every believer experiences at the moment of his or her salvation. There are seven verses in the New Testament that mention Spirit baptism. Five of these verses (Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5) refer to a time in the future when Jesus is going to baptize with the Holy Spirit, with Acts 1:5 indicating a time only a few days away. In Acts 11:16, Peter applies the phrase “baptized with the Holy Spirit” to explain Cornelius’ conversion, referring to something that had already taken place. The seventh reference is 1 Corinthians 12:13, where Paul also refers to a past event. The one event that fits the reference of all these verses is clearly Pentecost, where the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the disciples (Acts 2:4).³² At the time of their conversion, believers subjectively experience what objectively took place once and for all at Pentecost due to the atonement and resurrection of Jesus Christ: the baptism of the Holy Spirit.³³

Jesus Christ baptizes believers in the Holy Spirit in order to bring them into his body.³⁴ The Holy Spirit, as he is poured out on believers, brings believers into Christ’s body by uniting them with Christ.³⁵ Union with Christ is an over-arching soteriological concept. It is the concept under which John Calvin discusses the whole of his soteriology, and he describes it as the work of the Holy Spirit based upon what Christ has accomplished on the

³⁰Cole, 218.

³¹For example, see the five different perspectives on Spirit baptism in *Perspectives on Spirit Baptism: Five Views*, edited by Chad Owen Brand (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2004) or the work on Spirit baptism by Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).

³²For a more thorough explanation of the referent of these seven verses, see Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “The Baptism in the Holy Spirit as the Promise of the Father: A Reformed Perspective,” in *Perspectives on Spirit Baptism: Five Views*, edited by Chad Owen Brand (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2004), 19-21. See also John R. W. Stott, *Baptism and Fullness: The Work of the Holy Spirit* 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1975), 19-46.

³³“The Lord Jesus, mediator of the new covenant and the bestower of its blessings, gives both the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit to all who enter his covenant.” Stott, 43. This can only be on the basis of the cross.

³⁴This understanding implies a consistent rendering of the preposition *en* in the seven previously noted verses as “in” or “with,” not “by.” See Kaiser, 21; and Stott, 38-43.

³⁵“Baptism with or in the Spirit is about entry into the new life and the new community of Christ’s body. If so, Paul is arguing that the risen Christ unites members to himself through the agency of the Spirit [in 1 Cor 12:13].” Cole, 217.

cross.³⁶ Union with Christ denotes the truth that all believers are in Christ (John 15:4; 1 Cor 15:22; 2 Cor 5:17; 12:2; Gal 3:28; Eph 1:4; Phil 3:9; 1 Thess 4:16; 1 John 4:13) and that Christ is in all believers (Rom 8:10; 2 Cor 13:5; Eph 3:17; Gal 2:20; Col 1:27). As John Murray remarks,

We need to appreciate far more than we have been wont to the close interdependence of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the operations of saving grace. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ; the Spirit is the Spirit of the Lord and Christ is the Lord of the Spirit (cf. Rom 8:9; 2 Cor 3:18; 1 Pet 1:11). Christ dwells in us if his Spirit dwells in us, and he dwells in us by the Spirit. Union with Christ is a great mystery.³⁷

It is only through being united with Christ by the Holy Spirit that believers can then experience regeneration, justification, sanctification, preservation, and glorification.³⁸ The strong relational and ethical implications of a believer's union with Christ seem to demand that some knowledge of this union is necessary in order to be a genuine believer.³⁹ Knowledge of this union is only available through the gospel (cf. Rom 10:14-17).

Sanctification

Sanctification only takes place through the union that believers have with Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. There are two aspects to sanctification, definite (or positional) and progressive. Definite sanctification takes place at the moment of a believer's salvation (simultaneously with regeneration, justification, etc.) when he puts his faith in the gospel, and is the believer's "being set aside for God's possession and declared holy by faith in Christ's

³⁶"To sum up, the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself." John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20-21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3.1.1. See also Hoekema, 54-67. For an explanation of the importance of Calvin's concept of union with Christ in his understanding of the atonement and its application, see Kevin Dixon Kennedy, *Union with Christ and the Extent of the Atonement in Calvin*, Studies in Biblical Literature (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).

³⁷John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 166.

³⁸Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 80; Walvoord, 141-42.

³⁹"The relation, moreover, is a *comprehensive* union. The Christian's entire life and actions are exercised in relation to Christ – his life, values, power, and rule. The believer's speech is in Christ (Rom 9:1), his labors are in Christ (1 Cor 15:58; cf. Rom 16:3, 9, 12), his proclamation of the truth is in Christ (2 Cor 2:17), and his exercise of spiritual authority is in Christ (Phil 1:8). Paul testified that he was meek or gentle in Christ (2 Cor 13:4) and even that his imprisonment was in Christ (Phil 1:13). All this means that the entire Christian life is Christ-centered." Demarest, 332.

justifying work.”⁴⁰ It is seen in 1 Corinthians 1:2, where Paul addresses believers in Corinth as those who were already sanctified in Christ Jesus, and in 1 Corinthians 6:11, where Paul describes sanctification as a completed act akin to justification, done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. Progressive sanctification, on the other hand, can be defined as “that gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, involving our reasonable participation, by which he delivers us from the pollution of sin, renews our entire nature according to the image of God, and enables us to live lives that are pleasing to him.”⁴¹

It is in progressive sanctification that the Holy Spirit makes Christ’s redemption effective in believers by conforming them to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29).⁴² God chose believers for salvation “through the sanctification of the Spirit” (2 Thess 2:13). Believers only become acceptable to God through the sanctification of the Spirit (Rom 15:16). In order to be holy, believers are commanded to walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16, 25). The Spirit continually works to produce his fruit, the characteristics of Christ, in those whom he indwells and who walk in him (Gal 5:22-23). The Holy Spirit continually fills believers in order that they might be equipped for service (Eph 5:18), giving them spiritual gifts to accomplish this task of ministering to others (1 Cor 12-14). The Spirit is the one who leads believers to live for God and to grow in righteousness (Phil 2:12-13). Most often, the Spirit sanctifies believers through Scripture, as he inspired the Scriptures for the salvation and edification of believers (2 Tim 3:16-17), and he presently illuminates Scripture to believers so that they can understand and apply them to their contemporary situation (1 Cor 2:10-16).⁴³ How one can experience any of these aspects of sanctification, and therefore salvation, apart from explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ and his saving work through the gospel is difficult to understand.

Preservation and Perseverance

As the Holy Spirit sanctifies believers, leading them to grow in righteousness, he also preserves them in faith, causing them to persevere and endure in Christ until the end of their lives.⁴⁴ “The Spirit works in a multitude of ways to keep true believers in the path of faith, godliness, and security.”⁴⁵ He does this first by sealing all believers unto the day of redemption, guaranteeing their inheritance with Christ (Eph 1:13-14; 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 4:30). The Holy Spirit is the believer’s *arrabon* (pledge) of future blessing with God. “When God gave us the Holy Spirit within, he committed himself to give all the future blessing of

⁴⁰Ibid., 407.

⁴¹Hoekema, 192.

⁴²Grudem, 746. Although sanctification is in Christ, it is a work that Scripture repeatedly attributes to the Holy Spirit. See Ferguson, 152-73.

⁴³The Holy Spirit’s work of inspiring and illuminating Scripture is also inseparably related to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Word (John 1:1) whose person and work is the central message of Scripture. See Cole, 261-66.

⁴⁴Murray, 154-55.

⁴⁵Demarest, 448.

eternal life and a great reward in heaven with him. . . . All who have the Holy Spirit within them, all who are truly born again, have God's unchanging promise and guarantee that the inheritance of eternal life in heaven will certainly be theirs."⁴⁶ The Holy Spirit's sealing takes place simultaneously with a person's conversion, and therefore through the gospel.⁴⁷

Besides sealing believers, the Holy Spirit also causes believers to persevere by having them consciously reflect on Christ's work on the cross. The Bible uses the sacrificial atonement of Christ as an example to the believer of how she ought to live the Christian life. In Ephesians 5:2 Paul instructs believers to walk in love just as Christ loved them, and the way that Christ loved was by giving himself up to God on the cross.⁴⁸ Hebrews 12:1-3 encourages believers to persevere, to "run the race," by setting their eyes upon Jesus. What is pointed out about Jesus in these verses, however, is the way in which he endured the cross and the hostility of sinners against him. First Peter 2:21-25 is another example where the Bible instructs believers to endure in their walk with God by contemplating the way in which Christ suffered his atoning death. Christ's atonement not only made salvation a possibility, but it also serves as a concrete example of how one ought to live his life before God. The Holy Spirit can only encourage believers with the example of Christ if they are aware of that example through the gospel.

A final way the Holy Spirit causes believers to persevere is by assuring them of their right standing before God in Christ. The Holy Spirit does this as believers live in his power, resisting the flesh, obeying God, and advancing in righteousness (Rom 8:5-11).⁴⁹ He also does this by bearing witness with believers that they are the children of God (Rom 8:16). This is a subjective and internal witness of the Spirit whereby he convinces believers of their right standing before God, that God is their Father.⁵⁰ The Spirit continually works to make certain that all who are saved through the gospel of Jesus Christ are never lost, and that they are brought to glorification (cf. Rom 8:28-30). Again, it is difficult to see how the Spirit can perform this ministry in the life of a believer apart from explicit knowledge of Christ's atoning work for the salvation of humanity through the gospel.

⁴⁶Grudem, 791.

⁴⁷See Ferguson, 180-82.

⁴⁸"The model of love is Christ himself. It is because he laid down his life for us that we are to love others to the point of sacrifice." A. Skevington Wood, *Ephesians*, in vol. 11 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 66.

⁴⁹See D. A. Carson, "Reflections on Assurance," in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 258-59.

⁵⁰Bernard Ramm, *The Witness of the Spirit: An Essay on the Contemporary Relevance of the Witness of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 49-57.

Glorification

The present life of the Christian in salvation is but a foretaste of the glory to come. Those who are called, regenerated, converted, justified, indwelt, filled, baptized, united to Christ, sanctified, adopted, and preserved through perseverance will one day be glorified, as the unbreakable chain of Romans 8:28-30 indicates. This is the hope of all Christians (Rom 5:2; 2 Thess 2:14; 1 Pet 5:4). The Holy Spirit guarantees the future glorification of all believers. “Our pilgrimage will issue in a marvelous consummation in which the vestiges of the old self are eradicated and the new self is perfectly realized. Glorification is the bringing to a triumphant conclusion our redemption in Christ. It is the final realization of our unfolding salvation in Christ (Rom 13:11; 1 Pet 1:5).”⁵¹

Glorification is a realization of all of the blessings of salvation that were accomplished once and for all in the atonement. All who have the Spirit and who are therefore in Christ can look forward to the redemption of their bodies (Rom 8:23), to their inheritance that will never fade away or perish (1 Pet 1:3-5). The glorification of the believer includes her ultimate vindication before God at the last judgment, the future manifestation of an already accomplished justification (Rom 5:9-10). It includes a fullness of knowledge that comes with seeing Christ face to face (1 Cor 13:12; 1 John 3:2). In glorification the believer is spiritually and morally perfected; freed from sin, both in experience and in nature (Col 1:11; 1 Thess 3:13; Jude 24). Ultimately, all believers will be conformed to the image of their Savior, Jesus Christ (Rom 8:29).⁵² Being glorified, all believers will dwell together with God in the new heavens and new earth forever (John 14:2-3; Rev 3:12).⁵³

Also included in the glorification of believers is their resurrection. Believers only experience the resurrection because of what Christ did on the cross. This is made clear in 1 Corinthians 15. First Corinthians 15:13 states that there would not even be a resurrection from the dead if Christ had not died and been raised from the dead. First Corinthians 15:21-22 describes how Christ reversed the order of death that Adam instituted after he sinned. “The man who brought death is Adam, and the one who will bring about the resurrection of the dead is Christ.”⁵⁴ First Corinthians 15:35-50 argues that the resurrection and transformation of believer’s bodies is a consequence of Christ’s exaltation. First Corinthians 15:51 makes it clear that all who are in Christ will be changed, meaning that they will receive new bodies.⁵⁵ All who receive a new body in Christ, however, do so in the power of the Holy Spirit. Believers will be raised by the Spirit (Rom 8:11) and will receive a Spiritual body (1 Cor 15:44) after the likeness of Jesus Christ (1 John 3:2).⁵⁶ Even now, the Holy Spirit

⁵¹Demarest, 468.

⁵²Ibid., 473-74; Erickson, 1010-11.

⁵³For the corporate dimension of glorification, see Murray, 174-78.

⁵⁴W. Harold Mare, *1 Corinthians*, in vol. 10 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 285.

⁵⁵Demarest, 475.

causes believers to long for their resurrection bodies (Rom 8:23), a ministry that again seems to demand some knowledge of the gospel message.

CONCLUSION

Everything the Holy Spirit does to save people, from effectual calling to glorification, he does on the basis of the atoning work of Jesus Christ and through knowledge of that atoning work in the gospel. According to Scripture, the only way salvation takes place in the New Testament age is through faith in the gospel, which explains the urgent instructions for worldwide evangelization that Jesus gave in the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) and the emphasis of the early church on the gospel message (Acts 2:23-24, 30-36; 3:13-26; 4:10-12; 13:14-41; 17:22-31). The proclamation of the gospel is not an ancillary element in God's work of salvation; rather it is a vitally essential and absolutely necessary part of it. It is only through the proclamation of the gospel that the Holy Spirit takes the redemption accomplished by Christ on the cross and makes it a present reality in the life of believers.⁵⁷ All Christians therefore have a responsibility to preach the gospel because it is the means through which God accomplishes his saving work in the world. All Christians also have the privilege to proclaim the gospel because as they do so they are participating in the Triune God's saving work. The Holy Spirit applies in salvation what the Son accomplished in the atonement according to the will of the Father, and he does so only through the gospel call.

⁵⁶A spiritual body is one that is "consistent with the character and activity of the Holy Spirit." Grudem, 832.

⁵⁷"It is by preaching that God makes past history a present reality. The cross was, and will always remain, a unique historical event of the past. And there it will remain, in the past, in the books, unless God himself makes it real and relevant to men today. It is by preaching, in which He makes his appeal to men through men, that God accomplishes this miracle." John R. W. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait: Some New Testament Word Studies*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 53.

THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT: HIS WORK IN SALVATION

W. MADISON GRACE II¹
SOUTHWESTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

The words of “Just as I Am” are as familiar to most Baptists as the lyrics of the “Star Spangled Banner” are to most Americans. Generations have responded to those words and those of the dozen or so other sacred hymns that accompany a part of worship known as the invitation. Likely the pastor will lead the respondent to pray the simple words of the sinner’s prayer hoping and believing that the words are a genuine expression of confession, conviction, repentance and faith. In the familiar Christian vernacular what happened was that someone just got “saved.” However the simplicity of the words of the prayer or the call of the hymn to respond in simple faith, that moment marks the most significant event of a human life—the day of their second birth.

Often the testimony of one’s salvation experience is limited to how God took care of a sin problem that brought new life offered through Jesus Christ. Where that leads is to a view of the salvation experience that is man-centered, devoid of the recognition that something greater than the sinner’s prayer was involved. What is missing is the work of the divine, a work of God as the Trinity especially brought about through the agency of its third person: the Holy Spirit.

In many Baptist churches the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is neglected. A reticence to speak of the Spirit exists because of the overemphasis given in the charismatic or spiritualized circles of Christianity. Attempting to thwart this unbalanced approach to the Spirit, especially in relation to tongues and other spiritual practices, many churches become equally unbalanced and remain tacit on all things pneumatological. This is unfortunate since the Spirit is God, “the Lord, and giver of life” as the Nicene Creed states. He is part of the Trinity, which is wholly at work in the churches. The Spirit’s activity is a large part of God’s work within believers and churches. Beginning at Pentecost, the Spirit empowered the earliest churches and continues to do so. On an individual level, it is the Spirit who works in humans to bring about and guarantee his salvation. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the Spirit’s work in soteriology. Substance will be given to the broader aspects of both salvation and pneumatology, but the major portion of the paper will discuss the specific work of the Spirit in salvation.

PRELIMINARY CONCERNS

The doctrine of salvation is understandably one of the most important doctrines since it concerns humankind’s redemption. The *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* (BF&M) lists it after Scripture, God, and Man,

¹Madison Grace II is Assistant to the Director at the Center for Theological Research at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer. In its broadest sense salvation includes regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.²

The *BF&M* highlights four areas of salvation: Regeneration, Justification, Sanctification, and Glorification. Yet in its discussion among theologians these “graces,” or phases of salvation, are often given more extensive treatment. This is in part because of a variety of biblical terms pertaining to salvation. Often theologians present an arrangement of these graces into a logical order in salvation (*ordo salutis*) in hopes to understand better the mystery of salvation.³ However, these lists need not be so extensive, nor should non-biblical paradigms become tests for fellowship. Malcolm Yarnell notices, “There is no uniform agreement concerning the phases of grace.” He believes that these phases are part of one unit wherein “the Spirit exercises both ‘awakening influence’ and ‘convicting influence’ among sinners. He [the Spirit] calls all to salvation through the preaching of the Word.”⁴ What needs to be noticed from these different approaches is not the diversity between them, but rather the unity each sees in salvation itself. From foreknowledge to glorification everything is in relation to the one event of salvation. This unity in salvation is as the *BF&M* says, “In Jesus Christ as Lord,” or union with Christ.

In Romans 8:1 Paul states, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”⁵ This verse presents the core of the unity of salvation, which is “those who are *in* Christ Jesus.” The language of being “in Christ” is prominent throughout the New Testament (cf. Rom 3:24; 6:11, 23; 1 Cor 1:2; 15:19; 2 Cor 1:21; 5:19; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:13; 2 Tim 2:10, etc.). John Murray states, “Indeed the whole process of salvation has its origin in one phase of union with Christ and salvation has in view the realization of other phases of union with Christ.”⁶ If we are going to study salvation we must understand that from beginning to end salvation is a unified whole, describing believers’ union with Christ.⁷

²*Baptist Faith and Message*, 2000, Art. IV.

³For an example see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 670.

⁴Malcolm Yarnell, “The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 671.

⁵Unless otherwise indicated all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV).

⁶John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 161.

⁷cf. Kenneth Keathley, “The Work of God: Salvation” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 687–696; Grudem, 840–850.

This doctrine is closely related to the Holy Spirit, for in verses 10–11 Paul claims, “if Christ is in you, . . . the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.” An understanding of union with Christ in salvation needs to be seen as a work of the Holy Spirit. It is Christ with whom Christians are united, but it is by means of the Holy Spirit that this union occurs.

THE PERSON OF THE SPIRIT IN SALVATION

Triune Personhood

The work of the Holy Spirit in salvation should not be considered apart from an understanding of the person of the Spirit and his relation to the Trinity. Bruce Ware asks the question, “Can the Christian faith survive, as it were, if the doctrine of the Trinity is omitted?” The answer he provides is that “The doctrine of the Trinity is both *central and necessary for the Christian faith* to be what it is. Remove the Trinity, and the whole Christian faith disintegrates.”⁸ Also seeing the Trinity’s importance Karl Rahner comments on a common deficiency: “It is as though this mystery has been revealed for its own sake, and that even after it has been made known to us, it remains, *as a reality*, locked up within itself.”⁹ Seeing that there needs to be a relationship between man and this doctrine, Rahner presented his famous axiom: “*The ‘economic’ Trinity is the ‘immanent’ Trinity and the ‘immanent’ Trinity is the ‘economic’ Trinity.*”¹⁰ This means that to understand the Trinity one need only look to the works of God in the world. This is especially important to the understanding of the Spirit in salvation. To know how he works as God in salvation it is necessary to understanding who he is as God.

Coequal Personhood

The first place the Bible mentions the Spirit in relation to the Trinity is at the Baptism of Jesus (Matt 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–10; Luke 3:21–22). Depicted at his baptism all three persons are represented, the Son is baptized, the Father speaks, and the Spirit descends and rests upon the Son. The Spirit here is seen as the agent of God who will empower the work of Christ. This agency is not limited to his ministry to the Son. In John 15 the Spirit comes from the Father and the Son (cf. John 20:22–23) and in chapter 16 the Spirit gives glory to the Son. However, this is not an ontological subordination of the Spirit. In the Great Commission (Matt 28:19–20) Christians are commanded to baptize in the name of all three members of the Trinity, thus treating them as co-equals. In Second Corinthians 13:14 Paul offers a benediction in all three members of the Trinity attributing different functions to them, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the

⁸Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, & Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, & Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 16, emphasis his.

⁹Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel, *Milestones in Catholic Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 14 emphasis his.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 22.

holy Spirit be with you all.” Here the Spirit is seen as the fellowship, or the binding agent of the Trinity. In 1 Peter 1:2 the Spirit is again seen working alongside the Father and the Son functioning as the sanctifier of humankind. From these passages we can affirm that the Spirit is God, is equal to God, yet is distinct *only* in his function, and operates as an agent of God. Thus, God the Holy Spirit, the agent of God, is integral to the work of applying salvation.

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT IN SALVATION

The Spirit as the agent of God is the person of the Trinity who empowers its work. He empowered Christ during his earthly ministry and now empowers the churches in their earthly ministry. His empowering presence is seen particularly in the phases of salvation. This section will give separate treatment to each phase of the Spirit’s work in salvation, however it should be noted that even though the phases are presented separately and in a seemingly chronological order their application is not necessarily applied to the believer apart from one another. Hence, one should keep in mind the unity of salvation in union with Christ mentioned above. Also, not every part of salvation is mentioned in what follows; only those phases of salvation that are expressly due to the agency of the Spirit are discussed. For instance, one will note a lack of a discussion on foreknowledge and election. This is because even though these topics are important in salvation they are primarily a work of the Father and not of the Spirit. Furthermore, it must not be forgotten that it is God the Trinity who works salvation. Any emphasis of one phase or person over another in salvation leads to, at minimum, an inadequate view of God’s saving work. Thus, we begin our look at the Spirit’s role in salvation by seeing his inspiration of the Scriptures.

Inspiration

In quoting Joel 2:32 Paul reiterates the Old Testament prophet’s means of salvation, “whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom 1:13). Here he clarifies the means by which people are able to call upon the name of the Lord: “But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” (v. 14). He summarizes this method of salvation in verse 17, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” From this short passage the basis for salvation is laid: the proclamation of the Word.

The inspiration resident in the Word, or the Bible, is the primary act of the Spirit in salvation since it is the object of proclamation. There is not a part of it that has not been acted on by the Spirit. Second Peter 1:21 states that the Holy Spirit directed the writing of Scripture. In First Thessalonians 1:5 the gospel is presented “not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit.” Since the Word has been written with the Spirit and proclaimed in the Spirit, Scripture is intimately interlinked to the Spirit.

In short, the Bible is inspired. Second Timothy 3:16 claims “all Scripture is breathed out by God.” The various opinions on the means of inspiration are not in the scope of this discussion, rather it is important to notice *that* the Spirit is the divine agent involved in Scripture’s inspiration. L. Russ Bush says that “inspiration is the work of God’s Spirit that

guarantees the accurate recording of the content of divine revelation and the truthful description of the circumstances in which it came.”¹¹ To make the claim for inspiration of Scripture is to claim that God actively involved himself in it and that involvement is by the agency of the Holy Spirit.

One of the reasons the Spirit can inspire Scripture and make it truthful is that he is ‘the Spirit of truth’ (John 14:17). As such, anything that comes from the Spirit is true and authoritative. John further clarifies the giving of this truth in 16:13, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak.” As the agent of God, sent by the Father and the Son, the Spirit brings all truth. This truth is contained in the Bible and as such is not only the authoritative revelation from God but also the beginning work of the Spirit in salvation. In this work of guiding into all truth the Spirit is not limited to the writing of Scripture, but also to its interpretation, known as illumination.¹²

Illumination

Illumination can be defined simply as the witness of the Spirit in the Bible. In order for the truth of a biblical text to become clear to a reader there must be an act of the Spirit involved in its reading. Erickson lists three reasons why humans need illumination when coming to Scripture. First, God is transcendent; second, Man is sinful; and third, humans need certainty in divine matters.¹³ In First Corinthians Paul makes the argument that “the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1:18). When the world hears the message of Scripture it scoffs. This is in part because those in the world have no part in the Spirit and cannot receive him. Apart from the Spirit Scripture is less than clear. This is not to mean non-believers cannot propositionally understand the Bible, rather it means that they cannot understand it to the point of saving belief. A work of illuminating the text by the Spirit is necessary for salvation.

An example of this is the Road to Emmaus discourse in Luke 24. After Jesus’ resurrection he was speaking to two of his disciples who were confused about the reports of

¹¹L. Russ Bush, “Understanding Biblical Inerrancy,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 50 (Fall 2007), 28. Herman Bavinck rightly notes, “Holy Scripture nowhere offers a clearly formulated dogma of inspiration. . . . [Scripture] contains and teaches the God-breathed character of Scripture in the same sense and in the same way . . . as the dogma of the Trinity, the incarnation, vicarious atonement etc.” Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Vol. 1: Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 422–23; See also Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 224–245; David S. Dockery and David P. Nelson, “Special Revelation” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 141–162; Donald Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration & Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1994), 85–140; Grudem, 73–89.

¹²Erickson, 276.

¹³Ibid., 273.

him being alive. He said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (vv. 25–27). It is probable these men knew the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, yet they did not understand the message contained within apart from God showing it to them. The same is true for any person desiring to know truth; the Spirit must have an active part in illumining Scripture for saving truth to be found. This is what Paul means in First Corinthians 2:12, “Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.”

Both inspiration and illumination are the basis for salvation because, as mentioned above, salvation must come through preaching (Rom 10). Before any preacher begins a message, the chosen text of Scripture has already been an act of the Spirit through inspiration, and the means of understanding the truth of that message is the continuation of that act of the Spirit through illumination. Before any specific call to salvation is given the means of that call, the preaching of the word of Christ, has been an act accomplished by the agency of the Holy Spirit.

Calling

Since the Spirit’s work of inspiration and illumination of the Bible is the foundation for salvation, the call to salvation comes from it. Second Thessalonians 2:14 presents the call occurring through the gospel. However, the terminology of “calling” is seemingly ambiguous. At some points the Bible depicts a calling that is general and able to be rejected. Matthew 11:28 is a call Jesus gives after mentioning that the Son chooses for whom he will reveal the Father, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Yet in other texts it seems to present an effective call. Romans 8:30 says, “And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” This ambiguity of calling has led some scholars to create different types of calling such as a gospel call, an external call, and an internal call, all of which are distinct from one another.¹⁴ However, it might be better to understand these not as distinct types of calls but different aspects of the same call. Keathley sees that “God calls externally through communication of the Word of God and internally as the Holy Spirit speaks inwardly to those who hear that communication. The external and internal calls operate together to deliver salvation to everyone who repents and believes.”¹⁵ This is a better way to understand calling, especially in light of the Holy Spirit’s unified work of calling.

When the specific call is given through the preacher of the Word of Christ, the Spirit’s primary act is that of conviction. In John 16:8 Jesus says, “And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.” This conviction results in one of two ways. Either one hears the Word, is convicted, repents, and believes,

¹⁴Grudem, 693.

¹⁵Keathley, 723.

thus taking the blessing of salvation, or one hears the Word, is convicted, and turns away, thus enacting the just curse of damnation.

Conversion

What naturally comes out of the call to salvation is the conversion of the believer. Luke presents us with this means of salvation in Acts 2 after Peter preached his Pentecost Sermon. “Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (vv. 37–38). Notice that prior to this, Peter’s sermon was based on inspired Scripture (Joel 2:28–32; Ps 16:8–11; 110:1), by which it illumined those who heard it since “they were cut to the heart.” Since verse 41 tells us that three thousand souls were added that day, it is evident this call was answered. Yet, the call was a call *to* conversion wherein the hearers of the call must *respond* with repentance by which God will grant to them the Spirit. Conversion is the beginning of salvation for the hearer of the call given through the preaching of the Spirit-inspired Word.

Faith and Repentance

Whereas the Acts 2 passage depicts conversion, it only shows one aspect of conversion: Repentance. There is another part of conversion that occurs simultaneously: Faith. “Repentance is the unbeliever turning away from sin, and faith is his or her turning toward Christ.”¹⁶ The act of turning from sin toward Christ is an act of the believer in an intellectual and a volitional way. The focus of John 3:16 and 36 is on the belief of the individual. In chapter 11 Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet he shall live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” In Romans 5:1 justification comes by faith, and in Ephesians 2:8 Paul says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith.” However we must not see faith as *only* an act of humans, for verse eight continues, “And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” There is a divine aspect to repentance and faith as well. If it were not so it would be impossible to come to God.

We need to remember, however, that salvation is not to be viewed in parts, but holistically. The ability to have faith, to turn from sin toward Christ, is based upon the call illumined by the Spirit through the inspired Word. Whereas it might appear that faith supplied apart from the Spirit’s previous work (either from an act within man or from God), it only confuses that work of the Spirit on the believer. Repentance and faith are part of salvation wrought through the agency of the Spirit’s call to hearers of the Word. With the believer’s response of repentance and faith conversion occurs and, as Acts 2 says, the believers “will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

¹⁶Erickson, 946, 951–954. cf. Grudem, 709–721; Keathley, 728–739.

Regeneration

If conversion is the human side to the individual's new beginning in salvation, then regeneration is the divine side of that act wherein the Holy Spirit is given to the individual (cf. Gal 3:3). Article IV.A of the *BF&M* defines it as:

Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of grace. Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God. Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Savior.¹⁷

The Bible depicts regeneration through a variety of images that separately give a larger picture of the work of regeneration.¹⁸

Indwelling

First, the Spirit indwells the believer. In Ezekiel 11 God's future salvation is prophesied, "And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them." Ezekiel repeats this line in chapter 36 and adds to it, "And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules" (v. 27). The future salvation that is prophesied here is enacted by the indwelling of the Spirit in the believer. Notice from these verses that this indwelling naturally leads to a relationship with God in the covenantal formula, "you shall be my people, and I will be your God" (v. 28). This ability to have that righteous relationship is impossible apart from the Spirit's indwelling.

In the New Testament this is seen in 1 Corinthians where the Spirit is dwelling in believers, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" (3:16; cf. 6:19). In Romans 5 the love of God is poured into us through the Spirit (v. 5). Second Timothy 2:14 also says that the Spirit dwells in us and in First Peter 4:14 the Spirit "rests upon" us. It is the picture that Jesus gives in calling himself the vine and believers the branches (John 15; cf. the marriage imagery of Eph 5). Even though these passages may use slightly different language ("in" or "on") the meaning is the same: At conversion the Spirit is given to dwell within a believer. As will be seen, this indwelling becomes a particular means for other phases of salvation.

¹⁷*Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, IV. A.

¹⁸For more discussion on regeneration see Erickson, 955–58; Grudem, 699–708; Keathley, 739–45; Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 582–83.

New Life

Second, regeneration brings about new life as seen in Ezekiel above. It is also found in the discourse with Nicodemus in John 3 where Jesus says one must be “born again.” This rebirth is “of the Spirit” (v. 8) and gives the believer new life (cf. Titus 3:5; 1 Pet 1:3; 1 John 1:29). In John 6 Jesus again shows this new life to come by the agency of the Spirit: “It is the Spirit who gives life” (v. 63). Paul presents this new life in Romans. As he discusses the relationship between flesh and spirit he says, “But if Christ is in you, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through the Spirit who dwells in you” (8:10–11; cf. 13).

Seal

Finally, in regeneration the Spirit seals the believer. The terminology of “sealing” is biblically represented with a few different terms. It incorporates the ideas of “first fruits” (Rom 8:28), “seal” (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13; 3:30), “guarantee” (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5), and a “letter of recommendation” (2 Cor 3:3). The sealing of the Spirit in a believer is closely related to the indwelling of the Spirit in the believer. If union with Christ is the broadest understanding of what salvation is, then indwelling marks the beginning of salvation and sealing points to the end of salvation. The terms presented above utilize the concept of the Spirit as a down payment of what is to come. In First Peter 1:4 our salvation is said to be “an inheritance . . . kept in heaven.” Those who will receive the inheritance at the end are those who receive the Spirit now. Moreover, the sealing of the Spirit provides assurance of faith. In Second Corinthians 1:20–22 Paul assures his readers that the promises of God will be fulfilled because they are found in Christ and are known because the giving of the Spirit acts as a guarantee that the promises of God will come true.

Justification

One of the most emphasized parts of salvation is justification. In the Reformation justification by faith alone was a core issue. The *BFCM* defines justification as:

God’s gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ. Justification brings the believer unto a relationship of peace and favor with God.¹⁹

The core concept of justification has to do with righteousness. In Romans 5 we are seen as being completely unrighteous because of Adam’s sin, but through Christ we find salvation: “Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men” (v. 18). Justification is seen as our standing before the Father and might not be seen as an activity of the Spirit; however, the Spirit still functions as the agent of the Trinity even in Justification. In First Corinthians 6:11 the entire Trinity is seen working in salvation including justification. As it is the inheritance of God’s kingdom that is in question, Paul claims it is given to those who were washed, sanctified, and

¹⁹*Baptist Faith and Message, 2000*, Art. IV. B.

“justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” Keathley points out that “to be justified by God a person must be either (1) *found* righteous, (2) *made* righteous, or (3) *declared* righteous.”²⁰ In assessment of these three views Keathley rightly sees that justification only comes by being declared righteous.²¹ This declaration is immediate and occurs at conversion along with regeneration and sanctification. Although the Spirit’s role in justification is not as prominent as it is with regeneration and sanctification 1 Corinthians 6:11 makes it clear that the Spirit is active in it.

Sanctification

When believers have been unified with Christ, not only do they receive regeneration and justification, but also sanctification. Because we have been declared justified with the indwelt Spirit, we are imparted the holiness of God by the Spirit. The *BF&M* states that

sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God’s purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person’s life.²²

From this definition we see sanctification applied at the beginning of salvation and continuing on throughout the believer’s life. The biblical texts that concern sanctification present it as both a completed action and a continuing process. W. T. Conner comments on Paul’s usage of sanctification: “Paul’s predominant use of the verb to sanctify and the noun sanctification is with reference to the initiation of the Christian life. But he also uses these with reference to ethical purity on the part of the Christian in his daily life.”²³ Thus, sanctification is both positional and experiential.²⁴

The positional, or completed action, aspect of sanctification appears especially in First Corinthians. In 1:2 Paul’s address is to those “sanctified in Christ Jesus.” The believers who receive the letter are not declared as those being sanctified, but as those who are sanctified. Paul expresses this positional element again in 6:11, “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” From these texts it is clear that a completed act of sanctification has occurred. This action is because of the union with Christ acted by the indwelling Spirit in the believer. However, a tension arises when the believer continues to sin and mars the holiness given to

²⁰Keathley, 746 italics his.

²¹See Ibid., 746–753.

²²*Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, Art. IV. C.

²³W. T. Conner, *The Work of the Holy Spirit: A Treatment of the Biblical Doctrine of the Divine Spirit* (Nashville: Broadman, 1940), 114.

²⁴Keathley, 758–59; cf. Erickson, 983–86; Grudem, 746–62.

them. This is where the experiential aspect of sanctification begins. Keathley relates the two, “Our positional sanctification enables our experiential sanctification.”²⁵

Not only are believers made holy; also they are *being* made holy. Peter had this in mind when he quoted Leviticus in his first letter, “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (1 Pet 1:16). Even though the believers’ aim is to be holy, it should be recognized that this task cannot be completed on earth. First John 1:8 claims that “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” Because of continual sin, perfectionism on earth, which is completed holiness, must be denied. The experiential sanctification of the believer is the act of the Spirit that continues to guide him to more and more likeness to Christ.

The means through which we are to obtain this experiential holiness is a work of the Spirit. In John 16 Jesus tells the apostles that when the Spirit comes “he will guide you into all truth.” As mentioned above, illumination is one of the main functions of the Spirit. When the Bible is preached the Spirit not only calls those into salvation, but guides believers through the experience of sanctification. Romans 8 is the premier chapter on the sanctifying work of the Spirit. The overall message Paul gives is to “set your mind on the things of the Spirit” over against the things of the flesh (v. 5).

