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Introduction: Baptist Dogmatics

Steven A. McKinion, Christine E. Thornton
& Keith S. Whitfield
Guest Editors

The current issue of the *Southeastern Theological Review* (*STR*) gestures toward a fresh perspective on Baptist theology. Rather than focusing on the distinctive doctrines that set Baptists apart from other Christian traditions, this issue calls Baptist to engage in "dogmatics" as a distinct mode of theologizing and identifies some core Baptist principles for doing theology, aiming to understand and explain the inner logic of being a Baptist. The journey to this new trajectory began in the Summer of 2021 when a group of Baptist theologians convened at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary to discuss the possibility of this new approach in Baptist theology. Since then, this group has continued to meet annually, and this issue of *STR* is one of the first fruits of their ongoing dialogue.

The first article, titled "Toward a Baptist Dogmatics," is written by the guest editors of this issue and proposes specific markers for a distinctively Baptist approach to confessing and practicing the Christian faith. The term "dogmatics" refers to a particular way of theologizing that explores the theological connections of a tradition. The Baptist dogmatics project delves deeper into facets of Baptist theology that may have been overlooked, going beyond just ecclesiology, which has been (for good reasons) a significant aspect of Baptist identity and theology.

The issue also includes an interview with Timothy George, Emeritus Dean of Beeson Divinity School, who is a prominent theologian and historian among Baptists. The interview offers insights from his vast experience and ecumenical perspectives. Dr. George graciously read an early version of the "Baptist Dogmatic Manifesto," which will be published in a forthcoming volume, and shared some meaningful reflections that are included in the interview.

Chris Hanna, Professor of Theological Studies at Highlands College, takes up the discussion from where the interview and the lead article left off. Based on his doctoral dissertation research and book *Retrieval for the Sake of Renewal*, he examines Timothy George's "Baptist way" of doing theological retrieval within the Great Tradition. This piece builds on the four engagements and historic signposts for a Baptist dogmatics introduced by the issue editors in the first article.

The other articles in the journal contribute to the discussion in their own distinct ways. They explore topics such as theological retrieval within the Great Tradition, tradition engagement by historical Baptist figures like John Gill, and the exploration of Patristic writings on baptism. David Rathel, Associate Professor of Christian Theology at Gateway Baptist Theological Seminary, focuses on how John Gill, an influential 18th Century Particular Baptist, engaged with tradition using the "regula fidei" in his scriptural interpretation.

The next two articles are centered around the practice of retrieval. They explore the position on baptism in Patristic writings and propose a constructive Baptist theology that retrieves from the early church. Steven A. McKinion, who serves as Professor of Theology and Patristic Studies at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, in a republished piece, answers whether there is a consensus opinion in the patristic writings that accepts believers' baptism as the ancient and normative practice of the church. The other article, written by Christine E. Thornton, Assistant Professor of Christian Thought at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, argues that contemporary Baptists can follow Irenaeus's reflection on the role of baptism in establishing the ontological and conceptual framework for the Christian faith and Bible interpretation.

The final article addresses the distinct form of dogmatics in the free church tradition by focusing on biblical covenantalism. Malcolm B. Yarnell, Research Professor of Theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, sets forth an engaging thesis for the distinct form of dogmatics, taking on the principal challenge to Baptists participating in dogmatics. The vision is based on robust biblical covenantalism while maintaining the foundational Baptist convictions on Christ-centered soteriology and conversion, ecclesiology, and the value of the human person.

This issue of *Southeastern Theological Review* hopes to shed new light on Baptist theology by exploring some of its core principles and contributions from various angles. These valuable insights and perspectives from the articles contribute to contemporary theological discussions.

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Towards a Baptist Dogmatics

**Steven A. McKinion, Christine E. Thornton
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Abstract: *In June 2021, a gathering of Baptist theologians convened in Wake Forest, North Carolina, to delve into the distinct approach to dogmatics within the Baptist tradition. This academic initiative aimed to establish the core principles guiding theological discourse among Baptists. Baptist dogmatics places a significant emphasis on active engagement with the gospel, Scripture, tradition, and the faith-oriented community. Dogmatics, as a field of theological exploration, operates on the foundational belief that theology inherently serves the ecclesiastical body through its interactions with Scripture, tradition, and rational contemplation. The primary objective of dogmatics is to meticulously unfold the nature of God as revealed through Jesus Christ, a revelation drawn from both the Old and New Testaments. This revelation is coupled with the intention to equip adherents to embody their faith in practical ways. The authors put forth four guiding markers—historical, ecclesial, covenantal, and confessional—to chart the course of this theological endeavor. These markers are firmly rooted in a shared affirmation of the gospel, interwoven covenantal connections, and a dedicated allegiance to the paramount authority of Scripture. Consequently, the Baptist framework of dogmatics aspires to eloquently express and exemplify the Christian faith within the context of the congregational community, extending an open invitation to the wider world to partake in the transformative understanding of God through the figure of Christ.*