Galatians 5 also mentions experiential sanctification. In this passage the believer is to live according to the Spirit and in doing so will effectively put away the desires of the flesh: “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh” (v.17). In verses 19–24 Paul provides examples of how those in the flesh and those in the Spirit live and he exhorts believers to live by the Spirit’s fruit. We need to live a lifestyle that is submissive to the indwelling Spirit. Paul speaks to this in Philippians 2:12–13, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” This passage does not imply a works-based salvation, but an experiential sanctification whereby we are constantly subjecting ourselves to the indwelt Holy Spirit.

Glorification

When this life ends and the believer is able to gain that inheritance of which the Spirit is a down payment, the final stage of salvation occurs. We call this final stage glorification. The *BF&M* defines it as “the culmination of salvation and is the final blessed and abiding state of the redeemed.” This is where the salvific work of the Spirit comes to a climax by finally completing the experiential sanctification begun at conversion.

CONCLUSION

Since all believers experience salvation it is a subject that needs to be rightly understood. The often-highlighted human experience and testimony of salvation should not be minimized, but additions need to be made to the common presentation of salvation. The

²⁵Ibid., 759.

work of salvation is a work of the Trinity especially seen in its economic relationship to Godself and to the created world. The Father may have foreknowledge, the Spirit may be making believers holy, and the blood of Jesus may bring obedience (cf. 1 Pet 1:2), but it is God who saves. The Spirit's works on earth and in us are in tandem with the works of the Son in whom all believers are unified. Given that importance, those works need not be neglected or relegated to other persons of the Trinity. Our churches need to cease neglecting the Spirit's work or limiting his work to a few gifts. The gift of the Spirit is himself indwelling those who heed his call, applying to them their justification and sanctifying them as holy beings in order to prepare them for the inheritance to come.

THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST: THE IDENTITY OF MELCHIZEDEK IN HEBREWS

DR. R. LARRY OVERSTREET¹

INTRODUCTION

Foundational to Baptist Christology is the superiority of Christ over all created beings, and foundational to Baptist ecclesiology is the headship of Christ over the church. Among the strongest biblical passages arguing for the superiority of Christ over all created beings and particularly the Levitical priesthood is Hebrews 1-10. In Hebrews 7, Jesus is described as a priest after the order of Melchizedek, and thus prior and superior to the Aaronic priesthood. Who was this Melchizedek referenced in Hebrews 7?

Even though the Old Testament references to Melchizedek are meager, their impact is substantial. The mysterious character of Melchizedek is seen in ancient Jewish writings and in many early church fathers, as well as in more contemporary commentators and authors. The author of Hebrews uses Melchizedek to build a substantial part of his argument on the superiority of Christ. A commonly advocated view asserts that Hebrews does this since Melchizedek was a “type of Christ.” This is seen in such statements as: he had “no **recorded** beginning or close” of his life; he is “without any **recorded**” genealogy; and he is “without **recorded** father” and “without **recorded** mother.” However, other views have been advocated, even asserting that Melchizedek is much more than a mere type of Christ.

This article’s purpose is not to give detailed exegesis of all the texts related to Melchizedek. Rather, it limits its emphasis to seeking an exegetically correct identification of him. In so doing, this article focuses on an exegetical examination of key elements of the texts describing Melchizedek, distinguishing suggested identifications.

MELCHIZEDEK IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

A brief survey of writers throughout history provides a glimpse into the variety of positions, which have been taken concerning Melchizedek’s identity. Although detailed volumes are written on this matter,² only some key writers are briefly mentioned.

¹Dr .R. Larry Overstreet is a fellow of the Baptist Center and Professor Emeritus in Pastoral Theology at the Northwest Baptist Seminary.

²See for examples: Fred L. Horton, Jr., *The Melchizedek Tradition: A Critical Examination of the Sources to the Fifth Century A.D. and in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Cambridge UP, 1976); Bruce Demarest, *A History of Interpretation of Hebrews 7, 1-10 from the Reformation to the Present* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1976).

Jewish Writers

Philo

Philo assumes the historical reality of Melchizedek as one “who had received a self-instructed and self-taught priesthood,”³ but he also presents an allegorical interpretation contrasting a legitimate king with a despot, even finding the Ammonites and Moabites in Genesis 14. Philo refers to Melchizedek as the λόγος⁴ described as the “right principle” (λόγος) and as “Reason” (λόγος). Concerning this Horton observes, “Melchizedek has as his portion the one who is. . . , since he is, in fact the Logos itself.”⁵

Qumran

Among the writings from Qumran two are relevant to this study. These are *The Genesis Apocryphon* and the *11Q Melchizedek*.

The Genesis Apocryphon

The Dead Sea Scroll, known as *The Genesis Apocryphon*⁶ from the first century B.C., generally provides a literal translation of the account of Abram and Melchizedek, recognizing the former as a historical individual. However, it does not provide a particular identification of the latter.

³Philo, “On Mating with the Preliminary Studies,” §99, *The Works of Philo Complete and Unabridged*, new updated edition, trans. C. D. Yonge (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), 312.

⁴Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation*, III, § 80 and 82. The Loeb Classical Library, trans. F. H. Colson (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1956), 354.

⁵Fred L. Horton, Jr., *The Melchizedek Tradition: A Critical Examination of the Sources to the Fifth Century A.D. and in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Cambridge UP, 1976), 57. Horton discusses Philo’s connection of Melchizedek with the Logos as follows: “The Logos is the mind of God in which the pattern of all the visible world is conceived. As such, the Logos has no visible or sensible antecedents. It is the ‘eldest’ . . . and ‘most generic’ . . . of all things. Indeed, the Logos is the ‘first-born’ . . . , the ‘shadow of God’ . . . and the ‘pattern of the image’ . . . of God in which image God made man. Melchizedek’s lack of antecedents in the priest-kingship, i.e. the fact that his priesthood is self-tutored, lends itself to Philo’s interpretation of Melchizedek as the Logos,” 59-60.

⁶Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave 1: A Commentary*, 2nd rev. ed. (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1971).

The 11Q Melchizedek

The poorly preserved fragments known as the *11Q Melchizedek* date from the early first century A.D.⁷ After providing a full consideration of the text and its implications, Horton draws no definitive conclusion concerning who Melchizedek was: “We have just enough of the original document to tell that the author considered Melchizedek to be a superior being of some sort who will appear at the end of days to bring atonement for the sons of light and who is the direct opponent of Belial. We do not have enough of the document left to satisfy our curiosity about how the Melchizedek of Gen. xiv and Ps. cx could become such a figure. . . .”⁸

More definite than Horton, Fitzmyer asserts that in these fragments “Melchizedek seems to enjoy a status among or even above such heavenly beings as ‘the holy ones of God’. . . .”⁹ Fitzmyer further declares that, “He is associated with the deliverance of divine judgment, with a day of atonement, with a year of jubilee, and with a role that exalts him high above the assembly of heavenly beings. Such associations make the comparison in Hebrews between Jesus the high priest and Melchizedek all the more intelligible.”¹⁰

Josephus

Josephus refers to Melchizedek in both *Wars of the Jews* vi.x.1 and *Antiquities of the Jews* i.x.2,¹¹ assuming he is a historical character. He also adds (in *Wars*) that Melchizedek was “the first priest of God; and first built a temple there, and called the city Jerusalem; which was formerly called Salem.” Unfortunately, Josephus does not explain what he means by the “first priest” and the “temple.”

The Rabbinic Sources

Jewish writers prior to, and contemporaneous with, New Testament times interact with the person of Melchizedek in varying ways. A similar situation occurs in Jewish writers after the New Testament was completed. Their views can be briefly summarized.

⁷Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 73. Horton provides a reconstruction of the text and a detailed discussion concerning it.

⁸Ibid., 79.

⁹Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Semitic Background of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 252.

¹⁰Ibid., 253.

¹¹Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (New York: Hurst & Co., n.d.).

According to the Jewish rabbi Rashi (born 1040), “The Midrash identifies him [Melchizedek] with Shem.”¹² The rabbis proposed that a priesthood was given to Abraham through Melchizedek (Shem) prior to the Levitical priesthood. Jewish apocalyptic “literature variously interpreted Melchizedek as a heavenly angel exercising priestly functions, as the archangel Michael himself, or as a high priest of the Messianic age who emerges alongside Elijah *redivivus*.”¹³

Writers through Church History

Numerous writers throughout the history of the church have considered Melchizedek. Both early and late church writers were interested in him.

Early Church Writers

Some church fathers refer to Melchizedek without seeking to identify him.¹⁴ Other church fathers identify Melchizedek clearly as a man,¹⁵ and as a type of Christ.¹⁶

¹²A. Cohen, *The Soncino Chumash: The Five Books of Moses with Haphtaroth* (London: The Soncino Press, 1983), 69. “In Rabb. exegesis it was often conjectured that Melchizedek was another name for Shem, the son of Noah,” O. Michel, “Μελχισεδέκ,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed.. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 569. Horton observes that from “an early time Melchizedek was identified by the Rabbis with Shem, the son of Noah,” *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 114. Horton also demonstrates how this identification “had already been made by the first third of the second century A.D., as is shown by several quotations from R. Ishmael ben Elisha,” who wrote 110-135, *Ibid.*, 118.

¹³Bruce Demarest, *A History of Interpretation of Hebrews 7, 1-10 from the Reformation to the Present* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1976), 130. With this conclusion of Demarest, Sarna concurs: “In rabbinic sources he is a righteous priest who takes his place with the Messiahs of David and Joseph and with Elijah,” Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 380. See also Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand*, 138-39, for an overall summary of rabbinic teaching on Melchizedek.

¹⁴For examples, Ignatius (ca. 50-115) uses him as an illustration of purity; *To the Philadelphians*, CD-ROM, The Theological Journal CD, version 2 (Garland, TX: Galaxie, 1998), 5 [quotations from the Church Fathers are all from this CD]; Justin Martyr (ca. 100-165) emphasizes that he is priest of the uncircumcision, to which the Levitical priesthood is inferior; *Dialogue of Justin, Philosopher and Martyr, with Trypho, a Jew*, 19; the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* (3rd-4th century), 2.6.55, asserts he is one who was instrumental in calling his generation to repentance; and Augustine (354-430) refers to him to support the Christian practice of the sacrament of The Lord’s Table, *The Letters of St. Augustin*, letter 40, 4.6; letter 75, 4.15.

¹⁵In a discussion of the exemplary worship of Abraham, Chrysostom (345-407) compares him to Melchizedek, who had a human birth: “And what of Melchizedek? Was not he also born about those times, and was so bright as to be called even a priest of God?”, *The*

While writing against a heretical sect, called the “Melchizedekians,” who glorified Melchizedek as greater than Christ, Epiphanius (ca. 315-403) identifies several views as to the identity of Melchizedek. He asserts that some considered Melchizedek as human and had identified his father and mother as “Heraclas” and “Astarth” (or “Astoriane”),¹⁷ and that while he was just, holy, God’s priest, and king of Salem, “he was not of the <order> [sic] of heavenly beings, nor did he come down from heaven.”¹⁸ Others, he asserts, consider Melchizedek to be “the Holy Spirit,”¹⁹ or Noah’s son “Shem.”²⁰ Concerning Jewish belief, Epiphanius writes that “The Jews for their part say that Melchizedek is just and good and priest of the Most High . . . but because he is the son of a whore, they say, his mother is not mentioned in writing nor is his father known.”²¹ Finally, Epiphanius refers to views held in the church, asserting that “at present some people have different ideas about who Melchizedek is. Some think that he is by nature the Son of God who appeared to Abraham back then in human form.”²² With this view, Clement of Alexandria (died ca. 215) seems to agree in his description of Christ, our Savior: “What need is there to say that He is the only

Homilies on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans, 26; Jerome (340-420) specifically refers to Melchizedek, “that king of Salem who, as a type of Christ, offered to Abraham bread and wine, and even then consecrated the mystery which Christians consecrate in the body and blood of the Savior,” *The Letters of St. Jerome*, letter 46; Jerome’s acceptance of Melchizedek as a type of Christ requires Melchizedek to be a man. Jerome’s letter 73 is summarized by the editor, “To Evangelus. Evangelus had sent Jerome an anonymous treatise in which Melchizedek was identified with the Holy Ghost, and had asked him what he thought of the theory. Jerome in his reply repudiates the idea as absurd and insists that Melchizedek was a real man, possibly, as the Jews said, Shem the eldest son of Noah. The date of the letter is 398 A.D.” In Jerome’s letter 73.2, “Jerome reports that Origen and Didymus regarded Melchizedek as an angel,” Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand*, 140; St. Ambrose (340-397) specifically identifies Melchizedek as a man, distinct from being any type of angelic being: “for even that Melchizedek . . . the Church certainly doth not hold to be an angel (as some Jewish triflers do), but a holy man and priest of God,” *Of the Christian Faith*, 3.11

¹⁶Some church fathers who regard Melchizedek as a “type” of Christ include: Cyprian (ca. 200-258), *The Epistles of Cyprian*, Epistle 62, and Augustine, “*On Christian Doctrine*, 4.21.

¹⁷Epiphanius, “Melchizedekians,” 55.2.1, *The Panarion of St. Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis, Selected Passages*, trans. Philip R. Amidon (New York: Oxford UP, 1990).

¹⁸Ibid., 55.4.1.

¹⁹Ibid., 55.5.2.

²⁰Ibid., 55.6.1.

²¹Ibid., 55.7.1.

²²Ibid., 55.7.3.

High Priest, who alone possesses the knowledge of the worship of God? He is Melchizedek, 'King of peace,' the most fit of all to head the race of men."²³

Later Church Writers

Similar views to the above have been advocated throughout church history.²⁴ A summary of various positions held by interpreters, whether from a humanistic perspective, Protestant viewpoint, Socinian position, Roman Catholic inclination, Reformed or Arminian mindset, etc., is provided by Demarest.²⁵

MELCHIZEDEK IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The enigmatic Melchizedek is introduced in Genesis 14, and is also found in Psalm 110. While the New Testament book of Hebrews devotes considerable space to him and his priesthood, only these two brief texts in the Old Testament consider him.

Genesis 14

The appearance of Melchizedek in Genesis 14 appears abrupt. The chapter opens with Lot being taken captive by a coalition force of four kings, which attacked a coalition force of five kings from the area around Sodom and Gomorrah. Abram gathers a military contingency of his own, pursues the enemy force, defeats them in battle, and returns with the people and possessions, which had been captured. Arriving home, Abram met the king of Sodom who came out to greet him to regain the captive people. Abram returned not only the captive people but also the "goods."

In contrast to the king of the wicked city of Sodom, "Melchizedek king of Salem" also came out to meet Abram. He "was a priest of God Most High." He brought bread and wine to refresh Abram and he blessed Abram. After that blessing, Abram gave a tenth of all the spoils which he had to Melchizedek.

Melchizedek appears on the scene like a meteorite in the night sky, and disappears almost as quickly. Although there "is virtually unanimous opinion among [critical] scholars

²³Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata*, 2.5.

²⁴See Erik M. Heen and Philip D. W. Krey, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament, X, Hebrews* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005, 94-109, for further quotations from church writers, including Eusebius of Caesarea (260-340), Ephrem the Syrian (306-373), Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389), Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428), Nestorius (381-451), Theodoret of Cyr (393-466), Severian of Gabala (fl. 400), Leo the Great (fl. 440-461), Bede (672-735), and Photius (820-891).

²⁵Demarest, *A History of Interpretation of Hebrews 7, 1-10*. In addition to Demarest, a concise and yet complete historical summary of the views on Melchizedek from the early church onwards can be seen in Henry Alford, "The Epistle to the Hebrews," *The Greek Testament*, rev. Everett F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody, 1968), 127-29.

that [Gen. 14] vss. 18-20 were not originally of a piece with the rest of Genesis 14,”²⁶ and many speculate that Melchizedek was a Canaanite priest,²⁷ conservative scholars, who accept the integrity of Genesis, find such speculations unconvincing.²⁸ The titles of God used (14:19) testify that He is no Canaanite deity recognized by a Canaanite priest. The title “‘Most high God’ (‘*el ‘ehyôn*) emphasizes God’s strength and sovereignty, distinguishing Him from the gods of Canaan who were subject to the same weaknesses as their worshippers. ‘Possessor of heaven and earth’ is similar to titles used in Daniel 4.”²⁹ To these titles, Abram prefaces “LORD” (14:22), confirming that the true God is the focus here.

Sarna shows how the abruptness of Melchizedek’s introduction in Genesis 14 fits well in the narrative:

The artfulness with which the Melchizedek episode is integrated into the narrative is proven by the priest-king’s mention of Abram’s victory and by reference to the ‘Valley of the King’ (v. 17), which smooths the way for the appearance of the ‘king of Salem,’ the first element of whose name—Melchizedek—also means ‘king.’ There is a subtle contrast in the uses of the verb *y-ts-’* [יצא], ‘to go out.’ The king of Sodom ‘came out’ empty-handed to meet his benefactor, and the first word he uttered was ‘give!’ The king of Salem ‘brought out’ bread and wine and offered a blessing. . . . The name of Melchizedek’s city—Salem (Heb. *shalēm*) [שָׁלֵם]—is suggestive of *shalom*, the peace that Abram’s intervention brought to the region. Finally, the extraordinary title of God used by Abram in his colloquy with the king of Sodom is the name just used twice by Melchizedek.³⁰

Although the book of Genesis has numerous genealogical annotations, none is found concerning Melchizedek. His name is a combination of two Hebrew words, מלכי, (king) and צדק (righteousness), “king of righteousness.” He is also king of “Salem,” meaning “peace,” a word also used in Psalm 76:2 referring to Jerusalem. That Salem refers to Jerusalem is also confirmed by the reference to the “valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley)” (14:17; this valley only appears elsewhere in 2 Sam. 18:18, of the place where Absalom “set up for himself a pillar”). Josephus explicitly identifies the location: “Now

²⁶John G. Gammie, “Loci of the Melchizedek Tradition of Genesis 14:18-20,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 90 (1971): 385-96. In contrast to Gammie, see the quotation from Sarna below concerning how the text fits well into the context of the chapter.

²⁷Loren R. Fisher, “Abraham and his Priest-King,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962): 264-70)

²⁸See Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 291-93; John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 122-23.

²⁹John J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison: Studies in Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), 181.

³⁰Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 109.

Absalom had erected for himself a marble pillar, in the king's dale ["the King's Valley"], two furlongs distant from Jerusalem."³¹

From the Genesis data particular conclusions can be drawn. Since Melchizedek blessed Abram, and Abram gave a tithe to him, Melchizedek is superior to Abram. The appearance of Melchizedek at this historical event is crucial in the development of Abram's faith. Before the king of Sodom can suggest that Abram "take the goods for yourself," Melchizedek blesses Abram. "The words of this marvelous priest surely inspired the patriarch in his anticipation of the promises of God. Herein lies the strength for Abram's discernment of the Sodomite's offer: with a fresh reminder of the nature and promise of the Lord, the appeal from the pagan was shown to be nothing more than a confusing digression from the true faith."³²

Following Melchizedek's blessing, Abram rejects the king of Sodom's offer (14:22-23), affirming his relationship to the Lord who provides for him. The development of Abram's faith continues in the following section of Genesis. "Because Abram avowed the sufficiency of Yahweh for himself, Yahweh appeared to him to commend him and to assure him of continued divine support. The conversation (15:1ff) forms the transition and introduction to the next section, 15:1-21:21."³³ Melchizedek's interaction with Abram is, therefore, an integral part of the progression of thought in Genesis, and serves as an important function in the development of Abram's faith.

Psalm 110

Several crucial questions stimulate interpreters of Psalm 110, but a full discussion of all their ramifications is not the purpose of this study. A brief consideration of key elements, however, is essential since this Psalm is more frequently quoted or alluded to in the New Testament than any other.

The authorship and time frame of the Psalm³⁴ involve three primary possibilities. Some have suggested a pre-Israelite origin of the Psalm and connect it with the historical situation of the Jebusites.³⁵ Others suggest that this is a Maccabean era Psalm.³⁶ A third

³¹Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 7.10.3. In addition to Josephus, the "Genesis Apocryphon (1QapGen 22:13) clearly connects Salem and Jerusalem," Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 410.

³²Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 300.

³³Harold G. Stigers, *A Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 152.

³⁴The title of the Psalm, "A Psalm of David," can be taken to mean David wrote the Psalm or that the Psalm is about David in some way.

³⁵H. G. Jefferson, "Is Psalm 110 Canaanite?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 73 (1954): 152-56. A more comprehensive discussion of the general question of time frame and

view is that this Psalm comes from the time of David-Solomon.³⁷ The New Testament confirms this third view in that it bears abundant testimony to the Davidic authorship of the Psalm (cf. Matt. 22:43-45; Mk. 12:36-37; Lk. 20:42-44; Acts 2:34).

Assuming David is speaking, the next crucial question is: who is being addressed in the Psalm's opening words, "The LORD says to my Lord"? Again, several suggestions are made. One is that, although "this is the most messianic of all psalms as far as New Testament usage is concerned,"³⁸ David is speaking about himself as a royal priest. This means that the "royal priesthood of Jesus Christ, while ultimately traced back to Melchizedek, is most immediately modeled after that of David who himself was declared to be a priest after the order of Melchizedek and who exercised that priesthood from time to time as did his dynastic successors."³⁹ A second possibility is that David spoke this Psalm to his son Solomon, but it also contains a typological-prophetic character: "David prophetically spoke the psalm to his 'lord,' Solomon, when Solomon ascended to the Davidic throne in 971 B.C. Psalm 110 was then applied in the New Testament to Jesus Christ as the ultimate and unique Davidic King and Lord."⁴⁰ A third option is that the Psalm is entirely prophetic and that it "cannot address one of the kings of Israel."⁴¹ Although

authorship is found in Herbert W. Bateman, IV, "Psalm 110 and the New Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (1992): 438-53.

³⁶M. Treves, "Two Acrostic Psalms," *Vetus Testamentum* 15 (1965): 81-90). A Jewish scholar supports this view, "Modern scholars have favoured the identification of the king with Simon Maccabee who combined the monarchy with the office of High Priest," A. Cohen, *The Psalms*, Soncino Books of the Bible (London: The Soncino Press, 1964), 371.

³⁷Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms III: 101-150*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday, 1982), 112.

³⁸Eugene H. Merrill, "Royal Priesthood: An Old Testament Messianic Motif," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (1993), 54.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 61. Merrill exerts much energy attempting to demonstrate that David legitimately exercised the rights of priesthood. A similar view that the Psalm referred to Hezekiah exercising priestly rights was discussed and rejected by the church fathers Justin Martyr (ca. 100-165), *Dialogue of Justin, Philosopher and Martyr, with Trypho, a Jew*, 33, and Tertullian (ca. 160-220), *The Five Books Against Marcion*, 5.9.

⁴⁰Bateman, "Psalm 110 and the New Testament," 453.

⁴¹M. J. Paul, "The Order of Melchizedek (Ps. 110:4 and Heb. 7:3)," *Westminster Theological Journal* (1987), 200. Paul refers to R. de Vaux [Les institutions de l'Ancient Testament (2 vols.; Paris: Cerf, 1958, 1960), 1.175], and writes that Vaux "sums up priestly actions of the kings, but he says that this evidence does not necessarily prove that the king himself was a priest. He only had to fulfill certain priestly functions in exceptional circumstances," 200.

the issues are numerous, the third option seems best.⁴² “Jesus’ application to Himself of Psalm 110, in which the messianic king was also a priestly figure after the order of Melchizedek, points unmistakably [sic] to His self-consciousness as the eschatological high priest (Mark 12:35-37).”⁴³ “Ps. 110:4 proves that with him [Melchizedek] there begins a new order (τάξις) which cannot be combined with the Aaronic priesthood.”⁴⁴ The writer of Hebrews seems to accept this view in his first reference in 1:13, and again in 5:5-10. “In Heb 5 the author applies this verse of Ps 110 to Jesus, undoubtedly understanding it as messianic. . . . Having first introduced Ps 2:7 to establish the risen Jesus as the possessor of *regal* inheritance, he adds Ps 110:4 to present the Kingly Son of God as one appointed also to an *eternal priesthood*.”⁴⁵ The quotation in chapter 5 is, therefore, designed to prepare the way for the lengthy discussion of Melchizedek in chapter 7. To that discussion attention is now turned.

MELCHIZEDEK IN HEBREWS 7

Grasping the general flow of the argument of the book of Hebrews is crucial to understanding how chapter seven furthers the writer’s thought. The overall theme of the book of Hebrews is that Christ is superior, and chapter 7 occurs in the first major division of the book (1:1-10:18) where that theme is especially emphasized.

Argument of Hebrews

Hebrews 1:1-10:18 enunciates the superiority of Christ. He is first of all superior to the prophets (1:1-4), then superior to angels (1:5-2:18), superior to Moses (3:1-4:13), and finally to the Aaronic priesthood (4:14-10:18).

The author of Hebrews shows that Christ is superior to angels as Son (1:5-6), King (1:7-9), Creator (1:10-12), and Ruler (1:13-14). Psalm 110 is quoted in Hebrews 1:13 to show that Christ is superior to the angels as Ruler since God never said to any angel, “Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.” Following a warning not to drift from the superior Christ (2:1-4), the author demonstrates that Christ’s superiority over angels is proved by His sovereignty (2:5-9) and His salvation (2:10-18).

The argument of Hebrews continues by emphasizing the superiority of Christ to Moses (3:1-4:13). Christ is shown to be superior in His person and work (3:1-4), and superior in His position (3:5-6). Next, the writer again issues a warning, this time against

⁴²See also Elliott E. Johnson, “Hermeneutical Principles and the Interpretation of Psalm 110,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (1992): 428-37.

⁴³Alex T. M. Cheung, “The Priest as the Redeemed Man: A Biblical-Theological Study of the Priesthood,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29 (September 1986), 271.

⁴⁴Michel, “Μελχισεδέκ,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 4, 570.

⁴⁵Fitzmyer, *Semitic Background*, 225.

disbelief of the superior Christ (3:7-4:13), by stressing that faith is a condition of blessing (3:7-19) and that there is a promised rest (4:1-13).

The flow of thought in the book now turns to a detailed presentation showing the superiority of Christ to the Aaronic priesthood (4:14-10:18). This section opens with an emphasis on Christ being superior in His glorious position (4:14-5:10) because He is a heavenly High Priest (4:14), a helpful High Priest (4:15-16), in contrast to the human high priests (5:1-4), a heavenly-ordained High Priest (5:5-6), and a perfected High Priest (5:7-10). A third warning is then given to the readers against degeneration from the superior Christ (5:11-6:20). Following that warning, the writer resumes his emphasis by asserting the superiority of Christ in His priesthood (7:1-28), giving first the characteristics of Melchizedek (7:1-3), and the superior priesthood of Melchizedek (7:4-10). Christ is shown to be a perfect High Priest (7:11-28), in contrast to the imperfection of the Levitical priesthood (7:11-19), because His is a better priesthood (7:20-25), and He is the absolute High Priest (7:26-28).

The author of Hebrews continues to emphasize the superiority of Christ to the Aaronic priesthood by showing that He is superior in His new sanctuary (8:1-5), superior in His new covenant (8:6-13), superior in His atonement (9:1-28), as he contrasts the atonement of the old covenant (9:1-10) with that of the new covenant (9:11-28), and superior in His sacrifice (10:1-18), as he shows the weakness of the old sacrifices (10:1-4), the efficacy of the new sacrifice (10:5-10), the inability of the Aaronic priests (10:11), the sufficiency of Christ (10:12-14), and the completion of salvation (10:15-18).

SUPERIOR IN HIS PRIESTHOOD (HEBREWS 7)

The Characteristics of Melchizedek (7:1-3)

The overall purpose of chapter 7 is to demonstrate the royal supremacy of Christ in His priesthood, which is “according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 5:10), and which is “hard to explain” (5:11). The emphasis on Christ being “according to the order of Melchizedek” is repeated in 6:20, and 7:17. In each occurrence the connection is with the priesthood, emphasizing that Christ did not receive His priesthood from any natural descent but on the basis of an oath (see Heb. 7:21). In 6:20, in particular, the phrase is specifically connected with Christ’s work of salvation, “where the Melchizedekian priesthood is predicated of Jesus just as he enters the inner (heavenly) sanctuary as ‘forerunner on our behalf.’”⁴⁶

“The interests of the author in the Melchizedek tradition become clear in vii 1-3, where the author brings together those features of Genesis xiv 18-20 and Psalm cx 4 which are useful for his claim that Melchizedek is a divine figure.”⁴⁷ In Hebrews 7:1-3 the pattern of His priesthood is set forth; in 7:4-10 the pre-eminence of His priesthood is stressed. The

⁴⁶Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand*, 145-46.

⁴⁷James W. Thompson, “The Conceptual Background and Purpose of the Midrash in Hebrews VII,” *Novum Testamentum* 19 (July 1977), 211.

perfection of His priesthood is detailed in 7:11-28. In 7:1-10 the writer of Hebrews “uses the incident of Melchizedek’s meeting with Abraham to show the priority of Melchizedek over the Levitical priests. The comparison is primary to the demonstration in 7:11-28 that the priest ‘like Melchizedek’ is superior to the Levitical priests.”⁴⁸

Melchizedek’s Qualities of Being

The writer of Hebrews presents specific characteristics of Melchizedek as he draws from the accounts of Genesis 14 and Psalm 110 in this text. Melchizedek is “king of Salem,” which Psalm 76:2 identifies as Jerusalem.⁴⁹ As “king of Salem,” Melchizedek is a royal figure. He is also “priest of the Most High God.” This priestly figure serves the Lord who is “possessor of heaven and earth” (Gen. 14:19). This Melchizedek met Abraham and blessed him, and by that act of giving a blessing Melchizedek “at once assumed the position of a superior”⁵⁰ over Abraham (Heb. 7:7). This is a crucial point since Jewish people claimed Abraham as their spiritual father (cf. John 8:33, 39), but here is one obviously superior to Abraham. To Melchizedek Abraham gave “a tenth part of all” (Heb. 7:2) and in so doing Abraham assumed the position of the inferior, willingly acknowledging the superiority of Melchizedek.

The writer of Hebrews proceeds to interpret the Genesis narrative for his readers. Melchizedek is “by the translation of *his name*, king of righteousness” (Heb. 7:2). Significantly, this emphasis on righteousness occurs first. This is what Melchizedek is stated to **be**, not what he is merely called. Melchizedek is one whose character is specifically characterized by righteousness (cf. Isa. 32:1, 15). Furthermore, he is “king of Salem, which is king of peace” (7:2). Again, this is the characteristic of the person (cf. Isa. 9:7, which also includes “righteousness”)⁵¹. “His personal name and the name of his city are taken to correspond with the actual traits of his character.”⁵²

⁴⁸William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 163.

⁴⁹Some interpreters debate the issue of whether “Salem” refers to Jerusalem or to some other location, such as Shechem. The writer of Hebrews does not enter that debate, but merely states the fact that Melchizedek is king of Salem.

⁵⁰Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The Greek Text with Notes and Essays* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 171.

⁵¹“The writer may have recognized in Melchizedek’s character as ‘king of righteousness’ and ‘king of peace’ a prefiguration of the promised Messiah. . . , but nothing is made of these notions,” Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 164.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 172.

Melchizedek's Lack of Ancestry

The author next describes Melchizedek with the crucial terms, “without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life” (Heb. 7:3), and later as one who has “the power of an indestructible life” (Heb. 7:16). Concerning these descriptions a multitude of pages has been written. Many interpreters advocate that this merely means there is no **record** of his parents, of his ancestry, of his birth, or of his death, given in the Old Testament; this is stated to set up a contrast to the Levitical system where the emphasis was on the priest’s pedigree.⁵³ An examination of the terminology, however, points in a different direction, which Ellingworth acknowledges: “The following words suggest that the pre-Christian hymn [which is how he takes this text’s background] was concerned with the eternal, and therefore no doubt heavenly, origin of Melchizedek. This cannot be excluded from the thought of the author of Hebrews. . . .”⁵⁴ The third verse reads, ἀπάτωρ, ἀμήτωρ, ἀγενεαλόγητος, μήτε ἀρχὴν ἡμερῶν μήτε ζωῆς τέλος ἔχων.

The word translated “without genealogy” is ἀγενεαλόγητος. It occurs only here in the NT, and outside the NT is found only in reference to this passage.⁵⁵ It means simply, “without genealogy,” and may have been coined by the author of Hebrews.⁵⁶

⁵³Kent, for example, asserts that this “does not mean that he had no human parents, but rather that so far as the record goes these were absent,” Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), 126. Likewise Kistemaker writes, “We ought not take this verse [7:3] literally, for the author, reasoning from silence (Gen. 14:18-20), is comparing Melchizedek with the priests who descended from Aaron,” Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 185.

⁵⁴Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 358. Attridge agrees: “The poetic epithets used here do not simply describe the fact of which scripture is silent. They also evoke an image of eternity and transcendence.” Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 190.

⁵⁵Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., rev. Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 9.

⁵⁶It is around this term that much of the discussion concerning Melchizedek’s identity hinges, whether he is a mere man or the preincarnate Christ: “These diametrically opposed points of view concerning the writer’s intention reflect different estimates of the element in v 3 that is crucial. According to the first approach [preincarnate Christ view], the crucial statement is v. 3b (‘having neither beginning of days nor end of life’), which indicates that the writer is developing a hellenistic [sic] mythological [this present writer does not accept that Hebrews uses a ‘mythological’ approach] concept of a supra-human figure endowed with a mysterious heavenly origin. According to the second approach, the

Some interpreters have observed that the words “without father” and “without mother” are “used in Greek for waifs of unknown parentage, for illegitimate children, for people who came from unimportant families, and sometimes for deities who were supposed to take their origin from one sex only. . . . When nothing is recorded of the parentage of this man [Melchizedek], it is not necessarily to be assumed that he had no parents but simply that the absence of the record is significant.”⁵⁷ That statement has correct elements in it, but it also overstates the case. It functions with the assumption that the words appear in Greek contexts which exactly parallel the context of Hebrews 7, and therefore what is occurring in that type of Greek literature also occurs in the book of Hebrews. However, such is not the case.⁵⁸ In those occurrences in other Greek literature the contexts of the uses consistently identify that the words are used in what is not a technically literal sense. A few examples will illustrate this.

The Greek playwright Sophocles (died 406 B.C.) uses “without father” (ἀπάτωρ) in his play *Trachiniae*. However, the context is clear that the women referred to as “fatherless” do indeed have fathers, perhaps “free-born sires.”

And a strange pity hath come o’er me, friends,
At sight of these poor wretches, motherless,
Fatherless, homeless, in an alien land,
Daughters, it well may be, of free-born sires,
And now condemned to live the life of slaves.⁵⁹

significant element is the third term in v 3a (“without genealogy”), in the light of which the other declarations are to be interpreted.” Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 165.

⁵⁷Leon Morris, “Hebrews,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 63.

⁵⁸“The context makes it clear that the author does not use ἀπάτωρ and ἀμήτωρ in the pejorative sense of ‘orphan’ or ‘illegitimate child,’ as was common in Judaism. Rather the terms carry the meaning of the divine being of Hellenism. Cf. Euripides, *Ion*. 109; Plato, *Symp* 180d.” James W. Thompson, “The Conceptual Background . . . Hebrews VII,” 212, fn. 12. See also Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2001), who cogently states: “When papyri give a person’s name followed by ‘father unknown’ (*apatōr*). . . , the implication is that the person is illegitimate. . . . A person with ‘no mother, no father’ would be a foundling, an orphan. . . , or an illegitimate child,” 342. This is not at all consistent with Hebrews.

⁵⁹Sophocles, *Trachiniae* 298-302, trans. F. Storr, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1961). Sophocles uses “without mother” in a similar way, clearly identifying “That mother, mother none, Whose crimes, as oft thou gav’st me secret word, Thou wouldst thyself speedily avenge,” Sophocles, *Electra* 1154-1156, trans. F. Storr, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1961). See also Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus* 1383, trans. F. Storr, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1962), where Oedipus disowns his son in similar language.

The Greek essayist and biographer Plutarch (A.D. 46?-120) also used the term “without father” (ἄπᾶτωρ) in his discussion of various Roman questions in his *Moralia*. One question was, “Why do they call children of unknown fathers *spurii*?” The term “unknown fathers” is then discussed at some length with the context making it abundantly clear that these descriptions “denote children of unknown fathers . . . that is ‘without a father.’”⁶⁰ Clearly this context does not refer literally to a person without a father.

The Greek philosopher Plato (427-347 B.C.) shows the same use of the word in his *Laws*. When discussing the possibility of “differences greater than is right” between fathers and sons, he shows that the outcome of these differences may result in fathers publicly proclaiming “that their sons have legally ceased to be their sons,” and a result of that is that the “fatherless man” (ἄπᾶτωρ) should emigrate to another State.”⁶¹ Once again, the context is quite clear that this is not a man with no literal father.

Close examination of the use of the words ἄπᾶτωρ⁶² and ἀμήτωρ⁶³ in Greek literature demonstrates that the terms are not used at all in the same sense as that of the book of Hebrews when referring to ordinary individuals. Indeed, the book of Hebrews specifically sets Melchizedek in contrast to ordinary individuals. The writer of Hebrews presents nothing in his context to minimize the full and literal significance of the involved terms.

⁶⁰Plutarch, *Moralia* 2.288E, trans. Frank Cole Babitt, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1962).

⁶¹Plato, *Laws* 929a, trans. R. G. Bury, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1961). For additional examples of this same type of occurrence concerning ἀπᾶτωρ, see: Euripides, *Iphigeneia in Taurica* 864, trans. Arthur S. Way, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1958); Euripides, *The Madness of Hercules* 114, trans. Arthur S. Way, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1952). For examples of this same type of occurrence concerning ἀμήτωρ (see Euripides, *Ion* 109, trans. Arthur S. Way, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1958); Herodotus, *The Persian Wars* 4.154, trans. George Rawlinson (New York: Random House, 1942).

⁶²See Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 99; Gottlob Schrenk, “ἄπᾶτωρ,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 1019-20; and Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. Henry Stuart Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 181, for additional extra-biblical uses of the word.

⁶³See Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 54; and Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 82 for additional extra-biblical uses of the word.

How such terms are used when referring to deities must now be considered. The significance of this kind of usage was investigated in detail by Neyrey.⁶⁴ His thesis is that true gods are described in the Hellenistic literature with the same kinds of descriptive words which are used in the book of Hebrews. He provides a summary of the various terms which convey the concepts of “Eternal in the Past/Imperishable in the Future,” “Remains Forever,” and “Without Father or Mother or Genealogy.” He concludes that “evidence from ancient Greek sources” demonstrate that “it belongs to a true deity to be both ‘without father’ and ‘without mother.’”⁶⁵ Concerning Melchizedek he avers that “he is presented in terms used to describe a deity,” but that this emphasis “is not to exalt Melchizedek for his own sake, but to promote Jesus: ‘... resembling the Son of God’ (7:3).”⁶⁶ Neyrey’s study demonstrates that “Unmistakably, the author of Hebrews intends his readers to understand the figure described in 7:3 as a true deity, completely in accord with the *topoi* which describe true gods as fully eternal, uncreated or ungenerated in the past, and imperishable in the future.”⁶⁷

Melchizedek’s Eternality

In addition to the foregoing descriptions of Melchizedek, the writer of Hebrews explicitly states that Melchizedek is one “having neither beginning of days nor end of life.” Again, many interpreters advocate this means only that the Old Testament record is silent about his birth and death.⁶⁸ A critical element to observe, however, is that the word “having” (ἔχων) is in the present tense, stressing continuous action. This participle goes with both the “beginning of days” and the “end of life.” The text stresses that Melchizedek is presently having no beginning nor end. He is eternal. This stands in marked contrast to the situation of Aaron whose death is given in detail in the Old Testament (Num. 20:22-29).

As the argument proceeds, Melchizedek is asserted to be “made like the Son of God.” The verb translated “made like” is ἀφωμοιωμένος, a perfect passive participle (“having been made like”), the compound form causing it to be emphatic.⁶⁹ Interpreters

⁶⁴Jerome H. Neyrey, “‘Without Beginning of Days or End of Life’ (Hebrews 7:3): Topos for a True Deity,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 53 (1991): 439-55.

⁶⁵Ibid., 447.

⁶⁶Ibid., 448.

⁶⁷Ibid., 454.

⁶⁸In contrast, Thompson considers that “The next phrase, μήτε ἀρχὴν ἡμερῶν μήτε ζωῆς τέλος ἔχων accents the eternity of Melchizedek and is an appropriate transition to vii 3d. That which is divine (ἀπάτωρ, ἀμήτωρ) is eternal.” James W. Thompson, “The Conceptual Background . . . Hebrews VII,” 213.

⁶⁹This verb occurs only here in the NT. For a survey of its use in extrabiblical literature, see J. Schneider, “ἀφομοιόω,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard

who advocate that Melchizedek is a type of Christ, commonly state that this means he is like the Son of God because of the statements given and the information which is withheld concerning him in the Old Testament.⁷⁰ However, another approach to the text is preferable. The title “Son of God” is crucial in this context since it points to the eternal nature of Christ. The “Son of God” (that is, Christ in His deity) had no father, mother, genealogy, birth, or death.”⁷¹ However, the “Son of Man” (that is, Jesus in His humanity; observe that the actual name “Jesus” does not occur in chapter 7 until 7:22) did have a mother (no earthly father), genealogy, birth, and death. Hebrews 7 stresses that Melchizedek is a human representation of the Divine Son of God. Although Bruce considers Melchizedek to be a human type of Christ, he yet makes a pertinent observation on this thought: “It is the eternal being of the Son of God that is here in view, not His human life.”⁷² The word translated “made like” means “to produce a facsimile or copy.”⁷³ A facsimile is an exact copy. Prior to His incarnation, the Son of God did appear to men in the Old Testament in human representations (Christophany, or Theophany), which were exact representations of Him. Taking the words of Hebrews 7 at their face value, Melchizedek is a Christophany.⁷⁴

The next emphasis is that Melchizedek “remains a priest continually.” Some interpreters state that this merely **assumes** he is alive for the sake of the argument in this passage. Others argue that this means the Bible **record** is silent as to any interruption of the priestly office. The verb used here, “remains” (μένω), occurs in the book of Hebrews in 7:3,

Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 198.

⁷⁰MacArthur, for example, writes that “Melchizedek is described as **made like** the Son of God (7:3), not as *being* the Son of God. I believe that Melchizedek was a historical human being, whose priestly ministry typifies that of Christ [emphasis his],” John F. MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Hebrews* (Chicago: Moody, 1983), 173.

⁷¹Morris recognizes this as he observes that the “writer is, of course, speaking of the Son’s eternal nature, not of his appearance in the Incarnation,” “Hebrews,” 64.

⁷²F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 138.

⁷³Archibald Thomas Robertson, “The Epistle to the Hebrews,” *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 1932 (Grand Rapids: Baker, n.d.), 381. Interestingly, Robertson states that Melchizedek is a normal man, and that the “likeness is in the picture drawn in Genesis, not in the man himself,” 381. In contrast, however, the text of Hebrews directly states that “this Melchizedek” (7:1) is the one involved, the man himself.

⁷⁴Bruce also quotes J. B. McCaul: “Cunaeus . . . believes, as Ewald does, and I do, that Melchizedek was the second person in the Ever Blessed Trinity, the Divine *angel of the Lord*, who continually appeared to the Fathers under the Old Testament dispensation . . . if Melchizedek was ‘without beginning of days or end of life’, but ‘abideth a priest continually’, how can it be believed of him that he was a mere mortal? . . . Melchizedek, as the Divine *Logos*, existed from eternity’ (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [London 1871], pp. 75, 80),” 137.

24; 10:34; 12:27; 13:1, 14, and the related verb διαμένω is found in 1:11. The consistent emphasis found in all the references is to heavenly certainties, such as to the eternity of God (1:11), the eternal possession as believers (10:34), the unshaken realities of God (12:27), the continuing love of brethren (13:1), and the eternal city of God (13:14). The text of Hebrews likewise asserts the heavenly certainty that Melchizedek “remains” a priest.⁷⁵

The text further asserts that the remaining is continuous, εἰς το. διηνεκές. The adjective διηνεκές is only used in the New Testament in the book of Hebrews (here and in 10:1, 12, 14). By using this term, the writer of Hebrews is stating categorically that Melchizedek is eternal in his being. This term is “here synonymous with εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα of Ps. 110:4 (LXX 109:4, for Heb. *le-’olām*). The adjective διηνεκές is classical from Homer onwards.”⁷⁶

A significant question arises at this juncture. If Melchizedek actually was a pre-incarnate appearing of the Son of God, then how can Christ be a priest after his order? Does this not make Christ a priest after the order of Christ? The answer is that in Hebrews 7 the writer deals with Christ as both the Son of God (deity) and the Son of Man (humanity). When the Son of God became incarnate, this did not alter the nature of the character of His priesthood. The God-Man still maintains the same priesthood that He had before He became man, and that priesthood is superior in every respect to Aaron’s.

The Superior Priesthood of Melchizedek (7:4-10)

This section commences with a statement concerning the general superiority of Melchizedek (7:4). The word translated “Now observe” (from θεωρέω) speaks of a critical, discriminating inspection, so that you “come to an understanding of”⁷⁷ something. In classical times the word was used “for the military sense ‘to muster, to review.’”⁷⁸ What the writer wants understood is that “this man” (Melchizedek) was “great” (πηλίκος), of “extraordinary importance,”⁷⁹ a word which indicates magnitude in dimension. To this man, Abraham gave “a tenth,” which is significant because Abraham was the “patriarch” (the “first father”) of the Jewish nation, the progenitor of the Hebrew race, but Melchizedek is obviously superior to Abraham.

⁷⁵Lane acknowledges that the verb “abides” (μένει) “evokes the notion of eternity, in an eschatological sense,” *Hebrews 1-8*, 167.

⁷⁶Ibid., 133.

⁷⁷Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 454.

⁷⁸Wilhelm Michaelis, qewre,w, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 319.

⁷⁹Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 811.

Following this statement of general superiority, the writer of Hebrews next presents a more detailed superiority of Melchizedek (7:5-10). This detailed superiority is evidenced in respect of receiving tithes (7:5-6a), in respect of blessing (7:6b-7), in respect of life (7:8), and in respect of Levi (7:9-10).

Concerning tithes (7:5-6a), some “of the sons of Levi” received tithes. Not all the sons of Levi became priests; only those sons who descended through Aaron became such. They received “the priest’s office” from God, through his appointment. The Law commanded them to collect the “tenth from the people” because the tithe belonged to God (Lev. 27:30). The priests received the tithe because they represented God to Israel (Num. 18:21, 26). These priests significantly had the same basic descent as the other Israelites; they were “brethren.” The priests did not receive tithes because they were superior to other Israelites, but because the Law commanded it. Only the Law gave the Levitical priests authority to receive tithes. However, in complete contrast, Melchizedek received tithes from Abraham. Melchizedek’s claim is not based on any Law, nor on any genealogy. Rather, Melchizedek’s claim is based on his inherent character, so he is superior. Melchizedek “collected” the tithe from Abraham, the verb being in the perfect tense to indicate that Abraham never did anything to invalidate this act—its results continue.

A comment concerning the phrase “the one whose genealogy is not traced from them” (Heb. 7:6) is necessary. Some suggest that this phrase asserts that Melchizedek actually did have a genealogy, and that the writer of Hebrews here acknowledges this fact, while in 7:3 he had minimized it for purpose of his argument.⁸⁰ However, this misses the overall argument of the context. The quotation from Psalm 110:4 shows that “there exists an authentic priesthood independent of Aaron’s to which only persons who never die may belong. Since Jesus is eternal he may belong. But *must* he? Yes, because the psalm oracle is meant for him (7:13). . . . Melchizedek, having no parents at all, had no genealogy to qualify him. Despite his descent from Judah (7:14), Jesus too is *agenealogētos* in the sense most important for this author: his claim to priesthood does not rest on a family tree. For this epistle’s author, the meaning of Ps 110:4 was fundamentally ‘You are a priest because—like Melchizedek—you are forever.’”⁸¹

Having set forth that Melchizedek is superior in respect to receiving tithes, the author of Hebrews continues to show his superiority in respect to blessing (7:6b-7). Since Abraham received Divine promises before he met Melchizedek, a reader could think that Abraham was above being blessed, that he should be the one giving the blessing. However, Melchizedek blessed Abraham, so Melchizedek is superior. The verb “is blessed” is in the perfect tense, pointing to the lasting significance of that historic event. The inescapable conclusion, “without any dispute,” is that the lesser (Abraham) is blessed by the “greater” (Melchizedek).

⁸⁰“Now we can read v. 6 in such a way that Melchizedek did have a genealogy although not the required one.” M. J. Paul, “The Order of Melchizedek,” 199.

⁸¹Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand*, 147.

Having presented his case that Melchizedek is superior in respect to receiving tithes (7:5-6a), and in respect to blessing (7:6b-7), the writer of Hebrews continues to show his superiority in respect to this life (7:8). The words translated “In this case” (ὧδε μὲν) have the idea of “here on one hand,” in this life. The stress is on what had been established on earth for men to do while alive. In this case, men were appointed to “receive tithes,” a practice that the writer assumes is still being practiced at the time of this book. The Levites under Mosaic Law received tithes, and were mortal men who died from generation to generation. Yet, the word “receive” indicates a present, continuous action; tithes were still being received in Judaism until the temple’s destruction in A.D. 70.⁸²

In contrast to “in this case,” the writer now states “in that case” (ἐκεῖ δέ), or “there on the other hand,” meaning there in the case of Melchizedek. To Melchizedek “it is witnessed that he lives on.” The verb “it is witnessed” (μαρτυρούμενος) is again present tense, showing continuous action. While some commentators, such as Bruce, say the words “it is witnessed that he lives on” are to be taken “in the sense that we never read of him otherwise than as a living man,”⁸³ the wording of the text shows that Melchizedek is considered to still be living when the writer penned his words (about A.D. 68). Ellingworth concurs, “The implied statement ‘scripture says that Melchizedek is (still) alive’ points in two directions: backwards to the argument from scripture’s silence about his death . . . , and forwards to the key text Ps. 110:4. . . . The argument is . . . the more specific one that Melchizedek (like Enoch, 11:5) did not die.”⁸⁴ Although Kistemaker assumes that Melchizedek is only a normal man, he nonetheless admits the force of this text: “The exact wording is that Melchizedek ‘is declared to be living.’ Does this mean that Melchizedek never died? If he were a supernatural being, he would be the Son of God.”⁸⁵ That is exactly the assertion of the writer of Hebrews.⁸⁶ Melchizedek is considered to be receiving tithes presently because he is still living. Therefore, he is superior.

⁸²Significantly, the author argues for doing away with the Mosaic system in general, but he does not say that tithing should cease, and this context would be a perfect place to do so, if God intended to do away with tithing at this time in the Church.

⁸³Bruce, *Hebrews*, 142.

⁸⁴Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 368. Ellingworth also states that the “conclusion that ‘the author believed that Melchizedek was a christophany’ . . . is tempting but unprovable; it is in line with other expressions in the epistle which suggest, not only Christ’s pre-existence (e.g. 1:2c), but also anticipations of his work in OT times (e.g., 3:5; 4:2; 11:26, and possibly 12:25),” 351.

⁸⁵Kistemaker, *Hebrews*, 189.

⁸⁶Attridge asserts that there is “something suspicious about our author’s reticence and, particularly when he refers to the ‘life’ that Melchizedek is attested as possessing (vs 8), he presses literary observations to the breaking point. His argument there makes little sense if the Melchizedek whom Abraham encountered were not greater than the patriarch precisely because of the unlimited life attributed to him. It seems likely, then, that his exposition of Gen 14 is not simply an application to a figure of the Old Testament of

Now that the writer has presented his case that Melchizedek is superior in respect to receiving tithes (7:5-6a), in respect to blessing (7:6b-7), and in respect to this life (7:8), he concludes by showing his superiority in respect to Levi (7:9-10). A Jewish reader of the book of Hebrews may have thought that since Abraham was not a priest, then the flow of argument really does not apply to the Levitical priesthood; that anticipated objection is now answered. The phrase “And, so to speak” (which occurs only here in the NT), is used to introduce an unusual statement. Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek through the intermediate agency of Abraham. This was because Abraham was his physical forefather; there is a genuine unity in humanity. This was also because the Divine promises were given to Abraham, which included full development for all Israel, fully incorporating Levi. This point subjects any Levitical priesthood to the priesthood of Melchizedek; therefore, Melchizedek is indeed superior.

Space does not permit a full discussion of Hebrews 7:11-28. However, this passage consistently goes on to explain the perfection by the perfect priest, that is, Jesus Christ. The imperfection of the Levitical priesthood (7:11-19) is because it was transitory (7:11-14) and because it was temporal (7:15-19). That is contrasted to the better priesthood in Christ (7:20-25), which is given dignity by God’s oath (7:20-22), and which maintains eternity by Christ’s life (7:23-25). This culminates in the fact that Christ is the absolute High Priest (7:26-28) as shown by his personal traits (7:26), His high priestly work (7:27) and His superiority to the Levitical order (7:28).

CONCLUSION

This article considers the identity of one of the most enigmatic individuals of Scripture, Melchizedek. Although only introduced briefly in Genesis 14 and referred to succinctly in Psalm 110, the writer of Hebrews makes him an integral part of his argument that Christ in His priestly character is superior to the Aaronic priesthood because He is “according to the order of Melchizedek.”

Ancient Jewish opinions, as well as the views of Christian writers throughout history, accord with the continuing debate as to the identity of Melchizedek. Many interpreters regard him as a man, perhaps a Canaanite priest-king, who is regarded by the writer of Hebrews as a type of Christ. Another possibility, however, seems to be more in accord with the plain sense of the text of Hebrews: Melchizedek is an appearance of the preincarnate Christ. This strengthens even more the superiority of Christ over the Aaronic priesthood and advances the argument of the book of Hebrews to a crescendo worthy of the space given to it.

attributes proper to Christ, but is based upon . . . the figure of Melchizedek as a divine or heavenly being.” *Hebrews*, 191-92.

NEW ORLEANS BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

INSTITUTE FOR
CHRISTIAN
APOLOGETICS



JOHNSON FERRY

Defend the Faith

Christian Apologetics Summer School
June 7-11, 2009 • Marietta, GA



William Lane Craig



Gary Habermas



Craig J. Hazen



James Walker

AND OTHER GUEST SPEAKERS...



Earn up to six hours of seminary
credit in Christian apologetics!

Visit **DEFENDTHEFAITH.NET** for more details.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY: A SURVEY OF ITS PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY¹

DR. MALCOLM YARNELL²

INTRODUCTION

“But you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord” (Lev. 19:18b).

“Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them,
for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 7:12).³

In his essay, “The Christian Doctrine of Religious Liberty,” contained in a recent volume devoted to religious liberty, Barrett Duke argued that the doctrine of religious liberty is a necessary Christian teaching from a systematic perspective.⁴ Building on Dr. Duke’s work and filling a historical lacuna in that fine volume, this paper demonstrates that the Christian doctrine of religious liberty has not always been held consistently in Christian history. Indeed, the majority of Christian theologians have denied religious liberty, and in spite of its progress since the sixteenth century, there are many intellectual traditions, Christian and non-Christian, which are historically capable of sponsoring coercion, especially against those churches that committed themselves to being free, believing, and baptizing. Unless we are very careful to promote this doctrine consistently and continuously in our churches and in the broader society, at the local, national, and international levels, there may come a day when we find ourselves persecuted once again for holding to the New Testament as the fundamental basis of our faith.

In order to demonstrate this contention, a survey of the progress of and challenges to religious liberty is presented here. We begin with an outline of those biblical texts that have been utilized in the debate between those who would advocate the necessity of religious coercion and the persecution of heretics and those who would advocate the

¹Appreciation is expressed to Dr. R. Philip Roberts, President of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Missouri, for inviting this paper to be presented at “Loving God, Loving America: Celebrating a Free Church in a Free State,” on 22 February 2008.

²Dr. Malcolm Yarnell is Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

³All biblical citations are either taken from the New King James Version or are the author’s own translation.

⁴Barrett Duke, “The Christian Doctrine of Religious Liberty,” in *First Freedom: The Baptist Perspective on Religious Liberty*, ed. Thomas White, Jason G. Duesing, and Malcolm B. Yarnell III (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 7-29.

necessity of religious liberty and the freedom of the human conscience. We then consider the progress of political theology with regard to religious coercion and religious liberty in the early church, the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and the modern period. Finally, we conclude with a summary evaluation of some current challenges to the exercise of religious liberty.

THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Biblical Texts Supportive of Religious Coercion?

Historically, theologians have drawn upon a typical group of prooftexts, both from the Old and the New Testaments, in order to justify a theory of coercion and persecution. However, even when drawing upon texts from the New Testament, it has usually been with the presupposition that neither testament may be interpreted Christologically. There are an apparently limitless number of Old Testament texts utilized to justify coercion, for Israel was simultaneously both a state and a religion whose kings enforced religious policy. Indeed, from David to Josiah, the virtuous kings were those who upheld the true faith, while, from Saul to Manasseh, the evil kings were those who allowed or encouraged the people to fall into idolatry.

Augustine of Hippo drew explicitly from the following Old Testament texts in order to justify religious persecution against heretics and schismatics: 1 Kings 18, where Elijah slew the false prophets; Joshua 12, where Israel restored national unity through the bloody repression of the trans-Jordan tribes; Canticles 2, where the daughters are deemed to be both wicked and participating in the sacraments; and, Numbers 16, where rebels against the established religion are swallowed by the earth.⁵ John Calvin added to the list by citing Psalm 2, where the impious are broken with a rod of iron and dashed to pieces like pottery; Daniel 3, where the prophet praises Nebuchadnezzar for promising to kill any who spoke against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego; Exodus 32, where God commands the men of Israel to slay the idolaters with the sword; and, Isaiah 49, where the kings shall lead the people to worship God.⁶ Calvin's favorite Old Testament prooftext, however, was Deuteronomy 13, where the Israelites are commanded to slay not only false prophets (vv. 6-11), but also to raze totally any village that does not slay a false prophet in its midst (vv. 12-18).⁷

In the New Testament, both Augustine and Calvin appealed primarily to the parable of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13 (vv. 24-30).⁸ Both ignored or renegotiated the

⁵Augustine of Hippo, Letter 93, *ad Vincentius* 6, 26, 28, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. 1, ed. Philip Schaff (1886; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 382-401.

⁶John Calvin, *Defensio Orthodoxae Fidei de Sacra Trinitate, Contra Prodigiosos Errores Michaelis Serveti Hispani* (1554), in *Ionnis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, vol. 8, ed. Guilielmus Baum et al, Corpus Reformatorum (Brunsvigae, 1870), 471, 474, 477-78.

⁷*Ibid.*, 475-77.

interpretation of that parable provided by Jesus himself, silently or through the overused claim that our Lord commonly employed a synecdoche, that is, that he utilized a wider term but intended a smaller subset.⁹ On the one hand, Jesus defined the field as the world, the wheat as the sons of the kingdom, the tares as the sons of the wicked one, the harvest as occurring at the end of the age, and the angels as the dispensers of divine justice (vv. 36-43). On the other hand, Augustine defined the field as the church by diffusing the church within the world.¹⁰ Calvin followed Augustine in this regard and, moreover, included “the pious teachers” among those who dispense divine justice now and allowed “godly magistrates” to utilize the sword “against wicked men.”¹¹

Both Augustine and Calvin appealed also to Romans 13, where Paul informs us that the governing authorities are ordained by God, and all Christians must therefore submit to them. Of course, these seminal theologians in the Catholic and Reformed traditions understood that such submission must occur with regard to both civil and religious matters.¹² Augustine also appealed to Luke 14, where Christ used the language of compulsion in reference to bringing people in to the household of faith.¹³ The Latin translation of Luke 14:23 was literally *et compellare intrare*. Unfortunately, while the Greek **avnagkason** implies causation “in all varying degrees from friendly pressure to forceful compulsion,”¹⁴ the common meaning of the Latin *compello* places the emphasis upon “force,” even “accost” and “abuse.”¹⁵ There were a number of other New Testament texts to which Catholics and Calvinists appealed, with Augustine preferring the parables of divine compulsion and Calvin preferring various acts of divine compulsion in the book of Acts. The fact that such compulsion was divine in origin and agency mattered little to the Genevan.¹⁶

⁸E.g. Augustine, *ad Vincentius* 15, 31, 36; Calvin, *Defensio Orthodoxae Fidei* 472.

⁹Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. 2, transl. William Pringle (Reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 120.

¹⁰Augustine, *ad Vincentius* 44.

¹¹Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, 122-23.

¹²Augustine, *ad Vincentius* 20; Calvin, *Defensio Orthodoxae Fidei* 478.

¹³Augustine, *ad Vincentius* 5.

¹⁴Walter Grundmann, “ἀναγκάζω”, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, ed. Gerhard Kittel, transl. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 345.

¹⁵*The Pocket Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. James Morwood (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 28.

¹⁶Augustine, *ad Vincentius* 50; Calvin, *Defensio Orthodoxae Fidei* 462, 471-73.

The hermeneutical strategy employed by Christian proponents of religious coercion relies peculiarly upon a decidedly non-Christological perspective. First, the Old Testament texts regarding Israel are deemed applicable to the church in the same way as New Testament texts. This is facilitated by the belief of both Augustine and Calvin, who stand at the headwaters of their respective traditions, that the church existed both in the Old and in the New Testaments. Second, even the New Testament itself is not read in a Christological manner. Rather, the Old Testament context provides the only means for properly interpreting the New Testament. As a result, the New Testament texts are interpreted in light of the Old Testament texts of coercion rather than according to the teachings of Christ, a reversal of our Lord's own method of interpretation (Matt. 5:17; Luke 24:27).¹⁷ Finally, as noted above, even the specific interpretation of our Lord with regard to the parable of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13 is dismissed. In summary, these "Christian" expositors apparently did not believe that a Christological interpretation of the Old Testament, of the New Testament, and even Christ's own words of interpretation were adequate for the needs of the church.

Biblical Texts Supportive of Religious Liberty

When it comes to the proponents of religious liberty, there have been two streams of interpretation. The first, like the proponents of religious coercion, draws indiscriminately from both the Old and the New Testaments. In this regard, we may think of Sebastian Castellio, who stands within but at the margins of the Reformed tradition. The second, however, relies primarily upon the priority of the New Testament, and reads both testaments Christologically. In this regard, we may think of Balthasar Hubmaier, a seminal theologian within the Free Church tradition. While maintaining the Augustinian-Calvinist conflation of the testaments, Castellio indicates how Calvin has yet engaged in gross misinterpretation. Treating the Bible as a product of progressive revelation, Hubmaier and the Anabaptists emphasize the primacy of the New Testament for the construction of Christian ecclesiology and political theology.

Balthasar Hubmaier was the first Reformation theologian, by three decades, to devote a single treatise to the subject of religious liberty. Unfortunately, his courageous life was cut short, by a persecuting church, before he could spell out his doctrine of religious liberty at length. What we do have from Hubmaier is a compilation of 36 short articles addressing the subject. Hubmaier begins with the critical definition of heresy. A heretic is one who resists the teaching of Scripture or misinterprets Scripture.¹⁸ Such heresy is overcome only "with holy instruction" and "only with the Word of God" (arts. 3-4). According to Titus 3:10, if instruction fails, then the heretic must be avoided (art. 5). There

¹⁷Because He is the One Who is the fulfillment of the Scriptures, Jesus Christ properly interprets the Scriptures with authority: "You have heard ... but I say ..." (Matt. 5:17-20, 21-22, 27-30, 31-32, 33-37, 38-42, 43-48).

¹⁸Balthasar Hubmaier, *On Heretics and Those Who Burn Them* (1524) Articles 1-2, in *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, transl. and ed. H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989), 58-66.

is nothing within Scripture about burning heretics in order to be rid of them; only avoidance. Moreover, 1 Corinthians 11:19 teaches that heresies must necessarily exist. Furthermore, the proper interpretation of Matthew 13 is that only Christ may call the reapers to bring judgment (arts. 6-9). According to John 10:10, “Christ did not come to slaughter, kill, burn, but so that those who live should live yet more abundantly” (art. 14). The real heretics are the inquisitors, who teach contrary to Christ that the sword of the Magistrate should be used against heretics. The Christian knows that the sword of the Spirit alone should be used to combat heresy (arts. 13, 16-21). The greatest errors in interpretation are made by those who want to advance salvation and divine honor by looking to “the light of nature,” perhaps an oblique critique of Roman and Reformed theological method, rather than being “led and directed according to Scripture” alone (art. 30).

Thirty years after Hubmaier’s treatise, which was entitled *On Heretics and Those Who Burn Them*, Sebastian Castellio wrote a treatise entitled *Concerning Heretics: Whether They are to be Persecuted and How They are to be Treated*. Castellio, active in Bern in the 1550s, was disturbed by the fact that John Calvin had led the Genevan city council to condemn Michael Servetus for heresy, then acquiesced as the city slowly roasted a fellow human being over a fire in the name of preserving orthodoxy. However, he was incensed when Calvin issued his written defense of the murder of Servetus on the grounds that Christians must suppress all human considerations, even sanguinary concerns, and strike out “for God’s glory” against heresy.¹⁹ This extensive exchange, between Castellio on the one side and Calvin and his successor, Theodore Beza, on the other side, has only been partially translated into English—an interesting oversight, especially with regard to the current rush to embrace all things Calvin.

Castellio argued that Matthew 13 does not apply to heretics, for those who pull up and burn the tares before the harvest “eradicate also the command of Christ, who directs that they be left.”²⁰ Indeed, according to 2 Timothy 3:12, those who are in Christ will be persecuted; certainly, this indicates they should not persecute others.²¹ In Matthew 10 and Luke 12, Christians are called sheep, and sheep never persecute wolves, but wolves eat sheep.²² According to Matthew 5 and numerous synoptic texts, Christians will suffer

¹⁹“On ne lui [Dieu] fait point l’honneur qu’on lui doit, si on ne préfère son service à tout regard humain, pour n’épargner ni parentage, ni sang, ni vie qui soit et qu’on mette en oubli toute humanité quand il est question de combattre pour sa gloire.” [“It is not him whom God made that should be honored; if you would like to serve God without regard for man, then spare no parentage, neither blood nor life, and put away all humanity when it comes to fighting for his glory.”] John Calvin, *Defence of the True Faith and of the Trinity against the Dreadful Errors of Servetus* (French Version), cited in Stefan Zweig, *The Right to Heresy: Castellio against Calvin*, transl. Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: Viking Press, 1936), 145.

²⁰Castellio here uses the voice of one “George Kleinberg.” Sebastian Castellio, *De Haereticis*, in *Concerning Heretics: Whether They are to be Persecuted and How They are to be Treated [...] Together with Excerpts from Other Works of Sebastian Castellio and David Joris On Religious Liberty*, ed. Roland H. Bainton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), 220.

²¹Ibid., 220, 222.

persecution and must take up their crosses. There is nothing about Christians persecuting others or putting them on crosses.²³

When religious persecutors appeal to the Old Testament law, such as Exodus 22:20, the Calvinists demonstrated a decided inconsistency. “They cite the law in Exodus, ‘He that sacrificeth unto any god save unto the Lord only, he shall utterly be destroyed.’ I ask you whether this destruction is corporal or spiritual. If it is corporal, then they must first revive the whole law of Moses and inflict corporal punishment upon those who sacrifice. But to do this is to seek to be justified by works of the law, and to be cut off from Christ, in whom the former things are passed away and all things are made new.”²⁴ With Calvin, Castellio recognizes the validity of Deuteronomy 13, but points out that a false prophet is not the same thing as a heretic. And the punishment of death for the blasphemer in Leviticus 24 and for the idol makers in Joshua 7 are similarly inapplicable to heretics, for the heretic does not seek to prophesy, blaspheme, nor make an idol.²⁵ Castellio throws down the gauntlet to his fellow Reformed theologians: “If we really wish to imitate the ancients let us do the same as they. Let us abandon the New Testament and return to the Old Testament. Let us kill all those whom God has commanded to be killed, namely, the adulterers, children who curse their parents, the uncircumcised, those who do not keep the Passover, and the like.”²⁶

When he turned to the New Testament texts advanced by the Reformed, Castellio demonstrated the foolishness of the persecuting hermeneutic. Calvin had used Acts 5 to justify the idea that even the apostles called for the death sentence.²⁷ Castellio replied that Peter did not compel Ananias and Sapphira to give their goods to the church, nor did he wield a physical sword; rather, he was led to speak God’s Word and God Himself rendered the judgment.²⁸ Calvin dismissed Gamaliel’s advice later in Acts 5 on the basis “that his advice is not sound because it destroys not only civil government, but also ecclesiastical discipline.” Calvin concluded that Gamaliel was unsound and uncertain in his advice. Castellio replied, “Now let us ask this keen Calvin what advice he would have given the Scribes had he been in their council. He would have told them to kill the apostles.”²⁹ Again

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., 222-23.

²⁴Ibid., 226-27.

²⁵Ibid., 227-30.

²⁶Ibid., 232.

²⁷Calvin, *Defensio Orthodoxae Fidei* 462, 471.

²⁸Castellio, *De Haereticis*, 232-36.

²⁹Castellio, *Contra Libellum Calvini* (written 1562, published 1612), in *Concerning Heretics*, ed. Bainton, 271.

and again, Castellio refutes the Calvinist persecuting arguments. One can hear the disgust in his voice as he shredded the depraved arguments of both Calvin and Beza.

Later proponents of religious liberty, such as the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, George W. Truett, also appealed to the New Testament. Truett drew upon Mark 12:13-17, where Christ made a distinction between what is due the state and what is due to God: give back to Caesar his coins, upon which he put his picture, but render to God everything. Truett argued that Christ's teachings demanded a "free church in a free state." He proclaimed from the steps of our nation's capitol on Sunday, 16 May 1920, "In the very nature of the case, also, there must be no union between church and state, because their nature and functions are utterly different. Jesus stated the principle in the two sayings, 'My kingdom is not of this world,' and 'Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's.' Never, anywhere, in any clime, has a true Baptist been willing, for one minute, for the union of church and state, never for a moment."³⁰ Although we could mention the Fifth Monarchists, who included English Baptist revolutionaries,³¹ Truett's contention is largely sustainable. Baptists, as an intentionally New Testament people, have been leading proponents of religious liberty.

The proponents of religious liberty appealed to the humble, patient, and merciful character of Christ, to the call given to all Christians to take up their own cross, to the difference between the roles of the church and of the state, and to the difference between the law and the gospel. However, Castellio's strongest argument in favor of religious liberty was perhaps Christ's golden rule.³² He bluntly asked Calvin, who was seeking at the time to suppress Castellio's books through the university censor at Bern, "Why do you do to others that which you would not endure if done to yourself? We are concerned with a dispute about religious matters; why, then, do you gag your adversaries?"³³

Texts Supportive of a Restricted but Bold Verbal Engagement in Politics

Because of the difficulty that Christians have historically had with regard to the struggle between theories of persecution and theologies of religious liberty, we have perhaps had less opportunity to speak with regard to the need for Christians to be engaged in secular politics. However, we must remember that such an engagement is necessary. While we

³⁰George W. Truett, "Baptists and Religious Liberty," in Truett, *The Inspiration of Ideals*, George W. Truett Library, vol. 3 (1950; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 85-112.

³¹Louise Fargo Brown, *The Political Activities of the Baptists and Fifth Monarchy Men in England during the Interregnum* (Washington, DC: American Historical Association, 1912).