Key Words: Baptist theology, dogmatics, dogmatic theology, evangelical theology, systematic theology, theological method

In June 2021, a group of Baptist theologians gathered in Wake Forest, NC, to explore the possibilities of engaging the discipline of dogmatics in a distinctively Baptistic manner. As a part of this venture, we commenced collaboration on a book project, titled *Confessing Christ*.[1] The

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[1] Steven A. McKinion, Christine E. Thornton, and Keith S. Whitfield, ed., *Confessing Christ: An Invitation to Baptist Dogmatics* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academics, forthcoming).

vision for this gathering arose from the conviction that dogmatics uniquely serves the church and its witness because it explains the Christian faith holistically from both biblical and theological perspectives. The discipline of dogmatics, as a subset of systematic theology, explores the coherence of the faith by the church, within the church, and for the church.

This edition of the *Southeastern Theological Review* features an interview with Timothy George, where he defines three key terms: "dogma," "dogmas," and "dogmatics." His insightful discussion of these terms illuminates the intrinsic nature of dogmatics as a discipline that operates *by*, *within*, and *for* the sake of the church. He explains that Christian dogmatics involves theological reflection within the domain of the Christian faith—the church. This reflection is guided by the church's foundational doctrinal affirmations ("dogmas") in order to elucidate the central tenet (the "dogma") of Christianity—Jesus Christ is Lord. Christians have consistently confessed this "dogma" since the first century. It is, therefore, fitting for Baptists to contribute their unique perspective to this task, given that they have also engaged in such theological reflection from the beginning of the Baptist movement. The Baptist movement arises from a radical commitment to the Lordship of Christ over every human person. The intention is to establish specific markers that help identify core Baptist principles for doing theology, thus renewing a distinctively Baptist approach to confessing and practicing the Christian faith.

In this article, we aim to briefly introduce our approach to cultivating Baptist dogmatics. To do this, we will set a broad context for this project within the discipline of dogmatics and the recent developments in evangelical dogmatics. Additionally, we seek to introduce the distinctive features of Baptist dogmatics that should enrich Baptistic theological reflection. A more expansive exposition of the distinctives presented here will appear in *Confessing Christ*.

The Task of Dogmatics

Dogmatics represents a mode of theologizing grounded in the belief that theology serves the church by faithfully and coherently engaging with Scripture, tradition, and reason. Rather than reducing theology to a set of propositions or a historical narrative, dogmatics seeks to be a form of wisdom that explores and articulates the mystery of God's self-revelation in Christ through the Spirit, referred to above as the "dogma." This task requires theological retrieval, where theological reflection and Christian practices from the past are recovered and reappropriated

for the present and future. The aim is to rediscover the richness and depth of the Christian tradition while avoiding the pitfalls of modern and postmodern theological systems like rationalism, relativism, and individualism. As Jaroslav Pelikan described, this task is to preserve "what the church believes, teaches, and confesses."[2] The goal of dogmatics is then to articulate the truth about the Christian God as revealed in Jesus Christ by drawing from the Old and New Testaments and to equip Christians to live and confess their faith.

For evangelical dogmaticians, dogmatics must be theological and biblical. It is biblical in that it provides an account of what the Bible says about God and his work of reconciling the world to himself through Christ (2 Cor 5:18–19) and how it communicates this message.[3] At its core, it is "theological" because it demonstrates how the Triune God, in being and acts, shapes reality.[4] T. F. Torrance and John Webster have influenced the current work of evangelical dogmatics in their respective projects. For both of them, the Triune nature of God determined the purpose of theology as a discipline and directed how they pursued the theological task.[5] A Trinitarian perspective is central to evangelical dogmatics, as it grounds the "dogma" that pertains to the person of Jesus Christ, his saving work, and the significance of Christ's role in revealing the being of God to humanity.[6]

The Triune God reveals himself in the Scriptures. The purpose for

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[2] Jaroslav Pelikan, *Development of Christian Doctrine: Some Historical Prolegomena* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969), 143.