³²The entirety of his advice to the warring parties in France is built on this idea. Sebastian Castellio, *Advice to a Desolate France in the Course of Which the Reason for the Present War is Outlined, As Well as the Possible Remedy and, In the Main, Advice is Given as to Whether Consciences Should be Forced* (1562), trans. Wouter Valkhoff (Shepherdstown, WV: Patmos Press, 1975).

³³Castellio, *Contra Libellum Calvini*, cited in Zweig, *The Right to Heresy*, 189.

rightly affirm that the church and the state have their separate spheres of responsibility, we must never forget that Christians have a prophetic role to fulfill. This is what former theologians meant when they distinguished between the physical sword wielded by the magistrate and the spiritual sword, the Word of God, wielded by the church. The only power in the hands of the church is the Word of God and it is our responsibility to proclaim it—the Word in its entirety and nothing else but the Word.

The Great Commission demands the making of disciples through teaching everything He commanded (Matt. 28:18-20). And since He gave moral commands, about which the state is intimately concerned, for the maintenance of public morality is the very purpose of the laws of nations, we must proclaim the truth about morality. Moreover, we must proclaim that Christ is truly the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords (Rev. 19:16), at whose name every knee must bow in submission (Phil. 2:10). He has not yet revealed His kingdom in its fullness (John 18:36), but He is nevertheless Lord now, and He will one day fully introduce His kingdom and in God's own time (Acts 1:7). When Christians proclaim, "Jesus is Lord," they give both their saving confession and make a truly unsettling political claim. If Jesus is Lord, no other man, even an emperor or a president, and no group of people, whether an aristocracy or a democracy, may claim self-sufficient authority. Moreover, if Jesus is Lord, then the Christian may never ascribe lordship to any other without knowing that he thereby curses Christ (1 Cor. 12:2). If Jesus is Lord, all authority proceeds from Him and is responsible to Him, for He will return all authority to His Father (15:24).

"Jesus is Lord" is a message that people have not always wanted to hear, and yet it is incumbent upon Christians to proclaim His Lordship, for this Lord is also Savior. In Acts 4, we learn that the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin, forbid the apostles Peter and John to speak in the name of Jesus. Consider the response of Peter and John: "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge" (v. 19). The apostles did not deny that the Sanhedrin had an authority from God, and the right to make and render judgment. However, they also affirmed that God was the source of all true judgment. The Sanhedrin has the responsibility to judge, but the church has the responsibility to speak the gospel. "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (v. 20). The state must exercise judgment and the church may not interfere with the state or seek to use it for its purposes: "you judge." However, the church must exercise proclamation and the state should not interfere with the church or use it for its purposes: "we cannot but speak." And later, when the Sanhedrin discovered that they continued to speak, the reply was the same: "We ought to obey God rather than men." And then the apostles told the Sanhedrin the gospel story: "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered on a tree. ... And we are His witnesses" (Acts 5:28-32). Christians are supremely concerned to proclaim the gospel, to everyone, including magistrates.

THE HISTORICAL PROGRESS OF AND CHALLENGE TO RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

The Early Church

As is well known, the churches of the first through third centuries suffered periods of intense persecution by imperial mandate. The pagan Roman state looked upon this sect as subversive and immoral. Rumors swirled: that the Christians were murderers and cannibals because of their participation in the Lord's Supper, and that they practiced incest because they held love feasts. Christians refused to worship the idols; therefore, they were called atheists and sacrilegious. Indeed, they were accused of treason because they believed *Iesous Kurios*, "Jesus is Lord," and would not confess *Kaiser Kurios*, "Caesar is Lord."³⁴ However, the ultimate act of political subversion, in pagan eyes, occurred when they refused to swear to the genius of the divine emperor and offer sacrifices to the imperial cult.³⁵

In this context, Tertullian, our earliest Latin theologian, issued a call for universal religious liberty. He informed the imperial government that Christians joined the Christian "sect" through a "covenant" since they desired eternal salvation. Because Christians are commanded to love their enemies and to pray for the emperor, whom they considered divinely appointed though still merely human, they should not be seen as a threat. Then Tertullian made a claim that echoes through the ages: "However, it is a fundamental human right, a privilege of nature, that every man should worship according to his own convictions: one man's religion neither harms nor helps another man. It is assuredly no part of religion to compel religion—to which free-will and not force should lead us—the sacrificial victims even being required of a willing mind. You render no real service to your gods by compelling us to sacrifice."³⁶ Tertullian's appeal for universal religious liberty utilized the concepts of "patience," "the claims of humanity," avoidance of divine judgment, and appreciation for Christian civil virtues.³⁷ Ultimately, Tertullian recognized that only God could be claimed as the Christian's "master." Yet, it is through the witness of Christian martyrs that people are brought to consider the claims of the Christ.

Tertullian established a heavenly outlook and concurrent dichotomy between church and state that was influential in Latin-speaking Christianity, especially in North Africa. They maintained a strict separation between the secular and the sacred, the sinners and the saints, the world and the church. The cross-carrying Christians are spiritually freed even as they are thrown into prison, and martyrdom is actually victory in Christ.³⁸ This otherworldly outlook,

³⁴Geoffrey D. Dunn, *Tertullian*, The Early Church Fathers (New York: Routledge, 2004), 40.

³⁵Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (New York: Dorset Press, 1967), 26-28.

³⁶Tertullian, *ad Scapula* 2, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (1885; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 105-8.

³⁷Tertullian, *ad Scapula* 2, 4.

upheld by Cyprian of Carthage, was, however, reversed after the conversion of Emperor Constantine. Constantine recognized that the Christian churches were spreading so quickly that they could never be eradicated. Moreover, he came to see that some form of Christianity might actually serve as the religious glue he felt was needed to hold such a regionally and ethnically diverse empire together. In an epoch-making reversal, he altered the imperial policy toward Christianity from excision to embrace.

The message that Constantine sent to the Christian churches as he summoned the Council of Arles in 314 is telling. “The Highest God” has “committed the government of all earthly things” to him, and he demands unity. “For I shall really fully be able to feel secure and always to hope for prosperity and happiness from the ready kindness of the most mighty God, only when I see all venerating the most Holy God in the proper cult of the catholic religion with harmonious brotherhood of worship.”³⁹ In the name of harmony, Constantine set out to repress the local tendencies of the Christian churches. And in the name of unity, he threw the power of the “Christian” state behind ecumenical uniformity. Thankful for the respite from persecution, and feeding the imperial ego, Eusebius of Caesarea exalted Constantine as the “bishop of externals.” And to Constantine’s call for unity and uniformity, Eusebius added the commission for universality: “Go and make disciples of all nations in my name.”⁴⁰ To achieve universality, there must of course be reconciliation between the sacred church and the secular empire. In the conversion of the empire, Eusebius exulted that Christ had “freed mankind at one stroke both from the polytheism of the influence of the demons and from the polyarchy of different nations.”⁴¹ The Eastern bishops, especially those affiliated with some type of Arianism, convinced Constantine that he was “the universal bishop and earthly manifestation of the Divine Logos,” literally the earthly image of Christ.⁴²

The Donatists, who believed that “universal” meant entire obedience to Christ, were unconvinced. Following Tertullian, they believed that the world and the church were antithetical to one another. But Augustine, the bishop of Hippo, disagreed. Where Tertullian and the Donatists desired a pure, separated church, a holy church, Augustine desired a universal church that was diffused throughout the world. For the Donatists, the church must be pure and cannot be one with the state; for Augustine, the church must be united and the state is the coercive agent to bring that about. When it came to Matthew 13, the Donatists followed Christ and said the field is the world. Augustine modified the interpretation and said the field is the world is the church. The church is *per totum orbem diffusa*, diffused throughout the whole world.⁴³ For the Donatists, unity could be found only in a regenerate

³⁸Dunn, *Tertullian*, 42-43.

³⁹W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 543.

⁴⁰Eusebius of Caesarea, *Theophania* 5.49, cited in *ibid.*, 544.

⁴¹Eusebius of Caesarea, *Praeparatio Evangel* 1.4, cited in *ibid.*, 545.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 546.

church; for Augustine, unity must be realized now and the pure church is only an eschatological reality.

Augustine, usually respectful toward Holy Scripture, evidences a troubling development away from religious liberty and towards a theory of religious persecution. First, he began to take on the mantle of a secular judge, for bishops came to serve as cheap alternatives for the local extension of imperial justice. Then, he began to see that the imperial policy of coercion against the separatist Donatists was bearing apparent fruit. In his letter to the Donatist Vincentius, Augustine admitted that he had once denied religious coercion, but then he saw that it actually seemed to work: “my own town, which although it was once on the side of Donatus, was brought over to the Catholic unity by fear of the imperial edicts.”⁴⁴ On the basis of this experience and out of zeal for Christian ecumenism, he set out to reinterpret Scripture in a coercive manner. Indeed, he argued salvation could be found only in church unity, and although the Donatists were not technically heretics, they were “dissenters,” which is a heresy against unity.⁴⁵ Therefore, it is the duty of Christian magistrates and clergy to compel the separatist Christians to enter the catholic church. “It was our duty to inflict annoyance upon them, in order to prevent them from perishing under the disease.”⁴⁶ Just as the “darkness of error” is dispelled by “the light of truth,” so “the force of fear may at the same time break the bonds of evil custom.”⁴⁷

The Middle Ages

Augustine’s theory of persecution was radicalized during the High Middle Ages. Augustine shied away from the death penalty, but such squeamishness was considered a dereliction of duty by his followers. Thomas Aquinas said heretics “deserve not only to be separated from the Church by excommunication, but also to be shut off from the world by death.”⁴⁸ The medieval Roman church sought the punishment of heretics, including the sects we now know as the free churches, because they considered the social body of the church-state at risk of bodily infection. The metaphor of disease, applied by Augustine to heresy as a social ill, was specifically equated in the 12th Century with leprosy. “Against so insidious an

⁴³R.A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 113n, 120-23.

⁴⁴Augustine, *ad Vincentius* 1, 17.

⁴⁵Augustine, *ad Vincentius* 10.

⁴⁶Augustine, *ad Vincentius* 2.

⁴⁷Augustine, *ad Vincentius* 3. For more extended treatments of Augustine’s theory of persecution, see Geoffrey Grimshaw Willis, *Saint Augustine and the Donatist Controversy* (1950; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, [n.d.]), 127-43; and, Markus, *Saeculum*, 133-53.

⁴⁸Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, IIa-IIae, 10.8, 11.3-4, cited in Perez Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to the West* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 43.

infection nothing less than fire was effective. ... If leprosy and heresy were the same disease it was to be expected that their carriers should have the same characteristics.”⁴⁹ And if the same characteristics, then society’s cure lay in the same solution: separation from the unclean one, incinerating everything he had touched. As the caretakers of society, it was the duty of those who pray and those who fight to protect those who work through the social purgation of heresy.

Once the medieval church concluded heresy was a social disease worthy of expurgation, the machinery was developed to ensure its thorough application. The decree *Excommunicamus*, promulgated by the Fourth Lateran Council, condemned all heretics and established a legal basis for their removal. When heretics were discovered they were to be handed over (*relinquantur*) to the civil authorities for punishment. Secular authorities that did not cooperate were also declared heretics and their vassals absolved from obedience. Catholics were granted the same crusading privileges for removing heretics as had been granted for freeing the Holy Land of the infidel Muslims. Preaching licenses were required for those who dared to proclaim publicly. And bishops were required to conduct regular visitations of suspected hotspots of heresy.⁵⁰

Canon lawyers developed the bureaucratic institutions required to detect and prosecute heretics. When they discovered that existing church law might not be effective enough against suspected heretics, they lowered the standards of evidence, dispensed with the need for witnesses, and approved the use of torture to gain a confession.⁵¹ Beginning on the Continent in the 11th Century and arriving in England in the 15th Century, the magistrates made themselves willing collaborators in the prosecution of heresy. In England, the canon lawyers joined with the prelates and the theologians to standardize the documentation of heresy proceedings. The people were put on notice that everyone was a potential heretic. The church court’s role was to help the Christian see his own potential heresy and overcome it. The magistrate’s role was to burn the unrepentant heretic at the stake, as embodied in common law, such as the English Parliament’s 1401 act, *De Heretico Comburendo*.⁵² Christian theologians developed handbooks showing how to inquire after heresy.⁵³ In the hands of a zealot like Thomas of Torquemada, a Dominican friar of Jewish extraction, the machinery of the inquisition proved itself a terror to heretics, even if they were not heretics. Roland

⁴⁹R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe 950-1250*, 2nd ed. (New York: Blackwell, 2007), 59.

⁵⁰*Excommunicamus*, Lateran IV (1215), in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1, ed. Norman P. Tanner (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 233-35.

⁵¹James A. Brundage, *Medieval Canon Law* (New York: Longman, 1995), 92-95.

⁵²Ian Forrest, *The Detection of Heresy in Late Medieval England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁵³Bernard Gui, *The Conduct of the Inquisition of Heretical Depravity* (ca. 1323), in *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, trans. Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 373-445.

Bainton reminds us that inquisitors like Torquemada were neither insincere nor cynical. Rather, they were “passionately sincere fanatics.”⁵⁴

The Reformation

In the 16th Century, under intense pressure from Rome and the Empire, the Magisterial Reformers sometimes argued for religious toleration. However, their understanding of religious toleration was neither universal nor continual, but sporadic and expedient. This can be seen in Martin Luther. On the one hand, he argued against the persecutors of evangelicals: “the burning of heretics is against the will of the Holy Spirit.” On the other hand, he despised the Jews and called upon the magistrate to violently suppress the Radical Reformers. With his approval, Philip Melancthon called for the death penalty for all Anabaptists, whether they were revolutionary or peaceful. Interestingly, like other Reformers, Luther was willing to speak of a right of conscience, but those who err in doctrine have merely the appearance of a conscience. For the Magisterial Reformers, Reformed and Lutheran, the concept of freedom of conscience applied only to those with correct doctrine; a heretic has no claim to conscience.⁵⁵

As alluded above, it was the burning to death of Michael Servetus by the Genevan inquisition led by John Calvin that caused Sebastian Castellio to lobby for religious liberty and freedom of conscience as a principle. We have already reviewed *De Haereticis*, his first response to Calvin’s persecuting theory. In a follow-up manuscript, which remained unpublished until the Arminian Remonstrants began to search for arguments against their Dortian Calvinist persecutors, Castellio again deconstructed Calvin’s faulty exegesis. Reflecting upon Romans 13, Castellio said, “there are those who bear the sword as ministers of God, but to punish malefactors, not to erect the kingdom of Christ.” The magistracy is established by God, but its purpose is distinct from that of the church. The magistrate is intended to restrain evil, while the church promotes good.⁵⁶

Calvin repeated the medieval idea that a heretic is a disease that must be excised from the social body: “Shall the whole body of Christ be mangled that one putrid member remain intact?” Castellio replied, “To kill a man is not to amputate a member. ... When a man is killed as a heretic he is not amputated from the body of Christ, but from the life of the body.”⁵⁷ Calvin concluded in no uncertain terms, “the sword is placed in the hands of the magistrate to protect sound doctrine.”⁵⁸ Castellio concluded that Calvin was crassly using

⁵⁴Roland H. Bainton, *The Travail of Religious Liberty: Nine Biographical Studies* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1951), 52.

⁵⁵Bainton, *The Travail of Religious Liberty*, 21, 64, 119; Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to the West*, 75-76.

⁵⁶Castellio, *Contra Libellum Calvini*, cited in *Concerning Heretics*, ed. Bainton, 271.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 277.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 283.

Scripture to justify his sin. Having heard enough, Castellio exploded words that haunt the defenders of John Calvin, Theodore Beza, and Dortian Calvinism to this day: “To burn a man alive does not defend a doctrine, but slays a man. When the Genevese executed Servetus, they were not defending a doctrine, but sacrificing a man.”⁵⁹

I recently warned Southern Baptist Calvinists to be wary of fully embracing Reformed theology, for Calvin’s deficient anthropology and disobedient doctrine of baptism led Geneva to burn Servetus on two counts: denial of the Trinity, about which Servetus was wrong, and denial of infant baptism, about which Servetus was right.⁶⁰ A Founders Calvinist, in an academic context, responded that appealing to Servetus is a “straw-man argument.” My considered response to that exchange would echo Castellio: Servetus was a human being made of living flesh, not of lifeless straw. Nor was Michael a mere argument; he was a living, breathing human being made in God’s own image. Calvin took the divine image, conducted a show trial, and saw him condemned to death. Then he had the unmitigated gall to defend it with a non-Christological reading of Scripture. Did Calvin, the selective applicator of the old law, ever consider that the penalty for slaying the divine image was applicable to Calvin? Surely, the inventive covenant theologians remember the divine covenant of Genesis 9: “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man.”

Modernity

The struggle between the persecuting theologians and the freedom theologians continued into the post-Reformation period. In Anglophone historiography, the contribution of the Dutch to the development of modern liberty is often overlooked.⁶¹ Yet, it was in the Netherlands that religious toleration was first written into law with the Union of Utrecht (1579); unfortunately, the Reformed church was concurrently established as the state church. It will be remembered that the Netherlands declared their independence from Spain in the tumultuous years of the late 16th Century. This little nation, a conglomeration of small states, wealthy beyond its size, had substantial numbers of every major religious sect active in the period: Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Reformed, Anabaptists, and Spiritualists. While the

⁵⁹Castellio, *Contra Libellum Calvini*, cited in Zweig, *The Right to Heresy*, 182.

⁶⁰Roland H. Bainton, *Hunted Heretic: The Life and Death of Michael Servetus 1511-1553* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1953), 208. Calvin referred to heretics as “brute beasts.” “But we muzzle dogs, and shall we leave men free to open their mouths as they please? Those who object are like dogs and swine. . . . No human relationship is more than animal unless it be grounded in God.” Bainton, *The Travail of Religious Liberty*, 70.

⁶¹For example, see Bainton, *The Travail of Religious Liberty*. Butterfield sometimes mentions the Dutch development, but prefers to focus upon the French and English context in the early modern period. Herbert Butterfield, “Reflections on Religion and Modern Individualism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22.1 (1961): 33-46; idem, “Toleration in Early Modern Times,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 38.4 (1977): 573-84; idem, *Christianity in European History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951); idem, *Historical Development of the Principle of Toleration in British Life* (London: Epworth Press, 1957).

Reformed were able to fight their way to become the established church, they had great difficulty in forcing their will on the entire populace. They desired comprehension—the inclusion of all citizens within their church—but the Roman Catholics were still the majority, the Anabaptists would never compromise their regenerate churches, and the Spiritualists were opposed to the Reformed doctrine of persecution.

It was due to the courageous stand taken by Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert that the idea of religious freedom had been written into the treaty of union in the first place. Although the Calvinist enthusiasts in the state church effectively ignored the treaty, and continued to press their agenda of comprehension and coercion, they had to contend with this former aide to William of Orange. Coornhert was nominally a Roman Catholic, but in reality a Christian spiritualist who was also on friendly terms with the Anabaptists and any other Christian group that would tolerate him. When Coornhert read Castellio's books, he found there was "more truth, more fear of God, and more edification in a single page of his ... than in all the books of Calvin and Beza."⁶² Coornhert considered the Reformed arrogant because they assumed their doctrine was perfect, while every other church was in error. Disagreeing, Coornhert believed that all churches err and that the best way to truth is to allow the churches to engage in a free exchange of criticism. He thus appealed for universal religious toleration among Christians and for the freedom of Christian consciences, even when they err. Moreover, Coornhert understood that freedom of religion carried with it the need for freedom of speech and freedom of the press.⁶³ After the death of William the Silent, the Reformed theologians felt free to pursue the despised Coornhert, for he publicly challenged their predestinarian speculations and argued for religious liberty. Chased from city to city, he died in Gouda, harassed but ideologically triumphant.

Jacobus Arminius, a brilliant student of Beza, was assigned the task of refuting Coornhert's criticisms. However, while reading Coornhert, he became convinced that the Reformed system of doctrines did not match Scripture. Arminius then constructed his own theological system in opposition to Calvinism. Under pressure from the strictly Reformed teacher, Franciscus Gomarus, the more tolerant party in the Reformed church filed a Remonstrance against dogmatic predestinarianism. Attempting to build a more comprehensive church, Arminius and the Remonstrants distinguished between the essentials and the nonessentials of the Christian faith, acknowledged human fallibility, and abandoned dogmatism on disputed doctrines within the church. The abandonment of the Calvinist philosophy infuriated the Gomarus radicals and a national synod was convened. Through a series of brilliant political moves surrounding the Synod of Dort, these Calvinists saw the Remonstrant leader, Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, put to death and promulgated their five-headed definition of doctrine. Several Arminian leaders went into exile as a result, including Hugo Grotius and Simon Episcopius, who continued to argue for freedom of conscience.⁶⁴

⁶²Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to the West*, 155.

⁶³Henk Bongers, *The Life and Work of Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert*, trans. Gerrit Voogt (New York: Rodopi, 2004), 180.

⁶⁴Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religion Came to the West*, 164-78.

The struggle in the Netherlands continued well into the 17th Century, without a final victory being won by the Reformed in their zealous pursuit of forced comprehension. Similar attempts by the persecuting churches to dominate nations resulted in a Roman Catholic victory in France but only a temporary Reformed hegemony in England. Providentially, the persecuting churches were never able to triumph fully in England. Indeed, it is out of the failure of any one party to dominate everywhere that the modern nations ultimately accepted religious toleration. At first, the parties were exhausted and could not continue their efforts; eventually, some discovered religious toleration, and then full religious liberty, might be the preferable form of civilization. Butterfield argues, "It was perhaps good for the world that Jesuit and Calvinist failed to annihilate one another and that under the cover of their conflicts the sects were able to multiply."⁶⁵ The relative toleration of Holland provided a context for both the American Pilgrim Fathers and the first English Baptists to pursue the will of Christ. Unfortunately, the Pilgrim Fathers emulated the persecuting theory of the Dutch Reformed, but the English Baptists pursued the freedom theology of the non-Reformed. The story of the conflict between these two communities and the eventual triumph of freedom theology in both England and America has been and will be rehearsed elsewhere.

CURRENT CHALLENGES TO THE EXERCISE OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Well, this is our history. We Christians have not always been the most faithful people in taking up our crosses and following Christ. But sometimes, some have, and to them we owe a great debt of gratitude. And yet, we cannot rest upon the advances gained in the past. We must be ever vigilant in our advocacy of religious liberty. There are three major challenges that currently face those who desire to maintain religious liberty. These challenges may be summarily described as the challenge of free church amnesia, the challenge of left wing enthusiasm, and the challenge of right wing enthusiasm.

The Challenge of Free Church Amnesia

Let us not forget the truth of progressive revelation, specifically that Christians must follow Christ's own method of interpreting Scripture. Allow me to propose this rule as necessary for proper Christian hermeneutics: Positively, we may say that the Christian interpretation of Scripture, including the Old Testament and the New Testament, is necessarily Christological. Negatively, we may say that Christians who interpret Scripture apart from Christ commit a fundamental error, for non-Christological interpretation is simply not Christian interpretation. Our Lord is the fulfillment of the Old Testament law, and He holds a more righteous standard than that provided by Jewish hermeneutic (Matt. 5:17-20) or any other hermeneutic. Our Lord taught the early church that it should interpret the Scriptures as "the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27). The law is but the "copy and shadow" of that which is "heavenly," for Jesus Christ is the "Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises" (Hebrews 8:5-6). When the free churches, especially Baptists, forget this basic truth, they are forsaking their own heritage and selling it for a mess of unsatisfying pottage. When the free churches forget this basic truth, they are liable to succumb to the Constantinian fiction of the universal church, to the Augustinian conflation of the church and the world, and to the Roman and Reformed horror of the

⁶⁵Butterfield, *Christianity in European History*, 35.

persecuting church. Let Baptists remember that we are New Testament Christians because we learned to read Scripture Christologically.⁶⁶

The Challenge of Left Wing Enthusiasm

Western liberals treasure the freedoms of religion, assembly, press, and speech that they enjoy. Unfortunately, in their enthusiastic rush to preserve and continually expand their libertarianism, they sometimes forget and often outright deny that their doctrines of liberty developed out of a specifically Christian context by Christian theologians. Thus, when some liberals hear that Christians object to such moral travesties as homosexual marriage, the abortion of human beings, and the risks of a family-hostile educational system, they immediately perceive an attack on the judicial doctrine of the separation of church and state. What they fail to remember is that their freedoms come to them only within the context of active Christian involvement, especially free church involvement. Perez Zagorin, noted historian of early modern political theory, claims that in spite of the loving and nonviolent ways of Christ Himself, “Of all the great world religions past and present, Christianity has been the most intolerant.” However, he also concluded in his recent study that modern theories of toleration were not developed by intellectuals “inclined to religious indifference or unbelief;” rather, they were “the work of profoundly Christian if also unorthodox thinkers.”⁶⁷ Sir Herbert Butterfield, noted historiographer and Cambridge Vice-Chancellor, agreed that religious liberty is grounded in religion itself.⁶⁸ But following Lord Acton, he also takes this claim one step further: religious freedom is the very basis of all the other individual freedoms that we currently enjoy.⁶⁹ It would behoove the secular left to consider carefully that some of the very Christian “fundamentalists” that they fear the most in our society were actually instrumental in the development of modern concepts of toleration.⁷⁰ Michael Walzer, a Jewish liberal Princeton professor of social science, understands this well enough

⁶⁶For a fuller treatment of fundamental free church hermeneutics, which rests upon the ground principles of Christocentrism, the coinherence of the Word and the Spirit, the maintenance of the biblical order, and the believers’ church, see Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007), chapter 3.

⁶⁷Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to the West*, 1, 9. Cf. Bongers, *The Life and Work of Dirck Volkertszoon Coornhert*, 175-76.

⁶⁸Butterfield, *Historical Development of the Principle of Toleration in British Life*, 9.

⁶⁹Butterfield, “Religion and Modern Individualism,” 35.

⁷⁰The term “fundamentalist” has unfortunately been transformed by its equation, not only with its peaceful Christian moorings, but its subsequent affiliation with radical Islam. Malise Ruthven, *Fundamentalism: The Search for Meaning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Islam, an essentially civil religion, seems to have no real concept of religious liberty. Emir F. Caner, “Fantasy or Possibility: Can Religious Liberty Be Created in Islamic Countries?” in *First Freedom*, ed. White et al, 155-70.

to argue that the origins of modern toleration within Protestant sectarianism should be appreciated and taught in the public schools.⁷¹

The Challenge of Right Wing Enthusiasm

As a teacher, I regularly encounter young students who express a zeal for Christ similar to a convert in nineteenth-century England. When this pugilistic drunk was gloriously converted, the evangelist had to instruct this new Christian that one does not beat Christ into the lost. Love does not allow a large enthusiastic Christian to sit on a small pagan until he surrenders his heart to Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior. Many Christians, who have been impacted by the teaching of Presbyterian D. James Kennedy, among others, assume that our nation was founded as a Christian nation, and that we must uphold the Judeo-Christian basis of our laws. In one sense, we may agree, for when a nation forsakes divine law, as revealed both through natural law and through biblical (Judeo-Christian) law, in the establishment of its civil laws, it invites divine judgment.⁷² On the other hand, our free church forefathers suffered under the enthusiastic efforts of Puritans and Anglicans attempting the comprehension of all citizens within their own state church. Roger Williams was not always a faithful Baptist, but his *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution* is a must read for every Baptist who wants to know how bad this land was when some wished to establish a “Christian nation.” Also, let us not forget that Williams’s passionate plea for religious liberty for Baptists was publicly condemned by a gaggle of 52 Presbyterian ministers as an example of heresy and blasphemy.⁷³ The United States was established as a nation under profound Christian influence, but never has been, is not now, and never will be a Christian nation. That true Christian nation, the glorious city, the city of God, the New Jerusalem, has not yet been established by the return of our Lord Jesus Christ (Rev. 21:10-11). We still look for that city whose foundation and builder is God (Heb. 11:10). We are not a Christian nation, but a nation that includes Christians of various communions alongside various non-Christians, and we should be careful to maintain the distinction. Our goal is not to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth by establishing law through the state, but to spread the Kingdom of Heaven among the nations by biblical proclamation through the church (Matt. 28:18-20)

⁷¹Michael Walzer, *On Toleration* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1997), 66-71, 93-112.

⁷²On the relationship of natural law with religious liberty, see Craig Mitchell, “Natural Law and Religious Liberty,” in *First Freedom*, ed. White et al, 111-24.

⁷³Roger Williams, *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution, for cause of Conscience, discussed, in A Conference between Truth and Peace* (London, 1644); Bainton, *The Travail of Religious Liberty*, 208-28; Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to the West*, 196-213.

VALUABLE RESOURCES FOR YOUR STUDIES AND MINISTRY

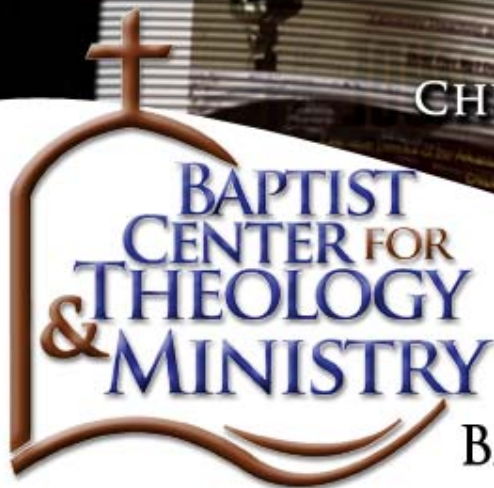
INTERACT WITH KEY SBC LEADERS
ON THE NEW BAPTIST CENTER BLOG

FREE WEEKLY MP3 DOWNLOADS
OF MINISTRY ENHANCING MESSAGES & TALKS

AN ONLINE ACADEMIC JOURNAL
NEW & ARCHIVED ISSUES IN TOPICAL INDEXES

AN EXTENSIVE NEW COLLECTION OF
BAPTIST CONFESSIONS &
DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS

THE LEAVELL CENTER
CHURCHES OF THE MONTH
HONORING OUTSTANDING
ACHIEVEMENT IN
SBC LIFE



AVAILABLE ONLINE AT
BAPTISTCENTER.COM

A RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF NEW ORLEANS BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

SECTION 3

THEOLOGIAN & THEOLOGICAL METHOD

“ACCORDING TO THE GRACE OF
GOD WHICH WAS GIVEN TO ME,
LIKE A WISE MASTER BUILDER I
LAID A FOUNDATION, AND
ANOTHER IS BUILDING ON IT. BUT
EACH MAN MUST BE CAREFUL HOW
HE BUILDS ON IT.

1 CORINTHIANS 3:10

THE FIRST BAPTIST TREATISE ON PREDESTINATION: THOMAS HELWYS'S *SHORT AND PLAINE PROOFE*

DR. J. MATTHEW PINSON¹

Thomas Helwys is often overshadowed by his mentor, John Smyth. Smyth was the leader of the English Separatist congregation whose voyage to the Netherlands Helwys financed and who later adopted believer's baptism and an Arminian soteriological posture.² Yet Helwys was the father of the English Baptist movement, having left Smyth, who had capitulated to the views of the Dutch Waterlander Mennonites. Helwys's decision to leave Smyth and take part of their congregation back to England resulted in the establishment of the first Baptist church on English soil and the subsequent Baptist movement.³ The General Baptist movement arose from Helwys's activities, while the Particular Baptist (Calvinist) movement arose a generation later.⁴

In 1611 Helwys and his congregation issued a confession of faith, *A Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam*.⁵ In this work Helwys outlined the major reasons for his separation from Smyth. The confession delineated objections to Smyth's denial of the Reformed doctrine of original sin and the imputation of the righteousness of

¹Dr. J. Matthew Pinson is President of Free Will Baptist Bible College.

²On Smyth and Helwys, see B. R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition: From the Marian Martyrs to the Pilgrim Fathers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

³See J. Matthew Pinson, "Sin and Redemption in the Theology of John Smyth and Thomas Helwys" (paper presented at the Theological Symposium of the Commission for Theological Integrity, National Association of Free Will Baptists, October 25, 2004).

⁴The "General" in General Baptists signifies general or universal atonement—that Christ died for all humanity, whereas the "Particular" in Particular Baptist stands for particular or limited atonement—that Christ died only for the elect. For more on both the General Baptists and Particular Baptists, see H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 21-123; B. R. White, *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1996). On the English General Baptists in the context of their relationship with their American descendents, the Free Will Baptists, see William F. Davidson, *The Free Will Baptists in History* (Nashville: Randall House, 2000); Michael R. Pelt, *A History of Original Free Will Baptists* (Mount Olive, NC: Mount Olive College Press, 1996); and J. Matthew Pinson, *A Free Will Baptist Handbook: Heritage, Beliefs, and Ministries* (Nashville: Randall House, 1998).

⁵For the entire English text, of Helwys's *Declaration*, see W. J. McGlothlin, ed., *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1911), 85-93.

Christ alone in justification, as well as his acceptance of Hoffmanite Christology⁶ and Waterlander positions on succession and the role of the magistracy.⁷

While the layman Helwys was not Smyth's equal in theological acumen, his passionate theological commitments motivated him to put his views into print. His literary output gave voice to the fledgling English Baptist movement, resulting, for example, in the first treatise in the English language advocating liberty of conscience and freedom of religion, *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*.⁸ Helwys's sentiments gave rise to the Baptist movement, his soteriological views laying the foundation for a vigorous Arminian Baptist movement in the seventeenth century, which would find expression in articulate General Baptist writers such as Thomas Grantham later in the century.

Later in 1611, after writing his *Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam*, Thomas Helwys wrote a brief work entitled *A Short and Plaine Prooffe by the Word and Workes of God that Gods decree is not the cause of anye Mans sinne or Condemnation. And That all Men are redeamed by Christ. As also, That no Infants are Condemned*.⁹ This treatise does more than any other General Baptist writing to link General Baptist soteriology with the thought of Jacobus Arminius. Though Helwys does not mention Arminius's name, in his preface he refers positively to the fact that the truth of general redemption was breaking forth in what even the Calvinist Separatists said were the "best Reformed churches"—that is, the Dutch Reformed churches (sig.A4v). Helwys obviously had in mind the Arminian surge in Dutch Reformed circles that was raging in the Netherlands at the very time he and John Smyth had been exiled there. That Helwys would tie his doctrine of general redemption to the Dutch Reformed churches, despite his lack of reference to Arminius personally, indicates that he was familiar with early Dutch Arminianism and viewed it favorably.¹⁰ When one adds to this the striking similarity of Helwys's and Arminius's soteriology, as Helwys moves away from Smyth's Waterlander-influenced soteriology in 1610, it seems indisputable that Arminius's thought directly influenced Helwys and General Baptist soteriology.

Helwys intended *A Short and Plain Proof* to be an exposition and defense of article five in his *Declaration of Faith*, which dealt with election and reprobation (sig. A3r). As reflected in his title, for Helwys the solution to the problem of election and reprobation lies

⁶Hoffmanite Christology taught that Christ's flesh was celestial or heavenly rather than derived from the Virgin Mary.

⁷See Champlin Burrage, *Early English Dissenters in the Light of Recent Research*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), 2:185.

⁸Thomas Helwys, *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*, ed. Richard Groves. Classics of Religious Liberty I (Macon, Ga.: Mercer UP, 1998).

⁹Hereafter, quotations from Helwys are modernized, thus avoiding archaic spelling, punctuation, etc.

¹⁰Authors did not footnote back then as we do now; thus, it is sometimes hard to discern their sources.

in the biblical construct of general redemption—God’s gracious, universal design for the salvation of humanity. Redemption is not “particular” (wrought only for the elect) but rather general or universal. “. . . God hath not in his eternal decree appointed some particular men to be saved and some particular men to be condemned, and so hath redeemed but some. But . . . Christ is given a ransom for all men, yea even for the wicked, that bring swift damnation upon themselves. . .” (sig. A3r).

Helwys’s prayer was that the “clear light of truth” of general redemption would shine on more and more people—starting with his Calvinistic Separatist counterparts.¹¹ Helwys criticizes Protestants for not going far enough in their reform of the church. They have broken “out of the depths of darkness” of the church of Rome and their “resting on the faith of the church” rather than scripture alone, Helwys says. Yet such Protestants still fail to reform the church thoroughly according to scriptural principles and thus distort the scriptural teaching on the divine salvific plan. Helwys hopes that new light will break forth from the Word of God and free them from their error, thus magnifying the universal grace of God in Christ (sig. A4v).

Helwys saw the main solution to the problem of election and reprobation in the doctrine of the general provision of salvation for humanity. Yet he saw the central question at the bottom of the debate as the origin or cause of evil. What caused sin? Was it the unconditional decree of God or the free will of man before the fall? This is the main question that must be answered in any discussion of predestination and human freedom (sig. A4r). Helwys faulted the Calvinists of his day, who wrongly “enter into the secret counsels of God” (sig. A4r). Helwys saw this as vain philosophy that “measur[es] God’s thoughts by their thoughts and his ways by their ways” (sig. A4r).

DETERMINISM AND THE FREE WILL OF ADAM

In his preface, Helwys emphasizes Adam’s free will before the fall. Because Adam had free will to choose to disobey God or not, then the divine (supralapsarian) decree to foreordain the fall makes no sense.

God giving *Adam free will and power in himself not to eat of the forbidden fruit and live, or to eat and die*, could not in his eternal decree ordain or appoint him to life or death, for then had his *free will* been overthrown. And if Adam had not eaten and sinned (which was in his own power), then had not death entered. Therefore God did not decree that death should enter, and thus *God’s decree* is not the cause of any man’s condemnation (sig. A2r).

Helwys says that it is Adam’s unfettered choice to sin that causes condemnation (reprobation), not God’s decree.

¹¹This phrase is reminiscent of Separatist leader John Robinson’s phrase, “The Lord has yet more truth and light to break forth out of His Holy Word.” Cited in Timothy George, *John Robinson and the English Separatist Tradition* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer UP, 1982), vii.

Another root problem in Calvinism, according to Helwys, is its determinism. He criticizes the notion that “*the Almighty* hath decreed all things that come to pass, and that of him, and through him all things are”—that “God is the moving cause of all things” (sig. A4r). This concept logically results in the supralapsarian idea that God foreordained the fall. This view, Helwys argues, results in the belief, whether Calvinists own up to it or not, that God is the author of sin: “. . . they will and do conclude most blasphemously that God hath foredecreed that sin should come to pass” (sig. A4r). Helwys believed that this doctrine was a result of “the craft and subtlety of [Satan] who lieth in wait hereby to deceive. . .” (sig. A4r). Helwys dealt with the Calvinist objection that God did not decree sin itself, just the action that is sinful. Helwys rejects this as faulty logic. If God’s providence is “in every action,” Helwys argues, then it must also have been in “Adam’s eating of the forbidden fruit.” Thus, if God foreordained every action, it logically follows that he foreordained sin as well (sig. A4r–sig. A5v). Helwys blasts this approach with stinging rhetoric: “Thus do they walk by their owne imaginations and intents, deceiving and being deceived, pretending not to lay sin upon God, when (indeed and in truth) they directly make God the author of sin. Our best thoughts of them are that they do it ignorantly. The Lord give them hearts to repent, all whose conversions should be the joy of our souls” (sig. A5v).¹²

After these opening thoughts about the free will of Adam before the fall and the Calvinist view of the foreordination of all things, Helwys sets out his plan for the treatise. He begins by humbly telling the reader that there is no one more unfit than he to delve into these issues. “Yet to show ourselves faithful with that talent that God hath given us, we have, through the grace of God, taken in hand to do our best service unto the Lord herein, hoping for his assistance and acceptance” (sig. A5v). Helwys’s first aim is to “show wherein we differ from them [Calvinists] and they digress from the truth” (sig. A5v).

Helwys confesses that God decreed all good that comes to pass, “through him are all good things. . . . the Lord is the author, actor, and moving cause in and to every good action” (sig. A5v). Yet God is not the author of evil. However, if Calvinism is true with its system of divine, unconditional election and reprobation, predestination to salvation and predestination to damnation, then God is the author of evil, for he creates people for destruction so that “they of necessity must be damned” (sig. A5r). The Calvinist system of reprobation, whether it states that God unconditionally reprobates people to damnation without choice in the matter, or God simply “hath particularly redeemed some and left others to perish,” makes God the author of sin and evil (sig. A5r).

THE CAUSE OF DIVINE REPROBATION

Having set forth what is *not* the cause of reprobation—God’s decretive will—Helwys proceeds to establish, in “the most plain, easy, and short way that, by the direction of his Spirit, our hearts can devise,” (sig. A5r) what *is* the cause of divine reprobation. Citing Romans 5:12, 18, Helwys says that sin is the cause of condemnation, not God’s decretive

¹²Sometimes in his writings, Helwys—beleaguered, persecuted, imprisoned, and in the context of theological polemics much more heated than those in our own day—makes extreme statements about the spiritual state of his opponents, whom he feels have rejected the truth.

will (sig. A5r). Everyone agrees with this, Helwys writes, but Calvinists wish to make human sin the result of God's decree.

Helwys argues that God's creation of Adam in the *imago dei* with free will to choose between good and evil courses of action frees God of the charge of being the author of sin.¹³ "It is proved here," Helwys says, "that God gave Adam free will and power to eat, or not to eat, and this all men do confess. How then can it be said, with any Spiritual understanding, that God decreed he should sin? For God's forecounsel and decree must of necessity come to pass" (sig. A6v). Whatever God decrees must necessarily come to pass. Thus, if God decreed that Adam would eat of the fruit, then that action becomes a matter of deterministic necessity and not a free action (sig. A6r). "Can men make freedom and bondage in one and the same action, all in one man, and all at one time? How shall men be able with any good conscience to make things so contrary hang together?" (sig. A6r).

Furthermore, God's command to Adam "that he should not sin," means that God is commanding Adam *not* to do something and at the same time decreeing that he *will* do it—making it impossible for him not to do it. Helwys argues that the biblical God does not make commands and then decree states of affairs in such a way that makes it impossible for his creatures to obey those commands (sig. A6r-sig. A7v). Such a decree would place God in opposition to his own revealed will: "In the fear of God, let men take heed how they go about (by subtle arguments) to prove God contrary to himself, which they plainly do, when they say it was the eternal will of God that man should sin, and yet God commands that he should not sin" (sig. A6r).

Just as it would be unjust for God to decree Adam's fall unconditionally, so, Helwys argues, it is unjust for God to decree the condemnation of human beings after the fall without extending divine grace to them. Helwys proceeds to refute the doctrine of divine reprobation:

This is the whole substance of what they say. That God hath decreed to forsake and leave those that he hath appointed to condemnation, to themselves, and withholdeth his grace from them, leaving them to sin, and so to perish for their sin. We will not put them to prove this because we know they cannot, but we will show, by the mercy of God, that it is an old, conceived imagination and hath no ground of truth (sig. A7v-r).

It is interesting that Helwys here aims, not at what has been called "double reprobation" but at "single reprobation." Double reprobation was much more popular among Calvinists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than it is now. Those who held this view believed that God unconditionally predestines people to both salvation and damnation. That is, both election and reprobation are unconditional, both arising from the secret counsel of God. Single reprobation argues that, while God's election of people to salvation is unconditional (that is, not conditioned on foreseen faith or foreseen union with Christ or anything "in the creature"), reprobation of people to damnation is conditioned on foreseen sin or unbelief.

¹³Helwys assumes the classic Reformed tying of Genesis 1:26-27 with Ephesians 4:24 in his understanding of the divine image in humanity.

Single reprobation is the doctrine that Helwys here refutes. Yet, to him, any doctrine of reprobation in which God condemns people when he commanded them to repent and believe and yet did not give them the grace to repent and believe is equally pernicious, whether single or double. It all amounts to the same thing: God says, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved,” yet he grants the gracious ability to believe only to the elect, leaving the reprobate in their sins. For Helwys, this is the height of injustice, unworthy of God who is the fountainhead of justice and truth.

FALL IN ADAM, REDEMPTION IN CHRIST

Helwys launches into a discussion of the effects of the fall on the human race. He reiterates the Reformed doctrines of original sin, depravity, and human inability in salvation. Like Arminius, he holds to a Traducian and Natural Headship understanding of the transmission of sin in the race, as seen in his statement that Adam’s posterity “were yet all in his loins” (sig. A7r).¹⁴ Helwys states that death and condemnation “went over him [Adam], and over all by his transgression” (sig. A8v). After Adam’s fall, Helwys explains, we see the first mention of the gospel, Genesis 3:15, which is intended for *all* Adam’s posterity. Helwys uses a Reformed approach to original sin to argue for general redemption. As all Adam’s posterity are caught up in his sin and guilt, so Christ dies for all Adam’s posterity (sig. A8v).

Christ, the second Adam, comes to provide redemption for all people. Yet this redemption becomes actualized in the human person through the condition of personal belief in Christ. Here Helwys’s Arminian view of conditional election comes to bear. Predestination to salvation is not unconditional. Rather, “the condition was, that Adam should believe, and under this same Condition was Christ promised and sent to all the world” (sig. A8r). Yet this condition is made available to all Adam’s posterity, and Helwys illustrates this by quoting from the Gospel of John: “*John 12.46. I am come a light into the world that whosoever believeth in me should not abide in darkness. And John 3.16. God so loved the world that he hath given his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life*” (sig. A8r).

If God had left people in a state of condemnation for Adam’s sin without giving them the opportunity to recover from such a state, he would be unmerciful, Helwys argues (sig. A9v). Yet, he does not leave humanity, or any part thereof, without a remedy for original sin. As all of Adam’s posterity are guilty in Adam, so Christ provides all of Adam’s posterity a remedy—not just the elect, but all of Adam’s posterity.

INFANT SALVATION

In this context, Helwys feels it necessary to discuss infant salvation. Tying the doctrine of infant salvation to the unity of the race in Adam, Helwys explains that infants are saved through the redemption Christ provides for all Adam’s posterity (sig. B1v). The difference between infants and adults is that infants have no way to resist the grace of God in Christ that has been proffered to all in general redemption. Adults must meet the

¹⁴See Pinson, “Sin and Redemption in the Theology of John Smyth and Thomas Helwys.”

condition of belief in order to appropriate the general redemption of all Adam's posterity. Yet, since infants¹⁵ cannot meet the condition of belief, and since they cannot resist Christ's general redemption through unbelief, they are saved through Christ's general redemption. Thus, Helwys posits infant salvation through general redemption (a different kind of "conditionality" for infants than for adults, since they cannot meet—or fail to meet—the conditions set for adults). This is opposed to the constructs in many Anabaptist and later Arminian theories of infant salvation, which are really more infant "safety" views, which reject original sin, than infant salvation views.

Helwys was interacting directly with Anabaptist theories of original sin (actually, the lack thereof) and infant safety that the Waterlanders had confessed and that John Smyth had appropriated from them. He distanced himself from Smyth and Waterlander leaders like Hans de Ries in his views on original sin and infant salvation.¹⁶ Again, here Helwys bore the influence of Arminius, the only theologian of that time who sought to combine the notions of general redemption and infant salvation with a thoroughgoing approach to original sin and the transmission of Adam's sin to the human race. The foregoing distinctions are not meant to imply that Helwys believed that infants were guilty of actual sins, as if they could do good or evil. His primary concern here is to provide a rationale for the salvation of infants, and he does so in the context of general redemption rather than mere infant safety or a denial of original sin. Helwys's statements on infant salvation here must be compared to his statements in his *Declaration of Faith* to get the full impact of these distinctions.

PROBLEMS WITH DIVINE REPROBATION

After this excursus on original sin, general redemption, and infant salvation, Helwys again takes up the subject of reprobation. He reiterates his earlier point, that reprobation makes God the author of sin. He then argues that the doctrine of reprobation, which rests on the Calvinistic system of particular redemption, mitigates the biblical witness to the love of God. It "restraineth the love of God to the world in giving his Son for a Savior" (sig. B2v). Helwys's argument from the universal love of God in Christ is penetrating and powerful, as seen in the following passage:

. . . whereas our Savior Christ saith, John 3.16, *God so loved the world, that he hath given his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have eternal life*. This opinion of particular redemption saith that God did not so love the world, but he loved some few particular persons, as he gave his son for them, and they only shall believe and shall be saved. And the greatest part of mankind, God loved them not, but hath decreed they shall be damned, and he hath not given his Son for them but hath left them to perish. Thus denying the greatest part of the world to have any means of salvation, and that there is no Savior for them (sig. B2v).

¹⁵And, as later General Baptists said, children and mentally incapable adults who have not reached an age of moral and spiritual responsibility.

¹⁶See Pinson, "John Smyth, Thomas Helwys, and Separatist Arminianism."

This excerpt brings Helwys's general-redemption approach into sharp relief with the particular-redemption theology of regnant seventeenth-century Calvinism. It also illustrates Helwys's method, which veers from the scholastic method and uses a more plain-style expositional approach to scripture to establish Arminian arguments.

Another reason Helwys rejects the Calvinistic scheme of particular redemption and reprobation is that, like the decree to cause the fall, the decree to reprobate certain people puts God at cross-purposes with himself. In Scripture God commands people to repent and even calls them to faith universally with the gospel. Yet in the Calvinistic view, God is commanding them and calling them to do what they cannot possibly do because he has not graciously given them the capacity to do it.

. . . this lamentable opinion of particular *redemption* and *reprobation* saith they [the reprobate] can have no part nor portion in Christ. So is their judgment enlarged for not receiving Christ, with whom they have nothing to do. And thus do they make Christ to offer himself to them that he would not have receive him, and which he hath decreed shall not receive him, nor believe him, and make the words of the Lord feigned words, and words of dissimulation (sig. B2v).

Helwys goes on to cite Luke 13:34, which he interprets as giving human beings the freedom to resist and reject divine drawing grace. Here again, Helwys presses, a particular-redemption scheme seems to make Christ conflicted with himself, using words he does not really mean, holding out promises on which he cannot, or does not intend to, deliver:

As also those words of our Savior Christ, Luke 13.34, where he speaketh with such unfeigned earnestness: *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem [. . .] how often would I have gathered thy children together as the hen gathereth her brood under her wings, and ye would not.* What impiety is this to account these words feigned, and if any shall say they do not account them feigned, then must they be forced to confess that God would have had all Israel and all their posterity in uprightness of heart, to have feared him, and kept his commandments, that it might have gone well with them forever, and so did not decree any of them, nor of their posterity, to be condemned. And if our Savior Christ's words were not feigned words, then would he have gathered the children of Jerusalem together which would not be gathered and so would have had them believe in him that would not. And yet they that hold this fearful opinion hold that God would not have some men, yea the most men, to believe, but hath decreed their condemnation (sig. B2r).

Helwys quotes Acts 17:30, "*That now God admonisheth all men everywhere to repent.*" He continues his engaging line of argument: "Yet they of this opinion . . . say, he would not have all, but some to repent. And if they would speak plainly, and not halt betwixt opinions, they must say that God would have some to be unbelievers and wicked and disobedient, and that is the highest blasphemy. . ." (sig. B2r).

Another difficulty Helwys has with particular redemption is that it diminishes Christ's gracious work of redemption and his suffering for sins. This view, which makes

Christ a “particular private redeemer for some private men” dishonors Christ “in that his great sufferings are not accounted sufficient to take away Adam’s sin, and so hath he not yet utterly broken, but only bruised, the serpent’s head, making Adam’s sin to abound above the grace of God by Christ, overthrowing that word of God, Rom. 5:20, which saith, *Where sinne abounded grace abounded much more*, speaking of Adam’s sin”(sig. B3v). Again Helwys invokes his theory that Christ’s redemption makes available a remedy for original sin for the entire human race, so that all who meet the condition of faith personally appropriate Christ’s redemptive work.

SPIRITUAL EFFECTS OF THE DOCTRINE OF UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

Helwys roots his discussion of the doctrine of unconditional election to practical, spiritual concerns, warning that Calvinism has numerous negative spiritual effects. First, he argues that the doctrine of unconditional election “works presumption in men” (sig. B3v). People who believe they are elect and have no possibility of being condemned will become presumptuous about their salvation. This relates to their security in salvation as well:

... if men can but once get a persuasion in themselves that God hath elected them, then they are secure. They need not work out their salvation with fear and trembling. For God having decreed them to be saved, they must be saved. They need not feare: If they increase and grow in knowledge and grace, it is well but if they do not, it is all one, for it is decreed they must be saved, and this causeth all slothful, careless, and negligent profession. ... But for all their presumption, it shall be said unto them, *I know you not. Depart from me all you workers of iniquity. Luke 13.26, 27* (sig. B3v).

Second, particular redemption causes those who fear they might be among the reprobate to despair and not to attempt to respond to God at all. This, in turn, leads to their own condemnation.

And this opinion ... makes some despair utterly, as thinking there is no grace for them, and that God hath decreed their destruction. And it makes others desperately careless, holding that if God hath decreed they shall be saved, then they shall be saved, and if God hath decreed they shall be damned, they shall be damned, and so in a desperate carelessness run headlong to destruction (sig. B3v).

Third, Helwys asks, why preach? If God has already decided that certain people are necessarily saved and others are necessarily damned, the biblical command to preach the gospel is incoherent. How can the gospel be preached to everyone, Helwys asked, if preachers do not know whether or not Christ died for the ones to whom they are preaching? “Here is all faith in preaching the Gospel to the World destroyed. For what faith can there be to preach the Gospel when we know not whether Christ belong to them or not?” (sig. B3r).

Fourth, Helwys argues, praying for the conversion of unregenerate people makes no sense if Christ did not die to provide them with salvation. If a Christian prays for an unbeliever to be converted, he might be praying against the decretive will of God. Helwys

asks, how can “a man of faith pray for any man, when he cannot know, whether God hath decreed him to condemnation, and so he pray against God’s decree” (sig. B3r).

Fifth, Helwys brings the discussion back to the question of assurance of salvation. Before, Helwys said that the doctrine of unconditional election might cause people to be presumptuous about their security in salvation. He now argues that the doctrine has the effect of causing some truly regenerate people to doubt whether they are among the elect. This gets to the heart of the problem of assurance (or lack thereof) in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English Calvinism (Puritanism): How can one prove (even to himself) that he is elect? Helwys says, “For thou must first believe that Christ is given a Savior for thee before thou canst know that he is a Savior for thee, which cannot be, that a man should believe what he knows not” (sig. B4v). Helwys goes on to say, “Let the mystery of iniquity the man of sin himself devise (whose device this particular redemption is) how any man shall know by the word of God that Christ is given a Savior for him, but by knowing that he is given a Savior for all men, except he can show his name especially set down in the Word” (sig. B4v).

General Redemption

Helwys follows his discussion of the practical, spiritual effects of the doctrine of particular redemption with a more direct discussion of general redemption or general atonement *per se*. He proposes to “prove by plain evidence of Scripture that Christ by his death and sufferings hath redeemed all men. . . .” He begins with a consideration of the *protoevangelion* in Genesis 3:15. Here again, Helwys marshals his Traducian and natural-headship view of Adam’s relationship to his posterity to argue for general redemption. Key to Helwys’s construct is his belief that all Adam’s posterity were “in him” or “in his loins” though they had not yet been born. Reformed theologians have often referred to this Augustinian concept as the doctrine of Adamic unity. In Genesis 3:15, Helwys argues, the promise to send Christ to redeem Adam and Eve was, by extension, made to the entire race, because the entire race were in Adam and Eve at the time the promise was made. The “promise of Christ is made of Adam and Hevah, in which were all mankind, and in whom were all mankind in whom all had sinned, and for the taking away of the condemnation due for that sin, Christ was there promised and given. . . .” (sig. B4v-r). This interpretive device sets certain Calvinistic categories on their head while at the same time appealing to Reformed categories (e.g., regarding Adamic unity).

Helwys’s other arguments for Christ’s universal atonement for humanity appeal to proof texts that were common to the Dutch Arminians and the Amsterdam Waterlander Mennonites. He cites, for example, 1 John 2:2, “*And he is a reconciliaton for our sins* (speaking of all the faithful to whom he wrote) *and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*” Helwys argues that this passage clearly teaches that Christ’s atonement is not merely for believers, but also for unbelievers. “. . . how is it possible that the Holy Ghost should speak more plainly, to show that Jesus Christ is a reconciliation for the faithful which are not of the world, and for the unfaithful which are the world” (sig. B4r).

In this connection, Helwys cites 2 Corinthians 5:15, which states that Christ is dead for all; 2 Corinthians 5:19, which says that Christ reconciled the world to himself; and 1 Timothy 2:5, 9, which says that Christ Jesus gave himself a ransom for all (sig. B4r). He is

appealing to proof texts that were part of both Arminian and Mennonite doctrinal teaching, with which he was familiar (as well as Lutheran writings, with which he may or may not have been familiar). He continues this with his citation of 2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4; and Colossians 2:20: “*The Lord of that promise is not slack as some men count slackness but is patient towards us and would have no man perish but would all come to repentance*” (B4). “*God will that all men shall be saved and come to the acknowledging of the truth*” (sig. B5v). “*And through peace made by that blood of that his cross to reconcile to himself through him [unreadable] all things both which are in earth and which are in heaven*” (sig. B5v).

Having cited these proof texts, the plain sense of which Hewlys believes should be clear to anyone who is “tractably minded,” Helwys moves back to a reiteration of his main theological framework for understanding both original sin and general redemption: Adamic unity.

. . . when man had of his own free will (being tempted) yielded unto the temptation of the serpent, neglecting the commandment of his God and Creator, and brought condemnation upon himself and all mankind, God, of his infinite mercy, would not leave Adam and in him all mankind to perish under that condemnation, but hath sent a Savior to redeem Adam and all mankind from that sin (sig. B5v).

Furthermore, Hewlys argues, both the mercy and justice of God demands that he send his son to die equally for all people. Yet he ties even this to the concept of Adamic unity. In the atonement, God was “equally merciful and equally just unto all, being no respecter of persons, not pardoning Adam and giving him a Savior and condemning the greatest part of his posterity for that his sin: but hath given his son a Savior for all, if through unbelief they deprive not themselves” (sig. B5v-r).

Finally, Helwys discusses the practical spiritual benefits of believing the doctrine of general redemption.

And what a comfortable doctrine is this unto all, when every poor soul may know, that there is grace and salvation for him by Christ, and that Christ hath shed his blood for him, that believing in him he may be saved, and that God would not the death of him, but that he should repent and live. Thus is all despair taken away, . . . and all careless presumption cut off. . . (sig. B5r).

In his concluding paragraph on proofs for general atonement, Helwys recaps some of the arguments he has already made. He discusses, for example, the agreement of the doctrine with “the whole Word of God,” the fact that the doctrine sets forth the mercy of God and advances the justice of God. Yet, then he adds to his understanding of the universality of Christ’s atonement being an example of God’s justice. Before, he had said that general atonement illustrates God’s justice in that God is not partial to one segment of humanity over another (e.g., Adam over his posterity or the elect over the reprobate). Here Helwys says that general atonement also illustrates the justice of God in that it leaves human beings “without excuse” in God’s condemnation of those who have rejected Christ and remain alienated from God in sin. General redemption “advances the justice of God, in

condemning unbelievers seeing he hath left them without excuse, in that he hath given them a Savior, in whom because they believe not, they are justly condemned” (sig. B5r).

It is clear that Helwys believed doctrine has not merely a cognitive function but also an affective one. This is seen in his constant appeal to the fact that the doctrine of general redemption brings with it emotional benefits: “. . . we doubt not that comfort will follow abundantly” (sig. B5r-sig. B6v).

In his conclusion, Helwys summarizes his treatment of the doctrine of particular vs. general redemption. Yet, he spends the most time on the unique keystone of his interpretation: that the unity of the race in Adam, which demands the Reformed doctrine of original sin, also demands the doctrine of general redemption, based on the *protoevangelion* in Genesis 3:15. Yet, while this general redemption is accomplished for all, it is not indiscriminately applied to all, but must be subjectively appropriated to be salvifically efficacious.

And we have shown that, as Christ the promised seed was given and sent to Adam to be his Savior, for the same end he was given and sent to all the world as also under the same condition, which was that he should believe in him. For if Adam had not believed, he must have been condemned, and if all the world had not believed, all the world must have been condemned, and as Adam, believing in the promised seed, was (through the grace and mercy of God in Christ) to be saved, even so all the world, believing in the promised seed, was (through the grace and mercy of God in Christ) to be saved (sig. B6v-r).

Free Will

In an epilogue, Helwys clarifies what his beliefs are concerning human free will after the fall. He argues that the belief in free will as Calvinists commonly define it is often attached to the doctrine of general redemption. Yet, he wishes to distance himself from that doctrine. If by free will is meant the Pelagian or semi-Pelagian belief (which, for example, John Smyth and the Waterlander Mennonites held) that man after the fall has the natural free will to choose the good without the interposition of divine grace, then Helwys does not believe in it. He says,

It is a custom amongst men to conclude that free will must needs follow this understanding of universal redemption: and if their meaning were free will in Christ, and that we have free power and ability through Christ to worke out our salvation, and that through Christ we are made able to every good work, such a free will we hold. But that man hath any free will or power in himself to work his own salvation or to choose life, we utterly deny. . . . Thus Christ offering himself, man hath power and doth reject Christ, put the Word of God from him, resist the Holy Ghost, and freely of his own will work his own condemnation. But he hath no power at all to work his own salvation, and so much only to clear ourselves from that gross and fearful error of free will, from the which the Lord in great mercy hath freed us. The End. (sig. B7v).

CONCLUSION

Many who are unfamiliar with Baptist origins will be surprised to learn that Helwys, the first Baptist, was Arminian. As seen in the last paragraph, his Arminianism, like that of Arminius, was of a different sort from the more semi-Pelagian tendencies of the Waterlander Mennonites, which he rejected, the English Arminianism gaining popularity in his day, or the later Wesleyan-Holiness Arminianism of those who would follow John Wesley.¹⁷ It was a more grace-oriented Arminianism that emphasized that salvation was by grace alone, through faith alone, by the imputed righteousness of Christ alone, though divine grace is resistible. Helwys's plain-style approach in this first Baptist treatise on predestination laid the groundwork for more extensive works by General Baptist thinkers such as Thomas Grantham (e.g., *Christianismus Primitivus*).¹⁸ Probably because the Free Will Baptists are the only modern denomination historically connected to the seventeenth-century General Baptists, the Arminianism of Helwys and his successors has not been studied in the wider Baptist movement. Yet it remains a vital resource for understanding Arminian Baptist approaches to soteriology.

¹⁷See Pinson, "Sin and Redemption in the Theology of John Smyth and Thomas Helwys," and "Atonement, Justification, and Apostasy in the Thought of John Wesley," *Integrity: A Journal of Christian Thought* 4 (2008): 73-92.

¹⁸See J. Matthew Pinson, "The Diversity of Arminian Soteriology: Thomas Grantham, John Goodwin, and Jacobus Arminius" (paper presented at the national meeting of the American Society of Church History, Florida State University, Spring 1998).

MOST OF THE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES OF THE BAPTIST CENTER ARE AVAILABLE ONLINE AT BAPTISTCENTER.COM. AMONG THE ACTIVITIES OF THE BAPTIST CENTER FOR THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY ARE THE FOLLOWING:



THE JOURNAL FOR BAPTIST THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY

Access articles on topics of interest written by Southern Baptist leaders and scholars with healthy sense of Baptist Identity. You can access every issue through the online Journal for Baptist Theology & Ministry archive.

ANNUAL EVENTS

The Baptist Center sponsors annual events which give attention to topics of interest to Baptists, particularly concerning issues impacting Baptist identity and Baptist distinctives. Conferences were held in February 2004 on "Issues in Baptist Polity," in February 2005 on "The Mission of the Church," and in March 2007 on "What Is a Baptist? Marks that Separate Baptists from Presbyterians." Many of the papers from these Baptist Center events are posted on the baptistcenter.com web site. The next Baptist Center conference is April 4, 2007, in coordination with the NOBTS Baptist College Partnership Program and the Greer-Heard Point-Counterpoint Forum. The next following conference will be on September 25-27, 2008, which will feature the inaugural James and Diann Davison Lectureship Series on Baptist Distinctives.

THE BAPTIST CENTER BLOG

The Baptist Center Blog on the baptistcenter.com web site provides an opportunity for interaction with fellow Baptists on issues relating to Baptists. Read interviews and interact with key Southern Baptist leaders as they tackle the important issues facing SBC churches and entities today.

CHURCHES OF EXCELLENCE

The Baptist Center, in coordination with the Leavell Center for Evangelism and Church Health, recognizes outstanding Southern Baptist churches which are exemplary as healthy, growing churches. These churches meet at least the following five criteria as measures for healthy growing churches: (1) an increase of church membership of 10 percent over five years, (2) at least one baptism each year for the past five years, (3) a total membership-to-baptism ratio of no more than thirty-five to one, (4) at least twenty-five percent of the additions each year coming from conversions, and (5) in addition, the percentage of members involved in discipleship/Bible study and the church's contribution to missions are taken into account as well to indicate spiritual vitality in the congregation.

RESOURCES FOR CHURCHES

The Baptist Center web site has a number of articles and white papers posted on a number of topics, including papers delivered at the annual Baptist Center meetings. A number of Baptist confessions and doctrinal statements are also posted on the Baptist Center web site to assist Baptists to frame their theological convictions within historic Baptists parameters.

BAPTIST CENTER RADIO

Also on the Baptist Center web site are downloadable MP3 audio files of sermons and papers delivered on topics of interest to Baptists.

THE TENSION OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER'S PRISON THEOLOGY REGARDING SOCIAL REFLECTIONS CONCERNING RACE AND POVERTY: PROVOKING ACTION TOWARD SOCIAL FREEDOM AND JUSTICE BEYOND SECULAR AND RELIGIOUS JARGON

CRAIG KYLE HEMPHILL¹

INTRODUCTION

Freedom is a loosely defined word that conjures many notions about social justice and provokes a spectrum of emotion when placed in the context of addressing racism and poverty. Freedom demands self-discipline, responsibility, and action.² The boiling of emotion and passion often follows in tandem where discussions address racism and poverty. For the Church, freedom should involve concerns for spiritual welfare and communal existence as a body identified with Jesus Christ. In terms of responsibility and freedom, the Church both historically and in the contemporary situation ought to commit to addressing racism and poverty beyond mere discussion. As a matter of Christian witness, the Church's responsibility regarding social freedom in relation to racism and poverty ought to offer a legitimate model of action consistent with the gospel of Christ versus merely a verbose paradox. The true gospel involves the confession of salvation, truth, and inclusion for all classes and races. However, while often well-intended, the Church provides mostly discussion and lament concerning issues of racism and poverty. The Church, then, has arguably united with secular institutions in a partnership of verbal pity and relational ineptness, but little action toward redressing racism and poverty.

A grave issue continues to confront the Church regarding social freedom and its attempts to redress racism and poverty -- how does the Church move beyond discussion and apathy toward action to confront racism and poverty? Particularly, how does the Church provoke action toward social justice to combat racism and poverty beyond notions of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer describes as the "insufficient tools of reasoning, principle, conscience, duty, absolute freedom and private duty?"³

¹Craig Hemphill is a J.D. graduate of the Thurgood Marshall School of Law at Texas Southern University, and a former *Editor-in-Chief* of the Thurgood Marshall Law Review. He has served as in-house counsel and construction contract specialist for Williams Midstream Gas and Liquids in Houston, Texas. He earned the B.S. degree in Economics from the University of Texas at Arlington and a Master of Divinity (*Cum Laude*) at Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University. He is a licensed and ordained minister for both the Missionary Baptist-National and Southern Baptist Conventions.

²See, e.g., Dietrich Bonhoeffer "After Ten Years," *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: The McMillan Company, 1971), 3-17.

³See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, ed. Clifford J. Green (Volume 6), trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis:

In an exact and numbing revelation, Dietrich Bonhoeffer presents through his works, prison experiences, and death a model for how the Church might confess *and* act to bring awareness and relief to the social ills caused by racism and poverty. This essay, then, presents an analysis of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology concerning social freedom -- i.e., Bonhoeffer's four principles: (1) discipline, (2) action, (3) suffering, and (4) death -- through examining Bonhoeffer's prison writings and, to a limited extent, his pre-prison comments regarding civil courage. The purpose of this examination is to present Bonhoeffer's theological constructs regarding the social and/or public injustice of his time (e.g., Nazi tyranny) to offer a suggested method for dealing with contemporary injustice(s) caused by racism and poverty. Although the examination is heavy on considering Bonhoeffer's works and reflecting on his resistance to Nazi oppression, it is not intended to argue an exact fitting of Bonhoeffer's theological constructs of his particular situation. Notably, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's shortened and interrupted life limited his ability to voice his perspective on numerous contemporary matters such as racism and poverty. Rather, stated precisely, this examination seeks to speak through and for what Bonhoeffer might have voiced by applying his works to the social challenges of the present day.

This work addresses the question of how the Church can provoke action toward combating racism and poverty by acting as a model of Christ and implementing his gospel. How should the Church become a social justice catalyst to move itself and society beyond discussion and inaction to counter racism and poverty? This essay asserts that Bonhoeffer's life and works nobly demonstrate a Christocentric model of action for the Church to incorporate to answer these questions.

CONTEMPORARY CONCEPTS OF SOCIAL FREEDOM VERSUS BONHOEFFER'S NOTIONS OF ACTION

For the Church to be a legitimate spiritual welfare agent, it must address important contemporary issues. Such issues involve existential matters regarding human relationships from the perspective to God.⁴ Two such relationships involve economic inclusion and racial equality. The perspective of God involves recognizing that every person as a matter of creation exists in the image of God, making humanity of immeasurable worth. Based on such worth, every person should enjoy equal dignity with his or her fellow humans.⁵ There exists a need then that humanity following the model of Christ and his gospel demonstrate equality and respect of dignity for each person no matter another's economic class or race.

Fortress Press, 2005), 12. Concerning racism and poverty, such tools often and ashamedly perpetuate the stagnant ineptness of secular and religious jargon. That is to say, the Church becomes a meeting place to discuss the good or ill fortunes of its members and/or society as a whole, but it remains merely a social outlet that empathizes with the plight of the poor and those cast aside by racial injustice.

⁴See, e.g., Bonhoeffer, note 1, 16.

⁵See, e.g., Léon Garriguet, *The Social Value of the Gospel*, ed. Henry Parkinson (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1911), 92-93, discussing the intrinsic value of human beings concerning "moral worth" as "created in the image of God."

The reminder is that Christ calls everyone who follows him to the task of service. Such service requires respecting the dignity of all people. This perspective permeates social freedom.

Problematic is the disappointment that the Church in the West and in Europe has succumbed to the will of rationalism and human intellect beyond the grit of spiritual faith that enables and promotes social freedom by fostering Christocentric service toward fellow human beings.⁶ Social freedom and service are powerful antidotes against racism and poverty. Unfortunately, Western and European churches have taken on a stance of nothing more than simple discussion, with little action to redress racism and poverty. The Church's response to racism and poverty is anemic concerning direct action. Mostly, the Church passes along its responsibility to secular vehicles to address the needs of those socially marginalized because of racism and poverty's situational results. Bonhoeffer experienced a similar situation concerning the rhetoric and passiveness of the Confessing Church during the height of Nazi oppression.