[3] See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Analytics, Poetics, and the Mission of Dogmatic Discourse," in *The Task of Dogmatics,* ed. Oliver Crisp and Fred Sanders (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 23–48; and Scott Swain, "Dogmatics as Systematic Theology," in *The Task of Dogmatics*, 49–69.

[4] For a robust account of the theological nature of theology, see John Webster, "What Makes Theology Theological," in *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology: Volume 1* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 213–24.

[5] See Michael Allen, "Theological Theology: Webster's Theological Project," in *A Companion to the Theology of John Webster*, ed. Michael Allen and R. David Nelson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans: 2021), 38–43; and Elmer M. Colyer, "A Scientific Theological Method," in *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology: Theologians in Dialogue with T. F. Torrance*, ed. Elmer M. Colyer (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 205–38.

[6] For helpful overview of this point, see John C. Clark and Marcus Peter Johnson, *A Call to Christian Formation: How Theology Makes Sense of Our World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 21–48.

expounding the Scriptures is to instruct the church about God and his ways and to guide the church in its confession of the God they worship. Theological reflection on the Scriptures seeks to discern the presence of a central theological message in the text and the interrelation of biblical concepts and categories around it. These patterns of biblical language rule the development of theological language. Following David Yeago's insights, dogmatics employs appropriate conceptual terms to interpret the patterns of biblical language.[7] Dogmatics involves summarizing and explaining the apostolic faith as portrayed in the Scriptures in terms that are understandable and fitting to communicate the truth. It provides the church with the language to express the gospel in ways that align with how the Bible conveys it. It is not a mere repetition of biblical words but a coherent re-telling of the gospel that maintains a biblical and theological approach.

Dogmatics proclaims what the church has believed and ought to believe to remain true to the apostolic faith. It conveys the church's reading of the Scriptures, not replacing the Scriptures as God's revelation but articulating what the church confesses based on the biblical revelation. It draws from the history of the church's witness to the God who works in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit—examining what the church believes, confesses, and proclaims in its worship and preaching. This theological reflection leads to a Christian grammar (words, symbols, and actions) that invites participation in the gospel of Jesus Christ. This theological grammar continues to be found in the church's creeds, confessions, prayers, sermons, and songs—guiding the church's behavior and communion.

The Rise of Dogmatics within Evangelical Theology

In 1973, Bernard Ramm offered some advice for the future of evangelical theology that would position the church to be at the frontlines of cultural engagement and defense of the faith. He called evangelical theologians to remain biblical, operate with thoroughgoing evangelical theological commitments, study the current culture and philosophy of language, and establish a robust theological account for how God relates to the world.[8] Contemporary evangelical theologians, like Carl F. H. Henry,

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[7] David Yeago, "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma," *Pro Ecclesia* 3.2 (1994): 152–65.

[8] Bernard Ramm, *The Evangelical Heritage: A Study in Historical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 151–70.

Donald Bloesch, Millard Erickson, John Frame, Gordon Lewis, Bruce Demarest, and Wayne Grudem, took up and by all accounts fulfilled Ramm's vision. However, just as the evangelical movement established significant works to defend and articulate the faith on the frontlines of modernity, the cultural terrain shifted significantly. Modernity, which had defined the intellectual operating system for two centuries, was undergoing its own critique and at some level, repudiation. The type of reasoning and argumentation that held sway throughout the 20th century was no longer compelling. As evangelical theology made some level of progress to articulate the faith and answer the questions raised by modernism, the emergence of postmodernism and rejection of hyper-modernism led to new objections to the evangelical arguments. As a result, the profound and timely work produced by the likes of Carl F. H. Henry began to lose its appeal, and in the 1980s and 1990s, criticism arose over how evangelicals approached the nature and task of theology.[9]

Much of this criticism surrounded questions on the function of the Bible in theology, epistemology foundational for the evangelical movement, and the nature of evangelical theology. Hans Frei's *Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative* and George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine* represent two early assessments from non-evangelicals that contributed to evangelical theology undergoing an evaluation at the end of the 20th century. Within the broad evangelical camp, Clark Pinnock,[10] Stanley Grenz,[11] Roger Olson,[12] Kevin Vanhoozer,[13] and Michael Horton[14] all contribut-

ed an appraisal of evangelical theology during this period. While they did not share the same points of concern or even arrive at the same conclusions, their questions did revolve around the three defining issues highlighted above: the function of the Bible in theology, epistemology, and the nature of doctrine.