For Bonhoeffer, "confession" was more than mere words. Bonhoeffer looked toward a deliberative ethic strengthened through decisive action in which he demonstrated the courage to take on a just war to eliminate what he saw as an enemy of German society, culture, national heritage, and the Christian faith. Such action did not come free of tension or criticism, however. Yet, Bonhoeffer engaged in action that represents a model of how to counter stagnant discussion and paralyzing inaction. For sure, Bonhoeffer's actions cost him his life. For Bonhoeffer, however, social justice and freedom combines conviction, faith and righteousness, which culminates into action—even at the cost of death. One might characterize such ideology as "righteous action." Bonhoeffer's prison poem "Stations on the Road to Freedom" provides an effective witness of such sentiment.⁷

STATIONS ON THE ROAD TO FREEDOM

In "Stations on the Road to Freedom," Bonhoeffer formulated a Christocentric model of social justice and freedom in relation to action, which involved (i) dying to self, (ii) taking up discipline, (iii) action, and (iv) suffering. Such rationales are also present in Bonhoeffer's pre-prison theology found in "After Ten Years," where he expresses the sentiment that emulating Christ in movement and action, which Bonhoeffer notes as civil courage, results in social justice and freedom.⁸ To Bonhoeffer, then, for one to focus on righteous action he or she must model Jesus Christ. In addition, such action unquestionably involves ethics and, as always, ethics involves tension. On the one hand, one must focus on Christian appropriateness. On the other hand, one must purpose and engage in what we might best describe as a just war—righteous action—against all things that stand to decay the faith (i.e., anything inapposite to walking with Christ), including forces that assault and oppose the

⁶Bonhoeffer, note 1, 16.

⁷Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Prayers From Prison: Prayers and Poems*, Johann Christoph Hampe, interpreter (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 27-28 and 70-73.

⁸Bonhoeffer, note 1, 15-16.

existential state of any human being as a creature of God demanding dignity and respect. Thus, there exists a tension in ethics when one is required to assault certain principles through righteous action to accomplish a legitimate end (i.e., breaking peace to keep peace). In Bonhoeffer's case, Nazi ideology and oppression represented an object against which to carry out a just war. Bonhoeffer's righteous action in an attempt to break Nazi tyranny produced a great internal tension for him. In this discussion and analysis, racism and poverty occupy the same shoes as the enemy Bonhoeffer faced.

From this thought process, what might the Church of today learn concerning social justice and freedom in relation to righteous action against racism and poverty? First, social justice and freedom come at a great price. The Church must commit at a greater involvement of righteous action beyond mere discussion and apathy to address the concerns of the poor and those who experience racial ostracism. Second, such righteous action should follow the model of Jesus Christ. For Bonhoeffer this involved committing to righteous action to rid Germany of the Nazi regime which burdened social freedom and justice by denying the voice of the Confessing Church and committing mortal crimes against humanity. Yet, to Bonhoeffer, righteous action was not brute force. Rather, such action involved being like Jesus Christ. That is, to commit to pouring out self—a *kenosis*—and following the will of God to answer any call that alleviates a corrupting enemy concerning the Christian faith. Therefore, although social freedom and justice may come at a great price, the culminating righteous action must involve structure. For Bonhoeffer, then, such structure included the four principles found in "Stations on the Road to Freedom."⁹ Each principle demonstrates a Christocentric response regarding righteous action. To Bonhoeffer securing social freedom and justice begin with recognizing an obligation. To this end, "Stations on the Road to Freedom" represents an appropriate model toward discussing *personal responsibility* and/or sacrifice.

"Stations on the Road to Freedom" offers a pragmatic calling of how the Church might respond to existential complexities regarding racism and poverty. Consequently, based on applying Bonhoeffer's theology, one might state that righteous action beyond concepts in modern and post-modern thought processes regarding religion involve notions of more than examining personal faith confessions and contemporary status models.¹⁰ That is to say, for Bonhoeffer, Christianity exists as more than a fad or something noble. Seemingly, this is the current state of the Christian tradition in the West, and represents a similar stronghold in European religious concepts involving reason and/or humanism.¹¹ Yet, Bonhoeffer ventured that Christianity is more. Christianity in the sense of social freedom and justice involves taking righteous action to address existential concerns and responding to contemporary

⁹See Bonhoeffer, note 7.

¹⁰Abraham Kuyper, *The Problem of Poverty*, ed. James W. Skillen (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1991), 16-17, discussing modern era of religion as characterized by "secularization, rationalization, bureaucratization, and materialism" concerning Western culture and Europe.

¹¹Ibid.

injustice(s). From this backdrop, how might the Church apply such notions toward a righteous action in relation to a contemporary response against racism and poverty?

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

As a matter of application, the principles of Stations reveal distinct insights concerning righteous action in relation to social freedom and justice.

Discipline -- For Bonhoeffer, discipline moves one beyond misguided concepts of personal desire toward righteous action.¹² Johann Christoph Hampe notes Bonhoeffer refers to discipline as “attitude, structure and servitude—almost a monastic life.”¹³ Thus, discipline is commitment to address any situation as God would address it versus how individual desires would address the situation. In righteous action, the Christian faith commits one to doing what is right—expedient—beyond notions of personal comfort and social affiliation (e.g., social affiliation such as conforming to perverted calls and mandates of nationalism and/or patriotism during Bonhoeffer’s Nazi Germany experiences).

Action -- Hampe notes that in action, Bonhoeffer relies upon God to judge the means of one’s commitment to securing freedom, which is, “relationship between action and thought.”¹⁴ Thus, righteous action is following through to address injustice (e.g., Bonhoeffer’s imprisonment and championing to rid Germany of the Nazi party).

Suffering -- Through suffering, the toil of the commitment bears fruition. Bonhoeffer notes that we place our entire trust in the power of God—“[s]tronger hands” than ours.¹⁵ To bolster this point, Lampe notes that for Bonhoeffer, suffering refers to the notion that freedom is not a possession, but “only for a moment can the sufferer touch it blissfully . . . then [he or she] must give it back to God from who it came.”¹⁶ This means that what we might consider as personal comfort in relation to social freedom and justice, may really present a hindrance thereby emasculating opportunities to further righteous action because of fear of persecution or tribulation. Yet, if we really desire to effect social freedom and justice, we must be prepared to suffer for such freedom and put away our desires for personal comfort.

Death -- Finally, we reach death (no pun intended). Bonhoeffer’s concept of death is that of an absolute giving over to faith concerning righteous action through open eyes in

¹²Bonhoeffer, note 7. For example, as God acted by committing Christ to humanity, humanity too must take on the example of Christ in relation to being the Christian faith (i.e., by state of mind and action).

¹³Ibid., 71.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., 27.

¹⁶Bonhoeffer, note 7, 27 and 72.

relation to social freedom and justice. That is, death is the culmination of a spiritual commitment to discipline and suffering. At death, at times literally, one exhausts all notions of self-centered-thought and/or considerations and gives oneself over to righteous action by addressing all matters through Christ. Thus, here, the model of Christ's death takes on greater focus and meaning. Lampe notes that at death, Bonhoeffer presents the thought that "[f]reedom is granted to the one who wanted to bring freedom."¹⁷ Life, then, exist solely for the purpose of acting or living focused on Christ as model. Consequently, it is not a stretch to consider that such act or devotion, even when resulting in death, brings on a newer and greater life.

ETHICS IN ACTION

Bonhoeffer's notion of ethics regarding Christian faith and responsibility incorporates the aforementioned four principles. Concerning an ethics analysis, the key is to move beyond the inadequacies of secularism and boilerplate religion where the two rely upon each other toward promoting endless discussion and inaction concerning resisting racism and poverty. Such an inadequate course follows a pattern of what Bonhoeffer notes as the failure of "insufficient tools of reasoning, principle, conscience, duty, absolute freedom and private duty"—the counter of discipleship and/or ethical participation toward securing social freedom and justice.¹⁸ Hence, to encourage social freedom, we must ethically embrace a change in thinking and response to social ills such as racism and poverty.

One example of Bonhoeffer's examination of action and ethics comes from his 1943 prison work, "A Wedding Sermon From a Prison Cell."¹⁹ To Bonhoeffer, ethical commitment beyond thought and discussion involved "[humans taking] full responsibility upon [their] shoulders for what [they do] . . . [and in equal confidence relying upon the hands of God]."²⁰ In other words, Bonhoeffer notes to the young bride and groom in "Wedding Sermon" that their *confession* [discussion] of love is a good commitment, but there must be more than verbalized commitment. There must be action. The bride and groom must undergo a dying to self and resist their natural tendencies to gravitate toward their individual pleasures. The expectation is that the conduct or action of the couple will produce a marriage that exists in relation to the method, will and manner that God conditions for marriage. The sentiment undoubtedly calls for a moral and ethical obligation in relationship to one another, centered on God's will. In this context, the "Wedding Sermon" offers a stark reminder that human action guided by the hand of God offers the greatest path toward ethical and responsive change.

The mystery arises in how to take on the method or guidance from God in an understandable sense. Bonhoeffer likens such as "the language of God, which is universally

¹⁷Ibid., 73.

¹⁸Bonhoeffer, note 2, 12.

¹⁹Bonhoeffer, note 6, 34-39.

²⁰Ibid., 34-35.

intelligible and the only means of mutual understanding among [humanity].”²¹ This notion enlists a sense that there is a basic ability to move toward the tasks of social freedom and justice only through submitting to a God-given commitment. Yet, for Bonhoeffer such commitment is only possible through the Church where “miracles happen.”²² Concerning racism and poverty, then, such miracles only occur where the Church breaks ethically from mere discussion concerning these social ills and turns toward an ethical and moral movement. That ethical and moral movement is righteous action modeled after the example of Christ. Such a model presents a marginalized Galilean who demonstrated civil courage to tackle and overcome evil at its origin.

CIVIL COURAGE

How does the Church stand up against racism and poverty? Bonhoeffer would suggest through discipleship, which again is more than discussion and contemplation. In the face of a social evil such as Nazi oppression, discipleship involves civil courage. In “After Ten Years” Bonhoeffer outlines the task of securing social freedom and justice.²³ Bonhoeffer notes that civil courage begins by one “standing ground.”²⁴ That is to say, there can only be civil courage toward accomplishing social freedom and justice where “. . . [the] ultimate criterion is not in . . . reason, . . . principles, . . . conscience, . . . freedom [per se] or . . . [even] virtue, but [where one] . . . is ready to sacrifice all these things when . . . called to obedien[ce] and responsible [(righteous)] action in faith and [in] exclusive allegiance to God.”²⁵ For Bonhoeffer, then, civil courage begins by “. . . seek[ing] to make [one’s] whole life a response to the question and call of God.”²⁶ Again, here are demonstrations of the notion of righteous action centered on God as a Christocentric concern. This leads to the most efficient ethical response. By example, Christ stood ground against the evil of the oppressions encountered during his earthly ministry. Thus, the beginning task of civil courage involves taking a stand. For Bonhoeffer taking a stand exists as “[forsaking self desires and] . . . [serving] . . . community.”²⁷ Yet, there is more to civil courage than taking a stand—one must understand the nature of the opposition against which he or she takes a stand. Stated otherwise, one must understand the world in which he or she seeks to bring about or encourage social freedom and justice.

²¹See Bonhoeffer, note 7, 41-42, providing discussion in work “Gift of Tongues.”

²²Ibid.

²³This 1942 pre-prison letter exists as a precursor or map to the four principles discussed in “Stations on the Road to Freedom.” Where “Stations,” exists as the model for righteous action, “After Ten Years” stands as the call for such action.

²⁴Bonhoeffer, note 1, 15-16; Bonhoeffer, note 2, 13-16.

²⁵Bonhoeffer, note 2, 13-16.

²⁶Bonhoeffer, note 2, 13-16.

²⁷Ibid., 16.

In some situations, for civil courage to exist, Bonhoeffer notes, “. . . free and responsible action might have to take precedence over duty and calling.” That is to say, civil courage is more than a sense of taking action or making a stand because of a *moral duty*. It exists as more than discussion. The task of civil courage “grow[s] out of the free responsibility of free [persons];” such freedom—social freedom— “. . . depends upon a God who demands bold action [(/righteous action)] as the free response of faith”²⁸ Concerning Christ, this involved a God who required standing up for the oppressed. Therefore, concerning racism and poverty the Church can only move beyond mere discussion in an ethically and responsible manner by understanding the systemic oppressions and cultural ills that racism and poverty produce. To do so, the Church must depend upon God in taking righteous action as the free response of faith to break the destructive counter-Christian results of racism and poverty.

INJUSTICE

Racism and poverty, as situations that the Church must understand, are unjust. The two exist as co-killers to that which God created. Such killing occurs not only to those suffering from racism and poverty, but also affects those that inflict or idly stand by in the face of racism and poverty—oppressors and the morally inept.²⁹ That is to say, racism and poverty involve those who perpetuate the two by act or inaction. In understanding racism and poverty, one must realize that the two often go hand-in-hand. What then are the injustices of racism and poverty?

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹For a discussion of the affects of racism and poverty when inflicted as a matter of act, consider Andrew Sung Park’s discussion of the Asian concept of *han*, which focuses on the spiritual, moral and psyche results of victims who encounters oppressive acts (Park does examines perpetrators, but his focus is heavily on the affects of misdeeds (sin) against victims). See Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1993), 72-74. Park’s discussion in the context of racism is particularly useful in conjunction with Bonhoeffer’s notion of attempting to understand the world in which the Church exists as standing against particular evils such as racism and poverty. Park characterizes *han* as a matter of individual and group concerns regarding experiences of positive or negative reaction. Ibid., 31-44. By definition, then, one understanding of *han* is that of “frustrated hope,” which affects the inner being of victims either negatively or positively. Ibid., 15-31. The frustrated hope is anything that curtails the existence of dreams regarding the individual or a group—existential hopelessness. The consequences affect parties on both sides of the coin (perpetrators and victims). Such frustrated hope is similar to the situation where Bonhoeffer advocates service to community where one would carry out righteous action to cast away “insufficient tools of reasoning, principle, conscience, duty, absolute freedom and private duty” and commit to bringing about social freedom and justice. This is quite opposite concerning inept discussions about racism and poverty that commonly plague secular and religious institutions.

RACISM AND POVERTY HAND-IN-HAND

Racism and poverty are often hand-in-hand because of the surrounding and utter contempt that one human demonstrates for the existence of another based on his or her biological skin difference.³⁰ More often than not, such contempt leads to a total disregard of even the most basic needs of persons ostracized because of race.³¹ Therefore, a withholding of or unequal and/or limited access to economic opportunities leads to poverty because of artificial economic constraints that stymie unrealized potential of those who are disadvantaged and marginalized because of race.

In the West, there are current discussions about economic equality, healthcare inadequacies, immigration reform, and educational disparity—all these topics address the poor. Notably, the majority of impoverished individuals are people of color. A correlation appears between formidable social and economic obstacles against people of color. This is so even regarding the acquisition of the most basic economic opportunities, much less aspiring to levels of luxury offered at higher socio-economic statuses. Still, what should be the goal for the Church in the discussion of the world of racism and poverty? What type of world does the Church face regarding the two? In answering such questions, perhaps the Church may move beyond simple discussion points concerning racism and poverty, understand the tasks before it in tackling the two and hopefully toward actionable redress.

³⁰ See, e.g., Garriguet, note 5, 88-90 and 104.

³¹ Ibid., 88-90 and 104.

Racism

Roger D. Hatch defines racism as having six components. One component is separation of the races geographically, socially, and institutionally.³² The second component is subordination of people of color concerning their access to (a) basic life needs, (b) high-quality public institutions, and (c) structures for political freedom and power.³³ The third component is the denial of an ordinary status—"ordinary" being defined as how the majority defines itself in society.³⁴ That is to say, Hatch appears to be suggesting that those who are dominant in society in terms of majority numbers define what it means to exist as personhood or to be a part of one race versus another. Fourth, racism means the fear and avoidance of each other; people of color avoid those of the majority race, and vice versa.³⁵ Fifth, racism means an expectation of violence and a legitimization of violence based on race relations.³⁶ Finally, racism is the rationalization of the five aforementioned components.³⁷ For sure, many other analyses characterize racism. Hatch's components, however, serve our current discussion well. This is so because from an analogous sense, Hatch's six components squarely fit with Bonhoeffer's experiences in Nazi Germany. Racism is distinctly similar to the prejudices that the Nazis demonstrated against the Jews because of their heritage, as well as the discriminations that the Confessing Church experienced because of its particular religious message.

Poverty

There are two basic perceptions regarding poverty. Either one's view regarding poverty largely stems from a positional perspective (e.g., from one's class in life) or from a cultural perspective (e.g., a learned view of how one considers a race of people). There are several notions concerning the causes of poverty.

³² See Roger D. Hatch and Warren R. Copeland, eds., *Issues of Justice: Social Sources and Religious Meanings* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1988), 154-56. "Institution," likely refers to education for Hatch, but education and employment opportunities offer a wider understanding.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 154-56.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

Poverty as a Personal Choice -- When dealing with poverty, some view it as a “personal problem” or an “individual matter.”³⁸ This view represents the notion that poverty derives from taste or choice. As a matter of taste, some view poverty as freedom of choice—the poor choose to be poor because they desire lower-paying jobs for shorter work hours or less responsibility.³⁹

Poverty as a Social Ill -- Some commentators view poverty as a social ill not in the wider societal sense, but as the result of dysfunctional families and inadequate work skills.⁴⁰ This view suggests that family shortcomings and marginal work skills perpetuate poverty.⁴¹

Poverty as the Perpetuation of the Status Quo -- Some commentators assert that poverty results from the privileged few who act as a collective social class to “protect and . . . improve their position [in the face of those who are impoverished].”⁴² The point is that affluence in jobs, political power, technological prowess and/or advanced knowledge of development adduces to those who control such resources.⁴³ Consequently, those who are poor or on the periphery of societal inclusion, which often involves racial minorities, remain left out of opportunities to gain upward status because of class protecting motives.

Poverty as a Human Problem -- Some assert that poverty is a spiritual problem involving ethical considerations regarding darkness and light, good and evil. From this perspective, “poverty robs people of [their] value.”⁴⁴ Certainly, not value as a spiritual or godly concern, but rather as a matter of what motivates society—material wealth.

VARIOUS METHODS OF ADDRESSING RACISM AND POVERTY BY CHURCH AND SOCIETY

It is helpful to examine how society and the Church in tandem have addressed the notion of social freedom and justice regarding standing against racism and poverty.

Historical Survey – Historically, society as a whole and the Church in particular have promoted inadequate measures in addressing racism and poverty. The two have either remained silent or urged patience and/or restraint in taking action against the inequalities

³⁸ Ibid., 225-30.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 230-31.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

that result from racism and poverty.⁴⁵ This is tantamount to what Bonhoeffer describes as “[social] freedom . . . [becoming an] undoing.”⁴⁶ Historically, the Church and secular organizations sought to “choos[e] the lesser of two evils” and has now fallen into a worse condition regarding racism and poverty.⁴⁷ This naturally followed from a “fail[ure] to see that the greater evil [that the church and secular concern sought] . . . to avoid,” mainly civil disruption and change in life-style choices, has proved to be what was initially thought of as the “lesser evil”—maintaining silence in the face of racial and economic inequality.⁴⁸

The Contemporary Situation -- As a contemporary concern, the Church and societal organizations present continued inaction regarding racism and poverty versus Bonhoeffer’s notions of civil courage concerning achieving social freedom and justice. In the West, there is now a materialistic preaching occurring that promotes individual prosperity for those who are Christian and contribute money to the Church. In this situation, the Church increasingly relegates the cause of the poor to secular institutions for assistance versus dirtying the prosperity of those blessed to sit in mega structures.⁴⁹ Concerning racism, there has never been a concentrated effort by the Church to address the problem. Notable, is the lack of tangible action regarding racism and poverty within the Church, seminary halls, and philanthropic programs.⁵⁰

Talk (Jargon), “Programs,” and Ineffectiveness -- Part of the title of this paper is “jargon.” Two appropriate definitions of the word are: (a) “the technical terminology or characteristic idiom of a special activity or group” and (b) “obscure and often pretentious language marked by circumlocutions and long words.”⁵¹ The Church and secular organizations often demonstrate ineffective remedial measures for addressing racism and

⁴⁵See, e.g., Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter From Birmingham City Jail,” available at http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/popular_requests/, Martin Luther King, Jr., Papers Project, Stanford University, accessed July 21, 2008. Note the open statement from white clergy cautioning the mode of wait regarding the injustice of racism, which solicited a letter in response from the late Martin Luther King, Jr.

⁴⁶Bonhoeffer, note 1, 15.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Notable is a personal experience where I spent several hours driving from church to church to donate clothes to the poor one Sunday morning before formal services in my community—a rural suburb of Houston, Texas. I was turned away at each stop only to find my final drop and ill-standing clothes drop bin. Personally, I am guilty of not going out to the poor and befriending them to provide the clothes personally.

⁵⁰See King, note 45, passim.

⁵¹See *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* available at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/jargon> accessed July 21, 2008.

poverty through particular programs and unclear goals that lead to the problems remaining.⁵² Simply stated, more jargon than action.

For instance, during the U.S. Civil Rights movement, several clergy admonished Martin Luther King, Jr. that his organized demonstrations in Alabama were not “timely and wise,” noting that the solution to racial discord exists in the courts and “open negotiations [(talk)].”⁵³ For sure, this occurred in an era where some would assert that thinking was different concerning social freedom and justice. Yet, is that truly the case? Disparity in social interaction, acceptance, and economic opportunity continue as a contemporary concern for people of color. There exists in the West a continued call for discussion and court intervention to eliminate racial discrimination. Yet, according to biblical standards, Christians should not resort to the court as the final solution to human inequality and matters that require righteous action. The Church’s obligation, then, in such discussions and intervention continue to be jargon toward promoting patience, perseverance, and timeliness.

Concerning poverty, there is a shameful persistence in the Church toward passing off commitments to other institutions to assist those affected. That is to say, many churches in the West now turn down even the donation of clothes for the poor and refer such donations to outside organizations and/or convenient “clothes dump bins”.⁵⁴ This is indirect and inept action at its best. Yet, what must occur to eradicate such inaction?

BONHOEFFER’S ROLE, THEOLOGY, MODEL, AND ACTS

Although Bonhoeffer did not address racism and poverty directly during his life or particularly by his prison experience, Bonhoeffer now speaks, as mentioned at the outset of this essay, through and for what he might have voiced concerning racism and poverty by applying the rationale of his works to such challenges. Consequently, from this position, Bonhoeffer’s life and works demonstrate how the Church might move toward righteous action beyond discussion to combat racism and poverty.⁵⁵

Bonhoeffer’s notion of social freedom and justice in relation to civil courage involves taking righteous action in reliance upon faith in God.⁵⁶ To Bonhoeffer this was free and

⁵²See King, note 45, *passim*.

⁵³*Ibid*.

⁵⁴See King, note 44, *passim*.

⁵⁵Scholars note that Bonhoeffer during his time in North America (1930-31), enjoyed his interaction with the Harlem experiences of Afro-American church folk—a time antecedent to the Civil Rights struggle. See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Who is Christ for Us?*, ed. Craig Nesson, trans. Renate Wind (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2002), 7-9.

⁵⁶Bonhoeffer, note 1, 15-16.

individual responsibility.⁵⁷ The Church in its response to racism and poverty must undertake righteous action that not only offers discussion regarding the existential suffering of those facing racism and poverty, but also must usher in an awareness of such existential states by promoting change in thought, deed, and emotional sentiment concerning society's response at large. To be sure, such a defining requirement comes with great tension.

The Tension of Plot (Just War) -- The discussion noted earlier that Bonhoeffer demonstrated the courage to take on a just war toward eliminating what he saw as an enemy of German society, culture, national heritage and the Christian faith. Bonhoeffer's righteous action created tension and/or criticism from those who questioned whether Bonhoeffer's participation in the assassination attempt against Hitler was Christ-like. Yet, for Bonhoeffer, as well as it should be for anyone who seeks to confront a grave evil that impersonates social freedom and justice, his actions were soundly "bold . . . as the free response of faith, [particularly acknowledged by a God who would] . . . forgive and console [one] who becomes a sinner in the process [of confronting a social evil.]"⁵⁸ To Bonhoeffer, such tension was amounted to a just war. As an ethical concern, tension in a time of confronting a grave injustice represents what Bonhoeffer scholars attribute as insight into Bonhoeffer's participation in the Hitler assassination attempt, namely, ". . . twin concerns for Christian ethics in a time of peace and reconstruction and the ethics of tyrannicide and *coup d' état*."⁵⁹

This notion appears to suggest that certain righteous action warrants seemingly even extreme measures against moral evil.⁶⁰ From such righteous action, the goal is always to build and secure legitimate social freedom and justice—beyond that of "shut . . . eyes to . . . injustice . . . at the cost of self-deception," which perpetuates inaction.⁶¹ From this perspective, the Church must learn to embrace the same tension that Bonhoeffer faced. The Church must do so by steering away from minor discussion and charge toward a path that reaps recognizable righteous action through responsible freedom that changes the minds of individual sentiments and institutions that allow and/or promote racism and poverty. Such action is not revolutionary or radical. Rather, such action follows the righteous model of Christ. Certainly, this is what Bonhoeffer attempted to do by his model of civil courage against Nazi oppression; to him, destruction of such tyranny served as a just *coup d' état*. Today, racism and poverty are tyrants who have used the slumber of discussion by and between the Church and state for far too long to perpetuate their unwanted presence in the lives of those affected by their cruel consequences.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Bonhoeffer, note 1, 15-16.

⁵⁹See note 49 and accompanying text.

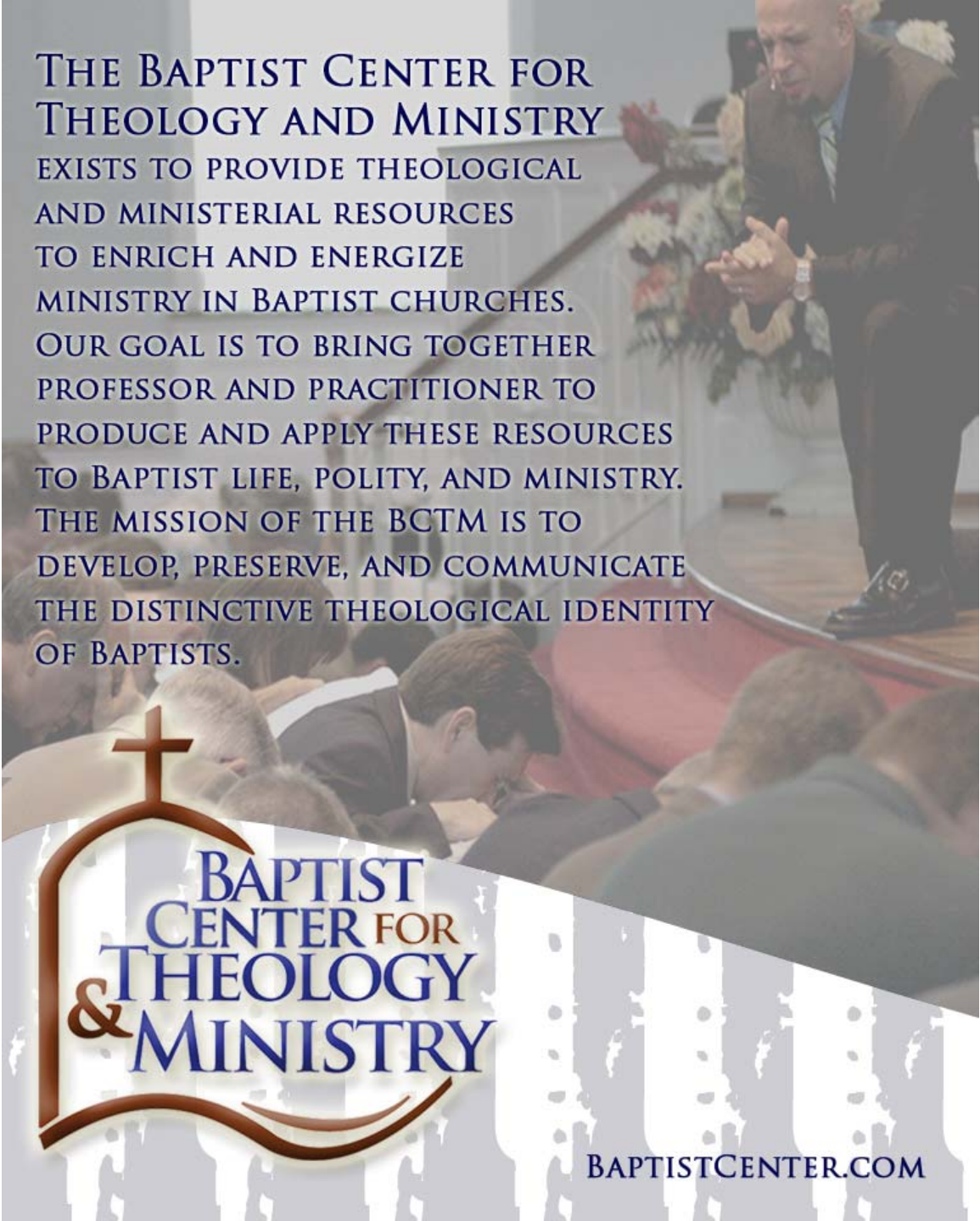
⁶⁰See King, note 45, 10-11, noting the extremeness of Christ regarding love in relation to civil disobedience.

⁶¹Bonhoeffer, note 1, 15.

Proper perspective – Act versus Talk and/or Ineptness -- Lest this essay be seen as a socialist or communist propaganda amongst those in the West and/or a call for revolution amongst those in the East, I plainly assert that there are many nonviolent measures by which Bonhoeffer's notion of a *coup d' état* against racism and poverty may occur. Bonhoeffer was not a brute bent on using force to demonstrate civil courage. His was a faith coupled with confession and righteous action toward leaning on the central power of Christ to usher in change. From a Christian perspective, then, civil disobedience to affect a wresting away of power from racism and poverty is warranted righteous action. Such righteous action in today's time must involve civil courage that presents a non-violent and/or legitimate protest to awaken the minds and hearts of those that by discussion and/or inaction perpetuate the evils of racism and poverty.

Bonhoeffer seems a pre-cursor to the late Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Likely, Bonhoeffer would have approved of the means that King established to affect a change during the U.S. Civil Rights movement, as well as addressing poverty worldwide from a human rights concern.⁶² In this sense, the righteous action that the Church and her precious content of men and women who belong to Christ may achieve regarding the injustices of racism and poverty is to not only speak, but also perform with all gravity legitimate protests. Such non-violent and appropriate/righteous action is the most efficient manner possible to begin a quest of moving the Church against racism and poverty. This is civil courage. Bonhoeffer demonstrated such civil courage with his life, works and sacrifice. Yet, he did so in obedience and in model to the life and gospel of Jesus Christ.

⁶²Bonhoeffer, note 55.



THE BAPTIST CENTER FOR
THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY
EXISTS TO PROVIDE THEOLOGICAL
AND MINISTERIAL RESOURCES
TO ENRICH AND ENERGIZE
MINISTRY IN BAPTIST CHURCHES.
OUR GOAL IS TO BRING TOGETHER
PROFESSOR AND PRACTITIONER TO
PRODUCE AND APPLY THESE RESOURCES
TO BAPTIST LIFE, POLITY, AND MINISTRY.
THE MISSION OF THE BCTM IS TO
DEVELOP, PRESERVE, AND COMMUNICATE
THE DISTINCTIVE THEOLOGICAL IDENTITY
OF BAPTISTS.



BAPTISTCENTER.COM

“WILL WE BE FREE CHURCHES OR NOT?” A WAKE-UP CALL TO THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

MATTHEW W. WARD¹

WHEN WILL THE BOMB EXPLODE?

Those who have taken the time to read and consider Malcolm Yarnell’s recent book, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, realize that he has pulled the curtain back on a theological and ecclesiological time bomb sitting in the Southern Baptist Convention’s living room. This bomb has largely been ignored by many Southern Baptists because most of us have not understood the contentions or the consequences; after all, how important can theological method be? How significant an impact can seemingly minor variations in theological method have on a local church? These are the questions that Yarnell insists the Southern Baptist Convention ask itself because he believes the stakes are in fact quite high. I, for one, agree, and that is the reason for this article. Anyone who reads *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* will immediately identify his call for a friendly but frank theological and methodological conversation between the various church traditions. Obviously such dialogue is incredibly helpful, but I do not think that is Yarnell’s primary goal for this first installment in what promises to be a substantial, on-going contribution to local Southern Baptist churches. Rather, he specifically extends this call to Southern Baptists first, and it is absolutely essential that Southern Baptists answer his call.

We are in the midst of an identity crisis. Because Southern Baptists do not seem to understand our Free Church heritage or how that should affect the way we “do” theology, we have allowed ourselves to adopt a range of conflicting and alien theological methods. Yarnell believes that we do so to our detriment, and he calls Southern Baptists not only to claim a distinctly Free Church identity ecclesologically but also to explore its ramifications theologically. In our defense, we really have not known exactly which questions to ask because we are not exactly sure what a Free Church theological method is, let alone what it is not. But no longer, for *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* proposes that very identity. In response, Southern Baptists must ask themselves two questions: Is Yarnell’s proposed theological method for the free churches right? And more importantly, does it matter enough to adopt?

¹Matthew is Minister of Worship at Retta Baptist Church in Burleson, TX, and a student of Baptist theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, TX.

FREE CHURCH IDENTITY

Actually, a more fundamental question exists: Should Southern Baptist churches consider themselves free churches in the first place? I believe the answer is yes, but with more and more Southern Baptists freely and uncritically aligning themselves with all things “evangelical,” this question has become rather obscured. “Evangelicalism,” the modern American (and now world-wide) coalition-building strategy, has incessantly sought to tear down the barriers that supposedly divided the “evangelical” Christian traditions by reducing orthodox Christianity to two key doctrines, namely salvation by faith and biblical inerrancy. Recently, in a positive sign for the future, some evangelical Christians have realized the empty promise of such reductionism and have begun to call the evangelical churches back to the ecclesiological structures that have historically identified and distinguished them.² It is into this confused environment that Yarnell sounds a clarion call for theological integrity. In fact, he takes the discussion of this concern to the next level—not simply that the churches would acknowledge their distinctions, but also evaluate them based on their biblical and theological foundations. Yarnell believes that orthodoxy and orthopraxy applies to the church’s entire existence; consequently there is a right way—and a wrong way—to be and do church.

To that end, it matters a great deal whether or not Southern Baptist churches consider themselves free churches, for the free churches represent a distinct ecclesiological tradition—the theological tradition that birthed the Southern Baptist Convention. If we care enough about our name and heritage to defend it, then we should care enough to understand it.

Yarnell defines exactly what he means when he speaks of the free churches and their theological method in the first chapter of *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*. Because there is a certain amount of disagreement here, a brief recap may be helpful. Most importantly, for understanding the Free Church tradition, “traditional ecclesiology, divine sovereignty, missions and evangelism, religious liberty, and inerrancy”³ are necessary but *insufficient* categories. Instead, following Harold Bender, Yarnell offers discipleship (*Gelassenheit* and *Nachfolge*) as the true and sufficient theological foundation of the believers’ churches.⁴ Consequently, he summarizes their theological method as “*disciplined* response to divine

²See D. G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), and Yarnell “Are Southern Baptists Evangelicals? A Second Decadal Reassessment” *Ecclesiology* 2.2 (2006): 195-212.

³Malcolm B. Yarnell, III, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2007), 11.