Lindbeck's short book had a monumental impact on theological studies. The book was a groundbreaking study on doctrinal criticism and not per se an assessment of theological methods. He introduced a three-fold taxonomy that assessed how Christian theologians were doing theology at the time: experiential-expressivist, cognitive-propositionalist, and cultural-linguistic. For evangelicals, almost every discussion on the nature of theology from 1984 addressed his critique. Ten major evangelical theological projects responded at various levels of directness to the questions Lindbeck raises: John Frame, *The Knowledge of the Doctrine of God*; Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology*; Alister McGrath, *Genesis of Doctrine*, Stanley Grenz, *Renewing the Center*; Stanley Grenz and John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*; Michael Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*; Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*; David Clark, *To Know and Love God*; and Anthony Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*. Lindbeck labeled the evangelical project "cognitive-propositionalist," emphasizing the cognitive aspects of religion and the informative function of church doctrines as truth claims about objective realities.[15] While this emphasis on propositional truth was beneficial in the 20th century, the responses made it clear that Lindbeck struck a nerve. Theologians tended to focus on propositional truth claims that atomized the theological enterprise and fractured evangelical theology rather than offering a holistic account of God and his world in the world.[16] To ground the interrelationship of doctrines, that system needs a theological center to unite theological

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[9] For a history of this development, see Gary Dorrien, *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998), and for an early reason to the changing landscape, see the collected essays in Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor, eds., *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times* (Wheaton: IL: Crossway, 2004).

[10] Clark Pinnock, *Tracking the Maze: Finding Our Way Through Modern Theology from an Evangelical Perspective* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990).

[11] Stanley Grenz, *Revising Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993); Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in Post Theology Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000); and Stanley Grenz and John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

[12] Roger Olson, "Does Evangelical Theology Have a Future?," *Christianity Today,* February 9, 1998, 40.

[13] Kevin Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture's Diverse Literary Forms," in *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 49–104;

Kevin Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005); and Kevin Vanhoozer and Daniel Trier, *Theology and the Mirror of Scripture: A Mere Evangelical Account* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015).

[14] Michael Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002).

[15] George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Louisville, KY; Westminster John Knox, 1984), 16.

[16] In response, while he does not use the term dogmatics, Douglas Vickers calls for a return to something like dogmatic reflection in *The Fracture of Faith: Recovering Belief of the Gospel in a Postmodern World* (Scotland: Christian Focus, 2000).

reflection. Another consequence of atomizing doctrines and not providing a holistic account of the Christian faith is that Christian truths can be apprehended separately from the practice of the faith.

The propositional focus on theology resulted in a theological method lacking a central core and an underdeveloped framework to illuminate the theological relationships of biblical doctrines. This led to one-volume Systematic Theology texts that lacked internal coherence and, at times, presented theologically conflicting claims.[17] Richard Lints addressed this issue in his 1993 book *The Fabric of Theology*, arguing that evangelicals need to recover a vision for theology that demonstrates the interrelated nature of doctrines around a robust biblical and theological core.[18] Furthermore, the inherited method tended to address Christian doctrine in such a way as to isolate it from Christian living, despite claims that theological knowledge should have a transformative impact on Christians.[19] However, this aspiration did not fully materialize in the evangelical experience, as the underlying epistemology seemed to align more with post-Enlightenment thinking than with biblical principles.[20] The lack of internal coherence among doctrines and the separation of Christian theology from the Christian life prompted some evangelicals to seek a reorientation in the pursuit of theological knowledge and a deeper understanding of God.

Eventually, some evangelicals began looking back to chart a path forward and discovered that propositional theology was not the primary way the early church theologized. They realized that theology was not always fragmented, leading them to retrieve the nature and method of theology from the rich history of Christian theology for their contemporary evangelical context. Fred Sanders offered an early evangelical exam-

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[17] Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 54–56; and David Clark, *To Know and Love God* (Wheaton, IL; Crossway, 2010), 33–58.

[18] Lints, *The Fabric of Theology*, 312–15.

[19] Ellen Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3–34; Clark, *To Know and Love*, xxiii–xxxii; Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 77–114.

[20] Ellen Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds*, 3–34; and Michael Allen, "Knowledge of God," in Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 7–9; David Clark, *To Know and Love God*, xxiii–xxxii; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 1–36.

ple of this theological reflection in his book *Deep Things of God*.[21]

This group of evangelical dogmaticians followed the paths set forth by their European counterparts, who initiated a dogmatic retrieval in the mid-to-late 20th century. Figures like Karl Barth, Henri de Lubac, and others influenced the history of dogmatic theology outside of evangelicalism. John Webster and Thomas F. Torrance were two influential evangelical dogmatic thinkers in the UK. Webster, considered by some as the father of American evangelical dogmatics, employed the Reformed Scholastic dogmatic method, which resonated well with evangelicals in the Reformed tradition.[22] Torrance, while less influential among American evangelicals, provided a model for retrieving the early church fathers within a robust theological epistemology, rejecting the bifurcation of theological knowledge prevalent in much of 20th-century theological reflection.[23] Both Webster and Torrance offered evangelical theologians a coherent vision for integrating theology within church life and practice. Although Torrance's influence may be less pronounced among some evangelicals, especially his work on theological epistemology, he remains a significant presence. Notably, North American evangelical theologians such as Tom Oden and Timothy George have played a significant role in doing Christian theology *by*, *as*, and *for* the church.

As of 2023, evangelical dogmatics has diversified into multiple spheres, each presenting a way forward for theologians seeking constructive theology. Scott Swain and Michael Allen have recently brought together theologians around a dogmatic project that draws inspiration from the Reformed Scholastic method, aiming to apply the best of their heritage to their contemporary ecclesial context.[24] Similarly, Tom McCall and Oliver Crisp have developed a proper dogmatic discourse through the discipline of Analytic Theology.[25] Among Baptists, Matthew Barrett and Craig Carter aspire to revive the classical scholastic dogmatic meth-

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[21] Fred Sanders, *Deep Things of God,* 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017). It was originally published in 2010.

[22] See John Webster, "*Omnia ... Pertractantur in Sacra Doctrina Sub Ratione Dei.* On the Matter of Christian Theology" and "Christology, Theology, Economy. The Place of Christology in Systematic Theology," in *God without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology: Volume 1: God and Works of God* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 3–12, 43–58.

[23] Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (London: T&T Clark, 2016).

[24] Allen and Swain, *Christian Dogmatics.*

[25] Crisp and Sanders, eds., *The Task of Dogmatics.*

od for Baptists in a forthcoming series of books called *Pillars in Christian Dogmatics*.

Baptist dogmatics is seen as a discipline engaged in confessional dialogue with other evangelical dogmatic enterprises, especially the constructive work done by Scott Swain and Michael Allen in their book *Christian Dogmatics*. Baptist dogmatics share significant common ground with the Reformed dogmatics tradition and is deeply indebted to the Reformed method and intended outcome. Theological retrieval is a shared commitment, making these theological projects valuable partners in helping the church engage in faithful theological reasoning.

According to Swain and Allen, dogmatics is "the concerted attempt of the church to discipline its hearing of and testimony to the gospel according to the same gospel, specifically, to the promise that God makes himself known to and by his people."[26] Engaging in this discipline is a practice shared within the communion of saints throughout time and space. The dogmatic task involves reading the creeds of the ecumenical church, studying the confessions of the Protestant Reformation, learning from the texts of the ancient church fathers and medieval doctors of the faith, considering modern articulations of the gospel, and exploring contemporary testimonies to God's Word.[27] It is a task undertaken by the church for God, the church itself, and the world.

Dogmatics empowers the church to read the Bible faithfully and requires theologians to continually explain the message of the gospel while remaining grounded in the Scriptures. For Swain and Allen, Christian dogmatics is both an exegetical and theological task, with dogmatic reasoning flowing from and returning to the task of exegesis.[28] Theology is never extricated from the Scriptures; it is sourced from and reflects on the revelation of God and his works as found in the Scriptures. Theological reflection is closely tied to the practice and confession of the faith within the church. It involves contemplating the Triunity of God as the origin and ultimate end of the faith. Swain and Allen emphasized that the possibility of faithful service in the task of dogmatics arises not from within the resources of dogmatics itself but from the infinite depths of the Triune God who speaks to and through his church, desiring to spread the knowledge and love of himself.[29]

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[26] Allen and Swain, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1.

[27] Allen and Swain, *Christian Dogmatics*, 4.

[28] Allen and Swain, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1. See Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *The Triune God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 11.