⁴See Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1944), 20; . Related, Yarnell also uses an image from Durnbaugh, who finds the term “believers’ church” to carry less theological and social baggage than “free church,” and prefers the former, although the referents are identical. Donald F. Durnbaugh, *The Believers’ Church* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1968).

revelation.”⁵ The importance of this simple summary cannot be overstated. Many Baptist theologians have identified theological truth as something that must be received, but few have taken this concept to its *necessary* conclusion. Christian theology *must be rooted* in a personal relationship with the Lord and Savior of the church, Jesus Christ. Why else would an academic work highlight the personal testimony of the salvation of the author? This method sets its purpose as encouraging and enabling obedience to Christ as revealed in the Word of God, the Bible. Equally important to the Free Church tradition, its context is not purely individual, but also congregational, for “discipline” is a function of the church.⁶

By means of the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, Yarnell explains the connection between Southern Baptists and the Free Church tradition, namely through the ideas of biblical inerrancy and sufficiency and Scripture’s resultant authority.⁷ This connection is found in the relationship between the written Word and the living Word. Baptists are not disciples of the Bible, but Jesus Christ, who gave the Bible as “a theological authority that speaks with clarity.”⁸ Such holistic discipleship to the Word manifests itself more clearly in the Free Church tradition than any other, for they believe that the three apostolic uses of Scripture are “witnessing to the lost, warning the saved, and condemning the disobedient,” and that we should continue to focus on those uses today. Their consequent insistence on connecting justification with sanctification results in a more biblical soteriology, for example, than that of the Lutherans or the Reformed.⁹

Southern Baptists’ traditional regard for biblical discipleship alone would be compelling reason for them to want to be identified with the free churches, but Yarnell also explains that Free Church theology maintains a proper perspective on the Bible that Southern Baptists would do well to consider. We are a people prone to the call of “no creed but the Bible,”¹⁰ but this call may be naïve regarding its full implications. Yarnell recounts Garrett’s own examination of the Reformation doctrine of *sola scriptura*, which quickly devolved into nothing more than *nuda scriptura* (the practical equivalent of “no creed but the Bible”). For the Reformers, this meant that they had no context by which to understand tradition, reason, or experience, making them too vulnerable to the elevation of each, which

⁵Ibid., 1. Emphasis added.

⁶Ibid., 12.

⁷Ibid., 29. The word “complementary” is the obvious key to his argument.

⁸Ibid., 24.

⁹Ibid., 89, 14; cf. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision*, 17.

¹⁰The 1845 Annual contains the statement, “We have constructed for our basis no new creed; acting in this matter upon a Baptist aversion to all creeds but the Bible.” Bill J. Leonard, “Southern Baptist Confessions: Dogmatic Ambiguity,” in *Southern Baptists & American Evangelicals: The Conversation Continues*, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 171.

happened to varying extents in the different branches of the Reformation.¹¹ Against the Magisterial Reformers, the Free Church Anabaptists held to *suprema scriptura*, which protected them from the Reformation's pitfalls by giving them the framework in which they could handle extra-biblical sources for theology.

In summary, Yarnell argues that Southern Baptists should consider themselves free churchmen. He finds in the free churches the ultimate expression of Southern Baptist ideals and the safeguards necessary to prevent them from drifting into the false theological conclusions he describes throughout the book. But what is the genius of the free churches that would make Southern Baptists desire to call themselves free churchmen? First and foremost, Yarnell believes it is their theological method, and that is why this issue cannot be ignored.

THE NECESSITY OF A UNIQUE THEOLOGICAL METHOD

The title of his book, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, may not clearly identify that Yarnell pursues such a lofty purpose. Indeed, the generic title and the author's own admitted identity as a Southern Baptist free churchman will unfortunately raise some immediate concerns that this book is simply an agenda-driven Southern Baptist response to other agenda-driven works such as Paul Tillich's *A History of Christian Thought* and Roger Olson's *The Story of Christian Theology* (Yarnell himself points out the oddity of such a Southern Baptist theological enquiry at the outset of the book). But nothing could be further from the truth. Yarnell believes that Southern Baptists need a clear theological method to guide and protect their theological endeavors, and that the Free Church tradition provides that method. *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* is not about grinding some agenda-notched axe, but rather opening a dialogue. Indeed, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* calls all Christian traditions into this dialogue, challenging them to confront their own presuppositions and analyze them in the light of the New Testament with a humility that is willing to admit error and seek biblical correctives. But the first step is taken at home. Yarnell hopes the various schools of Southern Baptist thought will make the same sober self-evaluation, identify their differences, and then engage one another in the friendly but frank conversation that will help shape his ultimate literary goal, a Free Church answer to John Henry Newman's powerful *An Essay on the Development of Doctrine*.¹² The process will admittedly be painful, for Yarnell wants Southern Baptists to be theologically accountable to one another; incessant decorum may keep people at the discussion table longer, but it rarely fosters any kind of resolution.

The process begins with the theologians, especially those in the seminaries who shape the mindset of the next generation of pastors and church leaders—at least, that seems to be Yarnell's point based on the heavy tone and lofty vocabulary of the book. I have elsewhere criticized Yarnell for making this book inaccessible to the average Southern Baptist, but his approach is understandable. Truly, Yarnell's love is for the people of the

¹¹Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 28; cf. J. B. Jeter, *Campbellism Examined* (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman, 1855), 213.

¹²Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 116.

church, and his desire is for healthy New Testament churches in the world today. In like manner, Robert Friedmann calls the Free Church tradition “existential Christianity,” by which he means it recognizes no distinction between faith and life; it is not something to be studied in the academy but lived in the church.¹³ Yarnell obviously appreciates this,¹⁴ and the ultimate success of his project will be dependent on his ability to take it to the churches, believing as he does that “constructing a biblical theology is the responsibility of every believer” and “theological judgment is best carried out by the church.” However, he wants to open this discussion first with those who are already thinking about the issue and have the ability themselves to carry the discussion into more and more localized venues.

I, for one, call upon the various theological leaders in the Southern Baptist community to accept the invitation to this table and bring a humble willingness to correct and be corrected, for the future identity of the Southern Baptist Convention is at stake. The time has come for Southern Baptist thinkers to air out their theological methods, and as fellow-workers in the gospel of Jesus Christ hold one another accountable to whatever method we conclude most appropriate to the service of Christ’s church, most faithful to the deposit of faith given in the Bible, and most glorifying to the Living God. This article has two goals: first, to justify the concern about current Southern Baptist theological methods by examining the variety of methods used by certain significant Baptist theologians; second, to summarize the main points of Yarnell’s proposal in hopes of jump-starting such a conversation between Southern Baptists. Why do I care so much about this issue? I am a music minister, and I believe our music ministries are being tossed about right now because we really do not know how our identity as free churches should affect our use of music in worship, discipleship, and evangelism. But that crisis cannot truly be solved until Southern Baptists agree what it means to think as a free churchman—until we know how disciples of Jesus Christ should approach all of these other, difficult issues. As will be demonstrated, there are a lot of different theological frameworks being taught in our seminaries making it extremely difficult for us to come together on important ecclesiological decisions. This has to change, and it needs to change soon.

WHAT IS THE URGENCY ABOUT THEOLOGICAL METHOD?

Why is Yarnell so insistent on identifying a Free Church theological method? In chapter two of his book, Yarnell helpfully illustrates the situation by offering some extremely diverse Christian methods—Roman Catholic, liberal, and Reformed Christianity—and comparing them with the Free Church method. Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) represents the conservative Roman Catholic position. Ratzinger laudably emphasizes faith in Christ and a love for the church, but his method includes a willingness to base his exegesis of doctrine more on postapostolic developments than the Bible itself, resulting in an appeal to the “divinely assisted Magisterium” above the individual human consciousness.¹⁵ Maurice

¹³Robert Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism: An Interpretation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973), 31; cf. 45, 50.

¹⁴Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 77.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 38.

Wiles, an Oxford theologian, represents the liberal Christian tradition, whose primary interest is “reinterpreting the Christian faith for modern culture.”¹⁶ Wiles’s focus leads him to adopt a foundation that does not regard fidelity to the past, but rather creative potential for the future, so his method (completely antithetical to the Free Church method) operates as a kind of survival of the fittest approach.¹⁷ Finally, Herman Bavinck represents the Reformed tradition.¹⁸ Bavinck begins with election and the divine decrees, and this particular emphasis on speculations about God leads to an elevation of general revelation and common grace and subsequently to a dual consideration of philosophy and Scripture, the foundation of Reformed theological method.¹⁹

The theological diversity represented by those three Christian traditions can largely be traced to the theological foundations and methods chosen. By painting such a clear picture, Yarnell makes a compelling case for the importance of a theological method. Now the question must be asked: What does this have to do with Southern Baptists?

THE FOUNDATION OF DOCTRINE: FOUR BAPTIST ALTERNATIVES

While it can be said that Southern Baptists do not cover quite as severe a spectrum as Yarnell highlights, it would be terribly foolish to believe that Southern Baptists are at all uniform in their theological methods. Taking a cue from Yarnell, perhaps the best way to illustrate this is to survey the theological methods employed by the textbooks used in Southern Baptist theology courses, some of the more popular of which include *A Theology for the Church* edited by Daniel A. Akin, *Systematic Theology* by Wayne Grudem, *Christian Theology* by Millard Erickson, and *Systematic Theology* by James Leo Garrett.²⁰ Certainly this approach has severe flaws, for not only can it not be proved that these methods represent a given percentage of Southern Baptists, but also it cannot be proved that the students who use these books even follow their method! Of course, the implication is such, and this approach will at least illuminate the variety of methods currently considered and taught by Southern Baptists.

¹⁶Ibid., 42.

¹⁷Cf. Ibid., 46, 154.

¹⁸The choice of Bavinck may be a bit extreme; Yarnell calls him “schizophrenic” (ibid., 51) and more than a few reformed Christians would distance themselves from some of his conclusions.

¹⁹Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 59, cf. 50 and 65.

²⁰Gregory Alan Thornbury, “Prolegomena,” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007); Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); James Leo Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (North Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL, 2000).

Gregory Thornbury

The most recent book on the list, *A Theology for the Church*, published in 2007, is problematic because it is a compilation of essays by different authors, so the method proposed by Gregory Alan Thornbury in chapter one does not necessarily apply to the entire book, but it is the method explicitly taught. To Thornbury, theology is “the attempt to explain God’s self disclosure in a consistently faithful manner.”²¹ Surrounding this awfully vague center, Thornbury’s “Prolegomena” is a perfect example of the problem identified by Yarnell, for Thornbury does not propose a specific theological method at all; rather, his chapter on prolegomena offers a philosophical and historical introduction to epistemology. Consequently his method must be deduced from the structure of his chapter, a relatively simple matter. Thornbury begins with a discussion of truth—“that which corresponds with reality”²²—and includes perspectives from individuals such as Stanley Fish, Richard Dawkins, the Milesian and Eleatic philosophers, and even Fyodor Dostoyevsky. What he does not begin with is a biblical exposition; indeed, only five of the seventy pages in the chapter are devoted to the role of the biblical witness in theology. Thornbury offers some helpful statements, including the Bible’s claim that all reality, not just theological truth, cannot be known apart from an acknowledgement of its divine origin. But he also posits that the reception of truth is radically impaired by the fall of man, so he quickly moves to his primary presupposition, that “philosophical systems and ground rules have always been deeply imbedded in the work [of theology] being done.”²³ From there he devotes the rest of his prolegomena to the various systems to thought that have shaped Christian theology.

By the very structure of his chapter, Thornbury communicates to his reader that theology cannot be done apart from philosophy; therefore, theological method begins with the right philosophy (or worldview). In response to Tertullian’s famous question, “What does Jerusalem have to do with Athens?” Thornbury recognizes the need for “appropriate caution” in the use of philosophy, but counters that “there is no need to go to the opposite extreme and dismiss all of the teachings of the Greek philosophers.”²⁴ He holds up Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas as positive examples of the way Christianity can integrate important non-Christian philosophies (Platonism and Aristotelianism respectively), and then explains how William of Occam turned a reinterpretation of Aristotle into a major split in Christian thought, concluding, “And how do we know the will of God? By reading Aristotle? The church fathers? Thomas Aquinas? To the contrary, God reveals his will to those whom he wills, and he does so most preeminently in his Word.”²⁵

This conclusion sounds positive, but in context actually creates a number of

²¹Thornbury, “Prolegomena,” 54.

²²Ibid., 5.

²³Ibid., 21; cf. *ibid.*, 17-18.

²⁴Ibid., 23.

²⁵Ibid., 30.

problems. “Most preeminently” takes on a different meaning against the following discussion of the philosophies of Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Karl Barth, as well as Baptists Carl Henry, Millard Erickson, and Stanley Grenz. Thornbury lays his methodology bare when he says of Baptists John L. Dagg and James P. Boyce that they “largely avoided philosophical speculation in their work and failed to include any substantive approach to prolegomena.” The rest of Thornbury’s prolegomena communicates the clear message that the student of theology must first carefully consider his or her own worldview, because worldview forms theology. Thornbury does make the critical concession, “Mental agility without a personal relationship with the triune God will doubtless terminate in grave error, or even worse, apostasy,” but waits to do so until the second to the last sentence of the entire chapter, and that not very convincingly.²⁶

Wayne Grudem

Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology* is a compendium of valuable theological statements and offers some very helpful guidance to beginning students of theology, but ultimately runs into the same conundrum as Thornbury. In his prolegomena, Grudem defines systematic theology as the answer to the question, “What does the whole Bible teach us today?” with respect to a certain topic.²⁷ He then establishes his presupposition, that the Bible is the only true and accurate revelation of God, making a clear distinction between biblical theology, which focuses on specific sections of Scripture, and systematic theology, which turns the results of biblical theology into structured formulae.²⁸ He even addresses the accusation made against Thornbury, that philosophy is a foundation in theological method, by saying, “It is Scripture alone, not ‘conservative evangelical tradition’ or any other human authority, that must function as the normative authority for the definition of what we should believe.”²⁹ This sounds like a promising beginning to a seemingly unbiased, biblical work. But herein lies the problem with Grudem’s foundation. As Garrett explains,

Systematic theology can give such attention to biblical materials that other sources for systematic theology are bypassed or deemphasized. Accordingly systematic theology is held to be the compilation of biblical doctrine devoid of other influences, even though the culture and/or the ecclesial tradition may have actually shaped the formulation. Illustrative of this type of systematic theology were Charles Hodge’s (1797-1878) *Systematic Theology*, Lewis Sperry Chafer’s (1871-1952) *Systematic Theology*, and Wayne Arden Grudem’s (1948-) *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*.³⁰

²⁶Ibid., 51, 70.

²⁷Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 21.

²⁸Ibid., 26; cf. 22-23.

²⁹Ibid., 25.

³⁰Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 26.

According to Garrett, Grudem falls into the *nuda scriptura* trap described earlier—there is no such thing as theology by *nuda scriptura*. Grudem somewhat hints at this when he uses the analogy of the jigsaw puzzle to describe systematic theology.³¹ He says that systematic theology is akin to putting together all of the edge pieces and a few of the middle sections, realizing that there are many significant gaps in the puzzle. In other words, systematic theology defines the border of all theology, which by extension includes biblical theology. So for Grudem, the theological system one uses is part of the foundation for one’s theological method. This is not to say that theology should not establish boundaries, for it most certainly should. But this is to question whether one should begin with the borders, or work from the center, namely Jesus Christ.

The identity of Grudem’s system is easy to establish, for he reveals it himself (safely in the Preface). He says that he holds a “traditional Reformed position with regard to questions of God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility, the extent of the atonement, and the question of predestination,” acknowledging that his understanding of theology was formed at Reformed Presbyterian Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia.³² According to Yarnell, these are the very doctrines that forced the Reformers into an extra-biblical theological system through which they interpreted significant sections of Scripture;³³ as a result, Grudem’s entire system is affected by this basic presupposition. Although somewhat obscured by Grudem’s thorough presentation of various perspectives on the different theological issues, the Reformed tendencies of his system are undeniably present in his theology, and not only in the obvious issues of predestination and limited atonement. For example, Grudem also holds to the concept of the church as invisible, an idea that Yarnell accuses results in a “weak ecclesiology,”³⁴ incompatible with a free church. Indeed, Grudem’s ecclesiology is weak in the sense that he deemphasizes the unique role of the local church and the function of the members of that church; even his meaningful section on church discipline lacks the covenantal significance found in the practiced ecclesiology of the early free churches.³⁵

Millard Erickson

Erickson qualifies many statements in his *Christian Theology* making it difficult to argue that he overlooks elements of method or foundation, or that he fails to bring them to his reader’s attention. Rather, any concerns with the theological method Erickson teaches his students must arise from both a phenomenological evaluation as well as some of his conclusions. To his credit, and against the tone of the earlier works reviewed, it is critical to

³¹Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 29.

³²Ibid., 16; cf. *ibid.*, 21n1.

³³cf. Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 92.

³⁴Compare Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 855-63 with Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, xiv.

³⁵Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 976.

note that Erickson's title has real meaning to him. Before he defines theology, Erickson tells his reader that "accepting Jesus as Lord means making him the authority by which we conduct our lives,"³⁶ and that Christianity is far more than holding specific beliefs. The free churches should be most pleased with this prefatory remark, and yet be somewhat concerned that Erickson does not explicitly state that being a Christian is necessary for writing Christian theology.

In this second edition of his well-known text, Erickson devotes seven chapters to a discussion of theological method, including a chapter on postmodernism written for this latest edition. He begins by describing Christian theology as first biblical, then systematic, then related to culture, then contemporary, and finally practical. Unlike Thornbury and Grudem, Erickson does not try to draw a clear line between systematic (what he means when refers to Christian theology) and biblical theology. Systematic Christian theology "is not simply based on biblical theology; it *is* biblical theology. Our goal is systematic biblical theology." Within this framework Erickson offers two very laudable presuppositions: that God exists and that he has revealed himself in the canonical Scriptures.³⁷

However, thrown into the middle of this discussion is a rather innocuous paragraph that states, "Systematic theology also utilizes philosophical theology,"³⁸ such that philosophy may be used to evaluate theology. Whereas Thornbury embraces the use of philosophy wholeheartedly, Erickson clarifies his approach to the study of philosophy, saying, "Because they may to some extent influence our thinking, even unconsciously, it is helpful to be able to recognize and evaluate their valid and invalid emphases."³⁹ It is on this basis that he launches into a rather lengthy discussion of philosophical alternatives. Erickson argues that "revelation rather than philosophy will supply the content of our theology," but also that philosophy "helps us" iron out our concepts, presuppositions, formulations, and applications.⁴⁰ The free churches should be comfortable with a certain amount of philosophical discourse, for no Christian thinks in a vacuum. Yet those same churches can also see through his discursive smokescreen and state clearly that Erickson's theological method and development is in fact *not* based on revelation but on philosophy.

Erickson's chapter entitled "The Method of Theology" is an excellent case in point, for in this significant chapter he cites only four biblical passages, and none of those for the purpose of establishing theological method. In this chapter, Erickson (like Thornbury) communicates the message that the interpretation of theology is highly philosophical in nature. This message is clarified three chapters later, but Erickson's "process" illustrates the situation. He creates the sequence, exegesis—biblical theology—systematic theology, and

³⁶Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 20-21.

³⁷Ibid., 20, 23-24, 26, 35.

³⁸Ibid., 29; cf. 36.

³⁹Ibid., 42-43.

⁴⁰Ibid., 56, 59-60.

the emphasis must be placed on his penultimate step, the development of a central interpretive motif.⁴¹ Our concern should not be with the possibility of an interpretive motif,⁴² but rather the process of its identification. Erickson tells his reader that he has developed his theology around the broad concept of “the magnificence of God.”⁴³ The free churches would never deny the magnificence of God, but they would query as to why his magnificence should be chosen as the theological foundation of the understanding of his Word. Unfortunately, Erickson never offers a convincing apologetic for his choice of motifs, so this most important of decisions is left to the assumptions of the reader.⁴⁴

In many ways, this reflects the concern expressed earlier about Grudem. Is the purpose of the Bible merely to reveal God’s glory (as does the creation), or is it to reveal the gospel—God’s plan to reconcile sinful man to himself through his Son Jesus Christ? Again, the apostles saw the purpose of Scripture to be “witnessing to the lost, warning the saved, and condemning the disobedient.”⁴⁵ This is done best through the central interpretive motif of covenant discipleship to Jesus Christ. The free churches also have one additional concern with Erickson’s choice of motif, namely its philosophical overtones. One has to go to the Bible to learn about discipleship to Jesus Christ; the magnificence of God as presented by Erickson is not so restricted. In fact, as Yarnell describes, the concepts of divine sovereignty and philosophical predestination can and have sometimes been used to subvert the biblical order.

This concern reaches a critical pinnacle in Erickson’s chapter, “Theology and Its Language.” In this chapter, which explains how theology is communicated, Erickson not only does not cite the Bible as a source for his ideas, but fails even to refer to it in any of his explanations. Instead, he offers a very complicated philosophical approach to language through high-level categories such as eschatological verification, metaphysical synthesis, and speech-act theory. While his presentation is interesting, Erickson unfortunately communicates to his students that only well-trained philosophers can correctly or effectively read or express theology. Consequently, despite all of the ideas Erickson offers for consideration in the name of Christian theology, his work raises significant questions as to appropriate theological method.

⁴¹Ibid., 70-82.

⁴²Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 5, 78.

⁴³Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 82.

⁴⁴From Erickson’s interaction with Stanley Grenz, it appears that Erickson’s choice of divine magnificence as an integrative motif may have been an afterthought. Ibid., 82 and 82n.

⁴⁵Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 89.

James Leo Garrett, Jr.

Next to these three Baptist alternatives stands the theology of James Leo Garrett, who begins with some strikingly different theological foundations in his *Systematic Theology*. First, “good systematic theology ought to be based on the fruitage of biblical theology and the history of Christian doctrine.” Second, Christian theology “is a sympathetic, not an alien, interpretation of the Christian gospel. Christian experience is thus a *sine qua non* of Christian theology.” Third, “it is the *church*, and not merely individual Christians, that is involved in the theological task.” Fourth, theology does not deny scientific observation, but rather “claims another and transcendent source of knowledge, namely, God’s self-disclosure, or divine revelation.” These presuppositions paint a very different image of theology, especially with respect to its sources of the Bible, tradition, experience, and culture, and its understanding of the church, the local and visible congregation of believers. For Garrett, there is a wedge driven between philosophy, man’s quest for truth, and theology, man’s understanding of divine revelation, which is finally and ultimately made in Jesus Christ. It is only after clearly establishing his foundations that Garrett begins to explain the relationship between Christian theology and philosophy.⁴⁶

Summary Evaluation

Further discussion of Garrett’s system and method is unwarranted because many of his conclusions will be adopted by Yarnell, Garrett’s student and admirer. For example, countering the three alternative systems of Catholicism, Liberalism, and the Reformed tradition, Yarnell calls upon Southern Baptist J. L. Dagg, who rejected building metaphors for biological metaphors with respect to the church, returning the emphasis to “a free church holism arising from a living faith in Jesus Christ.”⁴⁷ Importantly, this simple counter-perspective corrects not only those non-Baptist Christian alternatives described in *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, but also the Baptist alternatives described above. Thornbury’s foundation ultimately crumbles because it starts with philosophical methodology, Grudem’s because it starts with a theological system, and Erickson’s because it starts with an arbitrary philosophical center. None of these systems consider the role of a saving relationship with Jesus Christ in the formation of sound Christian theology, and none of these systems acknowledge the role of the Holy Spirit or the local, visible church in its development. These three simple concepts are the very foundation of the free church tradition! How can they not even be considered in the formation—the method—of Free Church theology? The Free Church commitment must be to a theology based on a living and personal faith in Jesus Christ and guided by the ongoing illumination of the Holy Spirit. Such a theology is protected from such deficiencies for the reasons Yarnell describes in chapter three of his book and it reflects the very basis of our identity.

⁴⁶Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, ix, 3, 4, emphasis added, 5, 81ff.

⁴⁷Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 70.

WHAT IS THE FREE CHURCH THEOLOGICAL METHOD?

We really cannot allow any ambiguity on this issue, so let me summarize the answer before launching into Yarnell's detailed argument. For the free churches, the foundation of theology is Jesus Christ; its source is the Bible as illuminated by the Holy Spirit; its participants are born again believers working together in the context of the local church; its purpose is to help believers live in covenantal discipleship to Jesus Christ. These simple points guide Free Church theological method, and this is why Yarnell defines it as “disciplined response to divine revelation” where “discipline” has a very specific meaning: “the church's commitment to follow Christ.”⁴⁸

For his primary Free Church theologian, Yarnell significantly chooses Pilgram Marpeck. Most importantly, Marpeck was a layman, engaging in churchwide theological method, and living out the Free Church ideal. Furthermore, recent manuscript discoveries have brought Marpeck into the forefront of German Anabaptist studies. But in my opinion, the most intriguing fact about Marpeck is that he lived in both worlds—as a Free Church theologian and as a public servant (city engineer). Marpeck worked with his persecutors, he was genuinely sympathetic to their beliefs, and he remained ever-compassionate about the needs of church members. He also poses a challenge to the contemporary theologian because “Marpeck was not so much concerned with precise theological definitions as he was with sincere and entire obedience to God, whose will was revealed in Scripture.” Yarnell wants to see a return to this motivation for theology, and he rises to this challenge by discussing Marpeck's thought in inductive categories generated from Marpeck's own thought.⁴⁹

Yarnell summarizes, “The free churches begin their theology of discipleship with a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, seek to understand His ordinances through His Word illuminated by the Spirit, and institute those ordinances within the church, according to the biblical order.” Jesus Christ, and discipleship to Him, is the essence of Christianity. By the Spirit of God, the Bible is the Word of God. So by emphasizing both Word and Spirit, Christians can properly understand the Bible without going beyond it (spiritualism) or forcing it into a man-made system (evangelicalism). This is possibly the most important claim Yarnell makes—critical, even, to the Free Church perspective—that both inspiration *and* illumination are works of the Spirit, and thus Christian theology is driven by the *coinherence* of the Word and Spirit. No more exclusive and inhospitable claim can be made, nor one more consistent with free churches' convictions. Unless one is a born-again Christian, he cannot properly understand the Bible (and by implication has no place at the theological discussion table). Furthermore, one cannot properly understand the letter of the Word apart from the Spirit of the Word; consequently the Bible can neither be purely spiritualized nor systematized. According to Marpeck, this fine balance is inherent to proper Free Church theological method.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Ibid., 1, 12.

⁴⁹Ibid., 76.

⁵⁰Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 79, 87, 82.

Not surprisingly, Marpeck denies any conclusion drawn from a system as opposed to the Bible. He decries the Reformers for invoking a vague “divine sovereignty” with respect to infant baptism, or practical considerations with respect to religious liberty, as opposed to the biblical witness. In a very significant section, Yarnell relates a trial/debate between the Strasbourg Reformer Martin Bucer, the prosecutor, and Marpeck, the defendant. Reviewing this trial, Yarnell concludes, “As the argument concluded, Bucer resorted to worldly concerns and historical precedent, while Marpeck continued to look to Christ.”⁵¹ Now the urgency of theological method should be apparent, for this assessment should be considered a slap in the face to all Reformed churchmen, especially those who align themselves with the Southern Baptist Convention. By virtue of the disparate starting points of the two theological methods, a legitimate doubt as to the place of Calvinism within the Free Church tradition is raised. In addition, the elevation of systematic theology over biblical theology in the Convention’s seminaries and decision-making is questioned. These issues cannot be ignored by our Convention. If Yarnell’s assessment is accurate, and if those foundations carry over to the present day, we are faced with a fundamental disagreement not only in theological method, but also theological purpose and theological conclusion. The only way this assessment can be pursued is if the theological leaders of our Convention choose to engage in a friendly but frank conversation, honestly, openly, and humbly.

Yarnell points out three additional consequences of Marpeck’s foundation of biblical discipleship to Christ. First, Marpeck did not divide justification and sanctification as the Reformers did. Instead, he expected all believers to continue their growth in Christlikeness. Second, Marpeck found the biblical referent for baptism to be “witness,” not “symbol.”⁵² Consequently, it must be reserved for believers, for it is a witness to their regeneration, and it highlights the role of the church in which it takes place. Third, the Lord’s Supper is also a witness, meaning it is more than mere memorial, though less than sacramental. In summary, Yarnell places the foundation of Free Church doctrine on Christocentrism and a Word-Spirit understanding of divine revelation interpreted within the church community over and against human systems. As simple as this may sound, it truly isolates the free churches from most other traditions. In practice, free churches may stray from this foundation, and other traditions may appeal to it, which is why this conversation should be engaged and will be extremely helpful over time. In theory, at least, this chapter of Yarnell’s book can serve as the starting point for much fruitful discussion within (and without) the Southern Baptist Convention.

UNDERSTANDING DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT

Yarnell does not leave his proposal with theological foundation, but pursues it through its historical dimension, namely, the proper form of doctrinal development. Yarnell may lose a number of readers in this section of his argument because it requires a strong awareness of Christian history, but it should not for that reason be ignored. After all, what good does it do you to take exceptional care in pouring your house’s slab and then pay little

⁵¹Ibid., 95.

⁵²Ibid., 99.

attention to its actual construction? Both aspects are equally important to the final product. Yarnell begins this section by describing alternative theories of doctrinal development. Vincent of Lerins speaks for the “classical thesis” that “there is no real development in doctrine,” but that orthodox doctrine has been believed everywhere, always, by all. The key to this thesis is that it was assimilated into the Roman Catholic church, which considered itself the guardian of doctrine. Heresy became identified with novelty or antisacerdotalism. Importantly, because church and state had been intertwined in this period of history, heresy was seen as a criminal danger to society, and heretics were subject to civil punishment, even the death penalty. The Reformation set the Roman church on the defensive for a time, and some Romans recognized some doctrinal development within their history. But rather than admit error, the Roman church “concretized” the classical thesis, deciding that all doctrinal development was protected by an infallible Church (Vatican I). The Enlightenment and German liberalism opened new criticisms, even threatening the validity of the Bible, and Harnack was specifically able to demonstrate the full extent of extrabiblical developments within the Roman church. Then John Henry Newman, “the most important theological thinker of modern times,” an Anglican-turned-Roman Catholic, proposed a new theory of development. Following Anglican obsessions with fourth and fifth century patristics, Newman proposed that the Bible cannot be understood on its own, but only through the church (especially the patristic church). He maintained the necessity of Scripture, but added tradition as a “necessary supplement;” the Holy Spirit guides men towards truth, but does so through the Church. Thus, Newman integrated Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and the church into the development of doctrine, a seemingly brilliant compromise between three competing positions.⁵³

It should go without saying that the free churches found Newman’s compromise unacceptable. On the one hand, Yarnell recapitulates Oscar Cullman’s argument for the priority of Scripture. Cullmann contends that Christ spoke through the apostles via the Holy Spirit, and the church recognized that their tradition alone could be authoritative and must be preserved in its written form. On the other hand, Yarnell also exegetes the Paraclete sayings of John 14-16 driving towards a most important conclusion about the development of doctrine. Against D. A. Carson and other Reformed thinkers, Yarnell believes that the paraclete sayings promise a continuing ministry of the Spirit upon all believers for all time to guide them into all truth (John 16:13). Essentially offering a basic doctrine of “illumination,” Yarnell explains the critically practical consequence of a church that believes and lives by this doctrine: such a church does not need to rely on rationalism (or by implication, tradition) to understand *or* develop its doctrine. Furthermore, Yarnell puts this in the context of Marpeck’s congregational hermeneutics, itself the context of John 16—illumination is not an individual but a corporate event.⁵⁴

There is a second consequence to this theory: all church doctrine must follow the “simple patterns of Scripture itself,”⁵⁵ avoiding the human tendency to augment and

⁵³Ibid., 107, 111, 113, 116, 117.

⁵⁴Ibid., 130-33, 134-36, 139.

⁵⁵Ibid., 141.

complicate ideas. To do this, a church tradition must identify the hermeneutical center of the Bible and establish its circumference. Unfortunately, this is apparently an “impossible” task, for every word in the Bible is important,⁵⁶ but Marpeck captured the essence of the task in his focus on radical discipleship, leading to believers’ baptism, a christocentric kerygma, and a Trinitarian identification. At this point Yarnell makes a key assertion, for it has begun to sound as if Marpeck is simply creating his own rival theological system. But unlike J. N. Darby, Frances Turretin or George Lindbeck (or Thornbury, Grudem, or Erickson, for that matter!), Marpeck began with Scripture, not Aristotelian categorization or Protestant scholasticism.⁵⁷ Marpeck’s “system” is biblical, not systematic; by beginning with the Great Commission, he has created a holistic understanding of the Bible that is not simplistic, but elegant. From all of this, on the authority of the book of Acts, Yarnell concludes that proper dogma actually unites, not divides, and a healthy awareness of the human tendency to drift into error must drive the church to continue to reevaluate itself by the only truly trustworthy theological source, the written Word of God.⁵⁸

This important chapter should provoke a great deal of discussion in Southern Baptist circles. If it does not, then Southern Baptists are not paying attention. Yarnell’s application of John 13 and Matthew 28 to a history of doctrine should provide a very important basis for his desired dialogue, assuming his peers are not too put off to join him at the table—implying that the *Institutes* is extrabiblical will be a bit of a stumbling block for some! At a first glance, it may seem that Marpeck tends to systematize in much the same way as his opponents, only from a different perspective, and that Yarnell overlooks that out of his bias towards the Free Church tradition.⁵⁹ On the contrary, Marpeck’s thought is that elegant. He cannot be charged with forcing the Bible through a system because the Bible itself is the system. Reformed and dispensational theologians (and all others) will fight this conclusion, and should offer some heavy retaliation, but as long as it is offered in honest, biblical tones, Yarnell may and should welcome the dialogue.

THE FREE CHURCH PROPOSAL

In the last two chapters of his book, Yarnell explains the Free Church model for proper doctrinal development, one that recognizes both rational and spiritual discernment, in its ecclesiological and personal dimensions.⁶⁰ He first points out two important steps in the development of the Free Church identity: first, early English separatists appealed to the “further light” or illumination by the Spirit as the Word of God “became better known;” second, Andrew Fuller proposed an entire theology based on the cross of Christ, resulting in a strong sense of the mission of evangelism. But in a welcome twist, rather than interpreting

⁵⁶Ibid., 139.

⁵⁷Ibid., 141; cf. *ibid.*, 155.

⁵⁸Ibid., 148.

⁵⁹cf. *ibid.*, 143.

⁶⁰Ibid., 150.

the history of theology or the development of doctrine, Yarnell explains how the Free Church perspective should impact the historian of theology and the theologian of history.⁶¹

To do so, Yarnell invokes Herbert Butterfield, who proposed three levels of thinking and reporting: facts, causes, and providence. Butterfield asserted that a good historian must offer an analysis of the facts of history—though never a Whig interpretation!—but a better historian will acknowledge his personal commitment to certain metaphysical assumptions that color his interpretation of those facts, and the best historian will approach history out of his personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Butterfield’s perspective is greatly—even solely—enhanced by Free Church values that are explained in the next section of the book. But at this point, Yarnell makes clear that every historian functions both as a scientist and an artist. Butterfield did so exceptionally well because of his commitment to Jesus Christ.⁶²

FREE CHURCH HISTORIOGRAPHY

Yarnell believes that the values within the Free Church theological method, when appropriately understood, will drive a superior interpretation of history. First, the Lord of eternity is the Lord of history. In other words, human history only makes coherent sense when understood within the metanarrative of creation to corruption to redemption.⁶³ Second, the Lord is Lord of all human beings equally. This perspective helps to mitigate cultural bias, and more importantly restrain judgment. Third, the Lord acts through divine providence. Consequently, history must be *linear* (though patterned). Fourth, the Lord is Lord of the fallible. Here, Yarnell draws the conclusion that the historian should treat all dogmatic development with much suspicion. Fifth, the Lord is Lord of both covenants, recognizing a progression from the old to the new. Such a progression is welcome and valuable to a historian, but full caution must be employed when applying this section to anything other than history. Finally, the Lord is Lord of all the churches. This perspective takes root in the Free Church prioritization of the local, visible church; in other words, “the history of the church is best conceived as the history of local churches.”⁶⁴ A historian with this viewpoint in mind will take seriously the voices from all cultures in all times.

This is a very promising proposal for the writing of history. Any theist will immediately recognize the value and importance of acknowledging the hand of God at work in human history; in fact, denying or ignoring that hand leaves a bad taste in a reader’s mouth. Unfortunately, it is much easier said than done. This is why I earnestly hope that

⁶¹One complaint may be issued to Yarnell in this context (which is the reason this article has been written in the first place), that he may have left too much to the reader to conclude.

⁶²See Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 154, 162, 165.

⁶³Ibid., 166. “Metanarrative” is my word, not Yarnell’s.

⁶⁴Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 178; cf. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism*, 59.