[29] Allen and Swain, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1.

As Baptist dogmaticians, the authors align themselves with this group of evangelical theologians in certain aspects while expressing their unique perspectives. They share a core dogmatic commitment to the theological interpretation of the Bible and theological retrieval. However, they also emphasize the importance of giving voice to catholic dogmatic theology in a way that accounts for Baptist distinctives and the particular ways in which Baptists confess and live the Christian faith. Embracing their Baptistic distinctives, they integrate these formative aspects into the faith and practice of Baptist churches that share their theological and ecclesial identity. The authors strive to retrieve the best of their Baptist heritage within the Great Tradition, aiming to develop Baptistic dogmatics.

The Task of Baptist Dogmatics

Historically, Baptists emerged from the radical reformation on the continent and as an independent movement in England. Despite the complex early formation of the Baptist movement, Baptists have always seen themselves as faithful representatives of the apostolic faith passed down through the ages by Christian communities participating in preaching the Word and administering the sacraments/ordinances. Historic Baptist confessions of faith have consistently maintained the orthodox foundations of the Christian faith that are consistent with the historic church. However, since its earliest days, Baptists have expressed and lived the faith with their unique theological inflection. Baptist dogmatics is the theological study and articulation of Christian doctrines from this distinctively Baptist perspective.

Baptists hold certain core convictions, including the authority and sufficiency of the Scriptures, the sovereignty of God, the priesthood of all believers, the necessity of regeneration and faith for salvation, believers' baptism by immersion, the autonomy and interdependence of local churches, and the separation of church and state. While Baptist dogmatics is not uniform due to the diversity and development of Baptist history and identity, there is a common heritage and a shared commitment to the gospel that unites Baptists across different contexts and periods. The Lordship of Christ over every human conscience is a central conviction that governs the Baptist way of being.

Baptist dogmatics is not a secluded or sectarian endeavor but actively engages with other Christian traditions and the broader culture respect-

fully and constructively. Baptists affirm their catholicity as members of the universal body of Christ, seeking to learn from and contribute to the Great Tradition of Christian theology.[30] While engaging with other traditions, Baptists also bear witness to the truth and grace of God in their context and address the challenges and opportunities they encounter in their ministry. Ultimately, Baptist dogmatics is an act of worship and service to God and his church. Its purpose is to bring glory to God by deepening the knowledge and love of him through his self-revelation in the Scriptures. Additionally, Baptist dogmatics aims to edify the church by equipping believers for ministry and building them up in faith and love. It utilizes various sources, such as creeds, confessions, catechisms, sermons, songs, and prayers, to communicate and apply the doctrines of the Christian faith for the benefit of believers.

A significant theological distinction in Baptist dogmatics is its self-conscious commitment to the gospel and its missional nature. Dogmatic reasoning for Baptist theologians is inherently connected to an evangelical commitment to understanding humanity's sinfulness, the salvific work of Jesus Christ, forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, and union with Christ. This missional aspect of Baptist dogmatics shapes the articulation of Christian doctrines and finds expression through ethical and liturgical practices. The belief that *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi* (the law of prayer is the law of belief, and the law of belief is the law of life) informs the method for dogmatics, integrating theological rationality with the lived faith of the believing church. The confessional articulations of faith state "what is to be believed" and inform the believing community. In other words, believing churches confess the faith that has formed them, making dogmatics an integral part of their identity and witness.

The Four Engagements of Baptist Dogmatics

Theologizing in a manner consistent with the field of dogmatics includes four fundamental engagements of theological reasoning. We describe this activity as engagement to capture the reality that the theological enterprise involves interpreting sources and making faithful judgments. So, these four engagements are not sequential acts or movements; they are integrated practices that form the substance of

theological articulation. We begin with the gospel because it is the *skopos* of the message of Scripture and the discipline of dogmatics.

Theological Engagement with the Gospel

Dogmatics entails an explicit engagement with the gospel according to Scripture. The Bible proclaims the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ from different perspectives, including succinct summaries. First Corinthians 15:1–14 says that the gospel is that Jesus died for our sins according to the Scripture, was buried, and was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. The explanation in the Old Testament determines the apostle's understanding of Jesus's death and resurrection. It is not merely that Jesus died for our sins, but that his death is understood through engagement with the rest of Scripture. The gospel is the key to understanding what it means to be a Christian, thinking well as a Christian, interpreting the Bible, and articulating doctrinal conviction according to Scripture.