Southern Baptist historians will choose to join this conversation and add their unique perspectives. Yarnell lifts up Butterfield and Robert A. Baker as positive representatives of proper school of historical evaluation, but who else can be added?⁶⁵ How can anyone learn the art of walking the line between a Christian interpretation of historical facts (which is not quite Butterfield's third level) and a misapplied appeal to divine providence? Yarnell's suggested themes, while reasonable and a helpful start, do not provide the answer to this question, and thus this issue must be addressed by Southern Baptists at large.⁶⁶

A FREE CHURCH HISTORY OF THEOLOGY

The free churches, following the New Testament, view history through the cross of Jesus Christ—which brings the reader to consider the life, death, resurrection, commission, and return of Christ—and the history of Christian theology must be viewed as a response to those events.⁶⁷ To illustrate a “New Testament pattern of history,” Yarnell traces the development of the doctrines of the Trinity, salvation, and covenant from this perspective. For example, with respect to the Trinity, the Free Church perspective leads to an interesting interpretation of the battle between the Arians and the Nicene Christians. Nicene theology “won” because of its biblical basis, especially with respect to the Great Commission. In this, the hand of God is seen through causality, for the appeals to human factors such as politics or philosophy ultimately cannot explain the matter. Yarnell sees the same factor at work in the understanding of salvation, seeing the anti-sacerdotalism of the Reformation (even the opinion of Erasmus) through a Great Commission-driven view of “living faith.” He further notes how the Anabaptists rediscovered the biblical concept of a church covenant, realizing that personal commitment operated within mutual accountability.⁶⁸ Importantly, Yarnell concludes with a lament that free churches have not always “been true to their principles,” commenting specifically about the Southern Baptist approval of human slavery.⁶⁹

This is an incredibly helpful exercise in the study of the formation of Christian doctrine because Yarnell shows his reader the primary Free Church themes at work in specific test cases. The doctrine of the Trinity comes about through the coinherence of Word and Spirit, driven by a doctrinal and practical focus on the Great Commission.

⁶⁵For example, Historian David Bebbington comes to similar conclusions about historiography in *Patterns in History: A Christian Perspective on Historical Thought* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1979) but avoids any meaningful reference to providence in *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

⁶⁶Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 187.

⁶⁷Ibid., 182; cf. 186.

⁶⁸cf. ibid., 190, 193; and Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁶⁹Ibid., 199; cf. Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: UNC, 2006).

Soteriology evolves around a commitment to discipleship and “living faith.” The church covenant, and its tension between freedom and accountability, takes all of these factors into account. In the process, Yarnell again intimates that only Christians can have a seat at this discussion table, for only Christians can properly operate at all three of Butterfield’s levels of a New Testament pattern of history.

This exercise also reveals the clear need for further dialogue in this area, and not entirely to Yarnell’s credit. Frankly, some of Yarnell’s explanations are unsatisfying, especially with respect to the egregious offenses committed in Free Church history (the primary example given is slavery, but countless lesser examples could be offered). To say that the nature of the Southern Baptist free churches was “compromised” but not lost during this period,⁷⁰ thought true, sounds very much like historical reinterpretation. How should a Free Church historian handle those periods of history where the proffered themes are clearly non-existent (such as the antebellum South)? How should Christians respond to histories written from a non-Free Church perspective (or even a non-Christian perspective—Philip Benedict’s *Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed* comes to mind)? What would a “school of historians” look like, considering that a history of churches is still written by individuals, not churches? Answers to these and other questions must be addressed in the hoped-for conversation, and I believe very strongly that Southern Baptists will benefit greatly from its engagement.

SUMMARY

By the end of Yarnell’s book it should be evident that the free churches should care not only about their theological foundation, but also their theological method. What is the purpose of theology? Is it to create a structure for making complex statements about God? Or is it to help Christians walk worthy of their calling, take up their crosses, and follow Jesus to the glory of God? By their method, the free churches do not separate theology from life, the academy from the church. We do not do theology in order to do evangelism, or in order to create ethical systems, as some of the methods discussed earlier seem to imply, for there is no separation between these things. If we think theology can be done independent from the call to take up one’s cross and follow Jesus, then I would question if we truly understand God’s purpose in self-revelation. The free churches should not have such ambiguity. And I believe very strongly that we should be very concerned that all of the theological methods taught in our colleges and seminaries may not take our theologies to this vital, singular purpose.

How Should We Respond?

How should Southern Baptists respond to Yarnell’s wake-up call? Do we ignore the bomb? Do we try to set it off in a “controlled” fashion, hoping to minimize the damage? Or do we work together to defuse it? While there will be a great deal of disagreement as to the particulars of his proposal, one conclusion is unavoidable: a Free Church theological method exists, and it is powerful—powerful through the Word and Spirit of God. Yarnell provides a taste of the grandeur of the Free Church tradition and the elegantly simple means

⁷⁰Ibid., 200.

by which it describes the foundation and formation of doctrine, keeping it true to the Bible and the pattern of Christianity set by Jesus Christ, and predicting and guarding against the abuses inherent in man's interpretation, abuses even within its own tradition. Yarnell's perspective is sound, and his accusations must be answered by all the traditions questioned in this book.

But the "success" of the book must be measured by response. Yarnell has two ultimate goals in mind with this book. One is to make a place for the Free Church tradition at the wider theological table. This he has done well, so it is not left to representatives of other traditions to open the dialogue. But the other is to clarify the Free Church position to his own Southern Baptist Convention. Members of the Convention (including those of a more Reformed, dispensational, or even possibly Landmarkist leaning) may discover that they fall outside of certain bounds described in this book. Yarnell clearly wants his peers to come to grips with their identity as free churchmen and together identify those foundations that determine what can and cannot fall under the large theological umbrella held by the Convention.⁷¹ This goal will be much harder to reach than he may realize. Both goals require theologians to come—of their own free will—to the table with a genuine desire to dialogue and learn. But will anyone come to the table? Certainly Southern Baptists, but will Anglicans or Catholics or Presbyterians come? Most importantly, at this time, will those who are entrusted with the task of teaching Southern Baptists come? Furthermore, can Yarnell guide the dialogue to a meaningful conclusion, and can he then help take the results to the churches? The first step can only be judged by the second. A modern restoration is called for on many fronts in *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*. Who will hear this call?

⁷¹cf. Ibid., 118.

JOE MCKEEVER
CARTOONS

DR. JOE MCKEEVER



VISIT JOEMCKEEVER.COM FOR MORE OF JOE'S CARTOONS

BOOK REVIEWS

Dockery, David. *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Proposal*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2008. pp. 256. \$9.99.

David Dockery's book *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal* is a much-needed treatise on the issues of Southern Baptist identity. For the past few decades, Southern Baptists have questioned their identity for various reasons. Dockery has written this excellent work as a reminder of why we need to cooperate as Southern Baptists. Dockery is a well-known Southern Baptist educator, having previously served as a seminary professor and currently as the president of Union University in Jackson, TN.

Dockery writes six chapters covering what he believes to be the primary issues challenging the Convention: cooperative missions, understanding the Gospel, worship, education, theology, and leadership. Dockery's methodology is as follows. With each chapter, Dockery gives a helpful historical overview that examines the various streams of influence into the contemporary SBC (Southern Baptist Convention) regarding the issue of the chapter. I believe Dockery is generally fair in his treatment of the various traditions that have influenced SBC life. He then gives an overview of the contemporary scene of SBC life in each of the six chapters. For example, in the chapter on worship, he examines the various influences of worship in the early SBC including the Sandy Creek and Charleston traditions. He then gives an excellent treatment of contemporary models of worship, from traditional to seeker-sensitive. At the end of each chapter Dockery proposes what he believes are the basic principles for renewal on which all Southern Baptist can agree.

Dockery begins the book by examining those things that brought Southern Baptists together from the beginning: belief in the inspiration of Scripture, a commitment to global missions, and a spirit of cooperation. Under girding all these issues was a confessional and orthodox faith that helped to guard against heresy. Dockery examines the core doctrines that have been a part of Southern Baptist life, especially relating to soteriological and Christological issues. Dockery cannot help but address the Calvinism/Arminianism debate that is currently rising in the SBC. Dockery's exposition of Southern Baptist doctrine shows that he certainly believes that God is the initiator in salvation, but He works wonderfully and mysteriously with the human will. For some Dockery's position may be too Calvinistic; for others, it may be too Arminian. Nevertheless, I believe Dockery presents an exposition that all Southern Baptists can support. He states, "As Southern Baptists we reject hyper-Calvinism, Pelagianism, consistent Arminianism...while concentrating on our shared work of missions and evangelism, proclaiming God's grace to a lost and needy world" (69).

In the second half of the book, Dockery turns to more practical matters. He gives a helpful survey of Southern Baptist worship styles in both the historical and contemporary settings. Whatever the worship style of a Southern Baptist church, Dockery rightly states that

all worship must be God glorifying. Worship that glorifies God is worship that moves away from the secular influences and individualistic emphases of the culture and concentrates on the mutual edification of the congregation. Dockery next proposes that renewal in education must happen as the educational institutions stay connected to the churches. Baptist universities and seminaries must promote academic freedom but within a confessional context. Being a seminary professor myself, I believe that Dockery correctly emphasizes that the focus of Southern Baptist seminaries must be on “doing theology” for the church. For too long the SBC has had a false dichotomy between theology and praxis. The theological work coming from the seminaries must be accessible to the churches and laypeople.

Dockery closes the book with two helpful chapters that focus upon the necessity of maintaining confessional standards and maintaining character and cooperation among Church and Convention leaders. If the SBC is to move forward in the future, it must do so under the firm confessional tradition of the past. This is especially true if Southern Baptists are to avoid the encroachment of any type of liberalism and eroding of biblical inerrancy that has happened before. There must also be a renewed sense of cooperation to the things that first brought the Southern Baptist Convention churches together.

Dockery writes to a broad audience that can include professors, pastors, and laypersons. While covering many theological issues that will be of interests to those in our seminaries, he writes on practical issues that are of interest to pastors. Yet, his writing is so that laypersons can understand even the more complicated theological issues he covers.

Is this book a step forward to bringing Southern Baptist consensus and renewal for a new generation of Baptists? I believe it is and that it is a must read for everyone involved in Southern Baptist life. Dockery provides a helpful reminder of the history that brought Southern Baptists together and why a re-examination of that history is so important in dealing with contemporary SBC issues. Despite the various traditions, Southern Baptists came together to promote the propagation of the gospel. They realized they could do some things better together than apart. This same idea needs to be heard again today.

Dr. Page Brooks
Assistant Professor of Theology and Islamic Studies
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright in Dialogue. Robert B. Stewart, ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006. xix+220pp. \$18.00

The book is more or less the script of the 2005 inaugural Greer-Heard Point-Counterpoint Forum at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. The annual forum allows for genuine public dialogue between evangelical and non-evangelical scholars related to a specific issue of religious and/or cultural significance. These proceedings of the initial forum illustrate the intentional “model for civil discourse on important topics and an environment in which to discuss differences—without abandoning one’s convictions—and to make a case for one perspective over against another” (xiii). This first forum on the

resurrection of Jesus brought together two prominent proponents from opposing perspectives—N. T. Wright, who develops the case for the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus in his comprehensive *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Fortress Press, Christian Origins and the Question of God series, 2003), and John Dominic Crossan, a chief contemporary proponent for a metaphorical resurrection. The organizers are to be commended for bringing together such scholars of distinction for a respectful and candid dialogue of the topic. The forum and the book provide a refreshing face-to-face encounter between theological opponents.

The editor opens the book by providing the reader a concise summary of the 200-year framework of historical scholarship related to the topic. Chapter 1, “The Resurrection: Historical Event or Theological Explanation? A Dialogue,” presents the transcript of the focal point of the forum, the actual dialogue between Crossan and Wright that occurred during the spring of 2005. Both participants made opening statements—Wright’s statement is a brief summary of his comprehensive *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Crossan’s statement is a talk-through of a paper entitled “Mode and Meaning in Bodily Resurrection,” which is captured in the appendix of the book under the title “Bodily-Resurrection Faith.” He has developed these ideas more extensively in *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991) and in *Jesus, A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994). These opening statements set the tone for a delightful interchange that highlights differences in presuppositions, methodologies, and conclusions.

The remaining 120 pages replicate six papers that were also presented at the Greer-Heard Forum, related either to a resurrection theme and/or the works of Crossan/Wright. They represent, as might be expected, the confessional perspective of the host institution and not the divergent perspectives of the headliners. Six of the papers were presented on the day following the Crossan-Wright dialogue with opportunity for Crossan and Wright to respond briefly and ask questions of the presenters. These responses, not included in the *The Resurrection of Jesus*, would have strengthened the book. A seventh paper, prepared for but not presented at the forum, is also included.

In Chapter 2, “In Appreciation of the Dominical and Thomistic Traditions: The Contribution of J. D. Crossan and N. T. Wright to Jesus Research,” Craig A. Evans highlights the unique contributions of Crossan and Wright both to gospel studies and more directly to the resurrection of Jesus. Robert B. Stewart, in “The Hermeneutics of Resurrection: How N. T. Wright and John Dominic Crossan Read the Resurrection Narratives,” addresses biblical texts and the relationship between history and hermeneutics. Gary R. Habermas charts the scholarly trends in the reading of resurrection narratives in his essay, “Mapping the Recent Trend toward the Bodily Resurrection Appearances of Jesus in Light of Other Prominent Critical Positions.” R. Douglas Geivett, in “The Epistemology of Resurrection Belief,” speaks to epistemological concerns about what he regards as similar methodologies between Crossan and Wright related to historical evidence for the resurrection.

In “The Gospel of Peter: Does It Contain a Precanonical Resurrection Narrative?” Charles L. Quarles argues for a second-century dating of the Gospel of Peter that is dependent on the Gospel of Matthew. Alan F. Segal concludes in “The Resurrection: Faith

or History?” that the resurrection of Jesus cannot be proven historically, so it is a faith issue, whether one accepts the resurrection as historical with Wright or as metaphorical with Crossan. William Lane Craig, in “Wright and Crossan on the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus” in some ways fine-tunes Wright’s argument and presses Crossan to engage the argument historically. Finally, in “The Future of the Resurrection,” Ted Peters challenges systematic theologians to interact consciously between history and eschatology.

The Resurrection of Jesus offers evangelical readers an engaging entrance into the world of resurrection study. The distinctions between Crossan and Wright are apparent and certainly the scales are tilted in Wright’s direction, but the lines are drawn with care and with great respect for Crossan and others who share differing perspectives.

Dr. Dan Wilson, Dean
School of Christian Ministries
California Baptist University

Caputo, John D. *What Would Jesus Deconstruct? The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007. 162 pp.

John D. Caputo’s *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?* is a popular-level primer on postmodern reconstructions of Jesus and the Christian mission written by one of America’s foremost postmodern thinkers and “a/theologians.” This postmodern vision of the Christian message plays the game of Derridean deconstruction while reconstructing an image of Jesus that looks strangely familiar—the socially-concerned Jesus of early twentieth-century liberalism. Although the book is written for evangelicals by a non-evangelical (Caputo’s non-realistic interpretation of religious language puts him in the category of atheism for most), *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?* is a fitting introduction to postmodern theology from an actual Derridean postmodern.

Caputo begins with a critique of the WWJD phenomenon of recent years, noting that Charles Sheldon’s version of the question—“What would Jesus do?”—was radically different than the question presented by the Religious Right—“a call for social justice” (22). The dramatic narrative of *In His Steps* speaks of an ordinary church in an ordinary town that is turned upside down by a marginalized tramp whose tale of misfortune challenges the townspeople to consider that most important question. Caputo interprets the story as a tale of deconstruction wherein an “event” crashes the “same” and causes destruction and reconfiguration (26). Caputo labels the “event” (or “the other” or “the coming of the other”) as “figure of truth” that brings with it significant change (27). His version of truth is not a “complementary theory of truth” (30). Caputo claims that deconstruction has exposed this type of correspondence of its failures and hypocrisy. This “event of truth” can be a gradual one that slowly brings transformation, and he likens this to the New Testament concept of *metanoia*—“undergoing a fundamental change of heart” (27).

For Caputo, “[d]econstruction is organized around the idea that things contain a kind of uncontainable truth, that they contain what they cannot contain” (29). Deconstruction is

not something that someone does to things, rather, “[t]hings are auto-deconstructed by the tendencies of their own inner truth” (Ibid.). The “other” gives the truth of the “same” by reconfiguration, reassembly, and reconstruction. The Jesus of Caputo’s hypothesis is a Deconstructor—a truth event that radically usurps the normalcy of religious dogma. Caputo writes, “[I]n the view that I am advancing here, deconstruction is treated as the hermeneutics of the *kingdom* of God, as an interpretative style that helps get at the prophetic spirit of Jesus—who was a surprising and sometime strident outsider, who took a stand with the ‘other’...” (26). The kingdom of God is the “other” that radically upsets the “same” of the church—the “Plan B” the apostles settled on when the manifestation of God’s kingdom was not made evident. The church, Caputo contends, is deconstructible and must be deconstructed in order that the kingdom of God—“if there is such a thing”—can emerge (35).

Caputo uses Sheldon’s title, *In His Steps*, as an analogy for this postmodern religious seeker who lives in an eternal search for something significant—the deconstruction that will help the seeker get to the “other” that is in the Kingdom of God. Caputo explains that when Derrida says, “There is nothing outside of the text,” he means that “there is nothing outside of the context of a text and therefore nothing that happens that does not follow in someone else’s steps...” (38). In chapter four, Caputo discusses the discourse that he calls the “theo-poetics of the kingdom.” Here he paints Jesus as a revolutionary figure who seems hell bent on reversing the irreversible. Jesus is a unique divine figure who finds power in powerlessness. Borrowing from the Apostle Paul, Caputo calls this paradox “the weakness of God”—the “icon of God we find in Jesus on the cross” (82). The Jesus of Caputo’s description is a vehicle for all the impossibilities of deconstruction—justice, forgiveness, hospitality, and most importantly, “love without measure” (86). In chapter five, Caputo addresses the particulars of the question, “What Would Jesus Deconstruct?” Here, he discusses issues serious to the New Testament that he sees going largely ignored by mainstream Christians of the religious Right—issues such as poverty, war, and gender equality. Seeing Jesus as a voice for the marginalized, Caputo writes, “Based on the gospel of love by which [Jesus] was driven, he would today have found love in homosexual love and a mission among the advocates of gay and lesbian rights” (109). Here Caputo reveals that he is comfortable with what his interpretation of Jesus, and this does not usurp his view of the Scriptures. For Caputo, New Testament is the archive (likened to a historic prototype), not the arche (likened to a timeless archetype); he deems any view of “scriptural literalism” or “papal infallibility” as idolatry (110).

Caputo intends the final chapter to put into concrete terms for the church the question “What would Jesus deconstruct?” Rather, he suggests that these examples are what the “church might be like after deconstruction” (135)—not institutions but rather groups of individuals practicing the hermeneutics of the kingdom of God. Caputo presents in a more popular format several of his key discussions, including the hermeneutics of deconstruction, the prayers and tears of the impossible, and the weakness of God. He challenges what he views as distortions of postmodernity made by its critics—claims that postmodernity is nihilistic, anti-realistic, and relativistic. This reader, a novice to postmodern philosophy, is certainly thankful that Caputo put the cookies on a slightly lower shelf.

The author wants those in the church to read Derrida, Foucault, and even Augustine. The way he imitates Derrida’s love for words and their multiple meanings makes reading his

work a fun and challenging task. The hermeneutics of the kingdom of God—the question of “What would Jesus do?” interpreted for the twenty-first century—was a helpful way to discuss how deconstruction works. The book, however, is unbalanced in its presentation. Caputo makes the promises and claims of deconstruction for the first three chapters but seems to abandon much of his argumentation in the chapters four and five, which draw more from personal politics and observation than they do deconstruction. Caputo has opened the question “What would Jesus do?” is open to a number of possibilities. He contends that the New Testament is an “archive” that is a “depository of memories” (33). He calls it “poetics of the kingdom”—a collection not intended to be systematic theology but rather a collection of memories or discourse that calls for “transformation into existence” (Ibid.). The New Testament is a sufficient source of inspiration for the tasks, but an essential part of hermeneutics is developing an argument independent of the text (91, 94).

Caputo’s approach to Jesus is much like that of classical liberalism in that he seems to make a radical distinction between the Jesus of the Gospels and the Christ of ecclesial imagination. Who Jesus is in relation to God is inconsequential and his suffering on the cross is tragic at best, because according to Caputo’s radical vision, Jesus was primarily concerned with shaking up the establishment. He is fascinated with what Jesus says about God in his weakness, but he distains traditional orthodoxy. Yet in all his discussion of Jesus the Deconstructor, one most important reversal of Jesus—really *the* impossible, the “event,” the wholly unexpected—goes unmentioned in Caputo’s account: the deconstruction of death itself. Resurrection, it seems, stands in a similar aporetic fashion with love, forgiveness, the gift, and justice. Resurrection can only occur with death; the only condition under which resurrection occurs is when resurrection is impossible.

Rhyne Putman
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

Clark, David K. *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2003. xiv + 464 pp.

To Know and Love God is an introductory discussion of evangelical theological method. As his title suggests, Clark believes that the knowledge of God’s person leads one to a committed life of discipleship and obedience to him. The uniqueness of evangelical theology, Clark argues, is in its “spirituality—a theological experience, an experiential theology, all at once” (xxix). Clark begins by defining the task of theology as a science that “seeks to articulate the content of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the context of a particular culture” (33). He evaluates a number of historical and contemporary models for theology. Following Augustine, Clark makes the distinction between *scientia* (“knowledge”) and *sapientia* (“wisdom”) and concludes that evangelical theology is “*scientia* directed towards the purposes of *sapientia*” (37), i.e., theology is a propositional knowledge of God that shapes the Christian life and community. Among the host of contemporary theologies, he sees a basic tension between the contextual pole—the concern for the expression of the gospel in a given context—and the kerygmatic pole—the emphasis on theology, faith, and Scripture. Clark warns of the dangers of taking both poles to their extremes: the danger of contextualization

to the point of transforming the gospel message (e.g., in the works of Schleiermacher, James Cone, and Paul Tillich) and the danger of over-objectification of the gospel message that fails to translate the gospel message to the culture.

The author discusses the possibility of unity in the theological disciplines. The emergence of theological studies as scholarly disciplines in the Enlightenment ultimately led to the fragmentation of these fields. Even doctrinal studies received four sub-disciplines: biblical theology, historical theology, systematic theology, and philosophical theology (169). When Brevard Childs spoke of the “growing polarity between Biblical studies and dogmatic theology,” he noted the radical fragmentation of these theological disciplines among contemporary practitioners that has led to ignorance of each other’s work (174). While Clark contends that the distinction of the disciplines is an appropriate and necessary (177-8), he notes that the “unity of... God and his will and his ways” makes possible the integration of these distinct disciplines—different microperspectives—under one “macroperspective” (182). Clark hopes to have a “genuine encounter between horizons” without dissolving differences—even noting that there is a need for a softer concept of incommensurability needed in interdisciplinary engagement (186-7).

Clark offers a valuable explanation as to how *scientia* and *sapientia* are integrated in the spiritual life of a believer. Theology for Clark is a spiritual discipline that engages both the mind and the heart. Christian theology describes the “metaphysical reality that... will sustain the moral life” (232), i.e., orthodoxy shapes orthopraxy. Clark notes that there are five phases by which people encounter reality, process truth, and find personal application from cognitive information. The first is engagement, which happens when one comes into contact with reality through the mediation of language (233)—language that can be expressed in a wide variety of media. Secondly and thirdly, a person discovers and tests reality, both of which involve the creative and critical evaluation of that reality. Fourth, a person integrates that reality by “personally applying truth to the issues of one’s own heart”—forging “theological conviction, inward character, and the events of everyday living” (237). Fifth, one communicates that experience with reality. For the Christian’s encounter with God, this communication results in ministry. Communication also brings the difficult but necessary challenge of finding appropriate means to communicate theological concepts with those not acquainted with its language (241-2).

Clark’s project concludes with an assessment of epistemology for evangelical theology and a discussion of how language expresses truth statements about God. The author desires to affirm a critical realist position that demands that our language of God have some referentiality to his reality (383). He writes, “As evangelical theologians, we should retain the conviction that absolute truth exists, yet we should piously and humbly acknowledge the objective-yet-relative character of our own human knowledge” (362). Religious language relates to that reality in expressing to us the person and nature of God. Clark critiques Thomas’s analogical approach to religious language (389-96) and contemporary models like Sally McFague’s panmetaphoricism—the idea that all language about God is metaphorical and open to reconstruction (405-10). Following William Alston, he contends that religious language univocally applies abstract concepts to Creator and creature alike in such away that our language can be informative speech about God (393-7).

Theology as transformation integrates the spiritual power of the triune God into the lives of individual people, specific communities, and whole cultures. Theology as information speaks truly about the reality of the triune God. Mere information without spiritual transformation is dead... Not only are there informational assertions that tell us truly about God the Father, the work of Christ, and the presence of the Spirit proper and good, but so are the formational utterances that spur us on to worship, spiritual growth, inner healing, godly community, and sacrificial service (417).

In many ways, Clark's *To Know and Love God* is an even-handed response to Stan Grenz's theological program. Joining in with Grenz's critics, he warns that Grenz's program—centered around what Grenz calls “convertive piety”—makes theology a fundamentally experiential movement with Schleiermacherian tendencies. Clark is equally frustrated with an entirely propositional systematic theology in the vein of Protestant Scholasticism and late nineteenth century theologies. He demands that evangelicalism—and its theological enterprise—be both theological in its commitment to knowledge (*scientia*) and experiential in its commitment to Christian wisdom (*sapientia*). Like Grenz, Clark welcomes a more pietistic approach to theology, but only on the condition that it is guided by the authority the Bible—referring to the external world. Unlike many other evangelical systematics, Clark humbly acknowledges our epistemic limitations and the provisional nature of our theological knowledge but without fleeing to postmodern perspectivalism. He does not resort to Grenz's plea for a nonfoundational or postfoundational Christian theology married to coherentism but rather a soft foundationalism (and like Grenz he is informed here by Reformed epistemology) that puts God at the center of reality. Whereas Grenz follows Kuhn in seeing science as a purely constructive task with a degree of committed incommensurability—and Clark acknowledges the constructive nature of both theology and science—Clark sees both theology and the sciences in a soft incommensurability and a dialogical relationship as they both attempt to explain the reality of God's world around them.

Clark's definition of the goal of theology to express “content of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the context of a particular culture” has the ring of Tillichian correlation to it. The particularity of each context ensures that the Christian theologian always has a job because the task of translation and transmission is never complete. Contextualization is always led by the voice of the biblical text, not the other way around (122). The question prompted by this definition, however, is its limited scope. Does the gospel of Jesus Christ—albeit the cornerstone of evangelical distinctiveness—cover the entire spectrum of the Christian theological enterprise. Would it not be more appropriate to make the case that the theologian brings the content of God's self-revelation in history and (to borrow from Vanhoozer) divine speech-acts to the context of a cultural setting.

Perhaps the greatest strength and the most unique contribution of Clark's prolegomena is his deep-seated conviction that *scientia* informs *sapientia*—theology as a second-order discipline that guides the first-order priority of spiritual life before God and the community of faith. Clark not only makes a brilliant case for this in these interlocking discussions of theology's purpose, theology as an academic enterprise, and theology as the shaper of the spiritual life, he also models this thesis in the way he writes as both philosopher and pastor. He tackles difficult concepts with remarkable clarity and is never afraid to interject personal illustrations or devotional application.

Clark's prose is clear and concise. He warns that a Christian theology that does not engage the culture or lead us to faith in Christ has lost its flavor. Good contextual theology can have a place in the academy and can shape a successful evangelistic enterprise. Clark rightly contends that theology done well "leads us to a passionate love for God, genuine worship of the Trinity, true community with fellow Christians, and loving service in personal evangelism and social compassion—all to the glory of God" (424). His prolegomena—directing us towards these concerns—is a very welcomed approach.

Rhyne Putman
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

THE JOURNAL FOR BAPTIST THEOLOGY & MINISTRY

BACK ISSUES OF THE JOURNAL AVAILABLE ONLINE AT
BAPTISTCENTER.COM

VOL. 1, NO. 1 (SPRING 2003)
ISSUES IN BAPTIST LIFE

- “Rescue the Perishing: A Defense of Giving Invitations” by Ken Keathley
- “Baptists and Evangelism: Passion for God, Passion for Truth, Passion for Souls” by Chad Owen Brand
- “Roots of Dilemma: SBC Entities and the Cooperative Program” by Charles S. Kelley
- “Ordinance or Sacrament: Is the Baptist View of the Ordinances Truly Biblical?” by Charles L. Quarles
- “Evangelical Theology in the Twenty-First Century” by Steve W. Lemke
- “Biblical, Theological, Pastoral Reflections on Divorce, Remarriage, and the Seminary Professor: A Modest Proposal” by R. Stanton Norman
- “Is Mormonism Christian? A Baptist Theologian Analyzes Stephen E. Robinson's Arguments for Accepting Mormonism as Christian” by Robert B. Stewart.

VOL. 1, NO. 2 (FALL 2003)
THE MISSION OF TODAY'S CHURCH

- “The Gospel of American Individualism Versus the Gospel of the Kingdom” by R. Alan Streett
- “Passion-Driven Shepherdology: A Biblical and Practical Reconciliation of Pastoral Preaching and Church Growth” by Jim Shaddix
- “A University Committed to the Great Commission” by Jonathan K. Parker, Daniel Skubik, and H. Bruce Stokes
- “Church Planting as a Growth Strategy in the Face of Church Decline” by Will McRaney
- “The Great Commission Imperative of Teaching: Why Christian Education Should Be On the Cutting Edge of the Church's Mission Today” by Walter H. Norvell
- “The State of Membership Growth, Sunday School, and Evangelism in the Southern Baptist Convention 1900-2002” by William H. Day, Jr.
- “Today's Sunday School: Dead or Alive?” by Margaret F. Williamson
- “Rethinking the Call of God” by Bob L. Royall

VOL. 2 NO. 1 (SPRING 2004)

ISSUES IN BAPTIST POLITY

- “Voices from the Past; Voices for the Pew: History of Support of the Direct Linkage Between Trustees and the SBC Churches” by Ergun Mehmet Caner
- “Baptist Ecclesiology: A Faithful Application of New Testament Principles” by Daryl C. Cornett
- “Hierarchy in the Church? Instruction from the Pastoral Epistles Concerning Elders and Overseers” by Benjamin L. Merkle
- “Why Baptist Elders is Not an Oxymoron” by Phil A. Newton
- “The African American Baptist Pastor and Church Government: The Myth of the Dictator” by James Jenkins
- “The Role of the Business Meeting in a Healthy Change Process” by Steve Echols
- “None Dare Call It Treason: Is an Inclusivist a Paul Revere or a Benedict Arnold?” by Ken Keathley

VOL. 2 NO. 2 (FALL 2004)

THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST

- “The Gospel of Jesus Christ: By Grace Through Faith” by David S. Dockery
- “Revisiting Penal Substitution” by Kevin D. Kennedy
- “The Passions of the Christ” by Jeff Cate
- “A Consideration of the Gospel Accounts of the Jewish Charge of Blasphemy Against Jesus” by Steven L. Cox
- “Two Aspects in the Design of Christ's Atonement” by Wayne S. Hansen
- “Why Jesus is the Only Way” by Edward P. Meadors
- “Setting Jesus Free from Postmodern Reconstructions: Was Jesus a Galilean Jew or a Jewish Hellenist?” by Steven M. Ortiz
- “John 3:13 and the Omnipresence of Jesus” by R. Larry Overstreet

VOL. 3. NO. 1 (SPRING 2005)

ISSUES IN BAPTIST POLITY, PT. 2

- “Baptist Polity and Elders” by Mark E. Dever
- “An Affirmation of Congregational Polity” by James Leo Garrett, Jr.
- “An Elder and His Ministry: From a Baptist Perspective” by Gerald Cowen
- “Pastoral Leadership: Authoritarian or Persuasive?” by Richard Land
- “To Answer or Not to Answer”: A Case Study on the Emergence of the Stone-Campbell Movement Amongst the Baptist Churches of Kentucky in the 1820s” by Rodrick Durst
- “Pastoral Reflections on Baptist Polity in the Local Church” by Jim Henry
- “Congregational Priesthood and the *Inventio* or Invention of Authority” by Malcolm Yarnell
- “Baptist Polity and the State Convention” by John Sullivan
- “From Church Competence to Soul Competence: The Devolution of Baptist Ecclesiology” by John Hammett
- “Polity and Proclamation: The Relationship Between Congregational Polity and Evangelistic Church Growth in the SBC” by Alvin L. Reid
- “Elder Rule and Southern Baptist Church Polity” by Robert A. Wring

VOL. 4. NO. 1 (FALL 2007)

KATRINA ANNIVERSARY EDITION: BAPTISTS MINISTERING IN THE MIDST OF DISASTER

- “Hearing God in the Midst of the Storm” by Scott Drumm
- “Lessons Learned From Katrina” by Charles S. Kelley
- “Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?” by Steve W. Lemke
- “Natural Disaster and Pastoral Comfort” by Jim Elliff
- “God in the Storm: The Goodness of God and the Reality of Evil” by R. Albert Mohler, Jr.
- “Ministering God’s Love in the Midst of Crisis”
- “The Biblical Rationale and Practical Expressions of Disaster Relief Ministry Through State Conventions and Local Associations” by Jim Richards
- “Hurricane Katrina, Gulfport, and the Second Commandment: The Impact of Love” by Chuck Register
- “Bringing Light to a City of Darkness: A Pastoral Perspective on Urban Transformation” by David Crosby
- “Embracing Service: An Overview of the Volunteer Organizations that Are Rebuilding New Orleans Homes and Bringing the Gospel to Life” by Marilyn Stewart
- “An Associational Perspective on Disaster Relief” by Joe McKeever
- “State and Associational Missions Involvement in Natural Disasters” by Emil Turner

VOL. 5. NO. 1 (SPRING 2008)

BAPTISTS ON MISSION

- “Ad Fontes Baptists? Continuity and Change in Early Baptist Perceptions on the Church and Its Mission” by Dr. Philip Roberts
- “The Emerging Missional Churches of the West: Form or Norm for Baptist Ecclesiology?” by Dr. Rodrick Durst
- “The Mission of the Church as the Mark of the Church” by Dr. John Hammett
- “An Examination of Tentmaker Ministers in Missouri: Challenges and Opportunities” by Drs. David Whitlock, Mick Arnold, and R. Barry Ellis
- “The Way of the Disciple in Church Planting” by Dr. Jack Allen
- “Ecclesiological Guidelines to Inform Southern Baptist Church Planters” by Dr. R. Stanton Norman
- The Definition of A Church by the International Mission Board
- “The Priority of Incarnational Missions: Or ‘Is The Tail of Volunteerism Wagging the Dog?’” by Dr. Stan May
- “Towards Practice in Better Short Term Missions” by Dr. Bob Garrett
- “The Extent of Orality” by Dr. Grant Lovejoy
- “The Truth is Contextualization Can Lead to Syncretism: Applying Muslim Background Believers Contextualization Concerns to Ancestor Worship and Buddhist Background Believers in a Chinese Culture” by Dr. Phillip A. Pinckard
- “Addressing Islamic Teaching About Christianity” by Dr. Michael Edens
- Book Reviews

VOL. 5. NO. 2 (FALL 2008)

BAPTISTS IN DIALOGUE

- “What is a Baptist? Nine Marks that Separate Baptists from Presbyterians” by Dr. Steve Lemke (with responses from Dr. Mark Rathel, Dr. Ken Gore, and Dr. R. L. Hatchet)
- “The Emergent/Emerging Church: A Missiological Perspective” by Dr. Ed Stetzer (with responses from Dr. J. Matthew Pinson, Dr. Jack Allen, and Dr. Page Brooks)
- Book Reviews