In Matt 28:18–20, Matthew sets forth a summary of the gospel as the narrative of Scripture. He begins with creation, declaring that the Son has all authority over heaven and earth, and he then proceeds to how the people of God participate in God's kingdom as we take the gospel to the ends of the earth. Matthew also explains in this narrative summary that we gain the privilege to participate by identifying with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection in our new life in Christ, demonstrated in our baptism (Ezek 36, Rom 6:1–3). This new life leads to faithful obedience as we follow what Jesus taught and teach others that they may also obey. Finally, the summary ends with the promise of the presence of the Son with the community of faith until the end. In this way, these verses proclaim the gospel as a meta-framework for the entire Scripture.

Another example of how Scripture address the reality of the gospel is found in 1 Cor 5:19. Paul presents what one might term the reality of the gospel in this verse. Describing the activity of God to redeem, Paul says, "In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and he has committed the message of reconciliation to us" (CSB). God has reconciled his people to himself in Christ and commissioned us to participate in his work by proclaiming this message of Good News. In this way, the gospel traffics in what is real—God, Christ, and his people. In this way, our faith can be established, not by mere *mythos* or hopeful conjecture, but in the truth of God in Christ. As dogmaticians engage with the gospel, we moor our lives and our words in the reality of this gospel and the God of this gospel.

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[30] See Matthew Y. Emerson, Christopher W. Morgan, and R. Lucas Stamps, *Baptists and the Christian Tradition: Toward an Evangelical Baptist Catholicity* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academics, 2020).

Theological Engagement with Scripture

Theologizing is primarily an engagement with the Scriptures as the Word that tells the story of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus, theological engagement with the Scriptures requires grammatical and theological exploration (Luke 24:13–35; 1 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21). Grammatical exegesis focuses on the language of the biblical text from the smallest linguistic level to the canonical contexts to discern the meaning of biblical words and concepts. Theological exegesis approaches the Bible as the revelation of God in the person and work of Christ so that we might behold God through his Word. As Tyler Wittman and R. B. Jamieson explain, exegesis is "not only … adequate to the text itself, but also … adequate to the ultimate reality to which the text bears witness."[31]

Further, by beginning with the confession that the gospel is the summary of Scripture and the redemptive reality it proclaims, dogmatics engages with the text for a more complete understanding of the gospel because the Bible is itself the message of the gospel. The Bible includes summaries that provide readers language and explanation of the gospel to deepen their understanding. Through the spiritual enterprise of theological reflection, theologians and their articulation are formed by a theological reading of Scripture. This type of biblical reasoning through theological exegesis leads to theological reflection.[32] This reflection meditates on the Word of God as a spiritual exercise with formation as its intended end. Through intentional contemplation of the Scripture, theologians produce theological language that serves the church in knowing God in Christ more deeply. This corporate knowledge of God is the purpose of engagement with Scripture.

Theological Engagement with Tradition

Baptist Churches practice the scriptural faith with the church in all times and places. Theology happens within the apostolic tradition, confessing the faith that was "once for all delivered to the saints" and doing theological reflection as recipients of and participants in that tradition. Dogmatics entails reflection on and engagement with a received tradition of theological exposition and proclamation. The Baptist tradition is a particular way of expressing and living that Great Tradition and is not

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[31] R. B. Jamieson and Tyler R. Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning: Christological and Trinitarian Rules for Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), xvii.

[32] John Webster, "Biblical Reasoning," in *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reasoning* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012), 115–32.

outside of it. For Baptists, the tradition is a lived faith in which conversion, progress, and Christian living are inseparable from the proper articulation of the Christian dogma. Our proposal retrieves dogmatics for the believers' church, while doing theological reflection within our own time and space as Baptist Christians. A Baptist disposition does not require sectarianism or the unwillingness to listen to non-Baptist voices in the Christian tradition—quite the opposite. Baptist dogmatics, as we understand it, necessarily requires participation in the broader Christian communion without losing those elements of the believers' church that we believe form that church.

Theological Engagement with the Community

Theology seeks to provide the church language to articulate an understandable, receivable, and livable faith. This process occurs within the church. Theologians should participate in the community to experience the reality of lived faith. They reflect on the church's practices as embodied portrayals of the gospel that unite the believers' church. They join the church in confessing their faith and listen to how the people of God understand the confession. As members of the body of Christ, they serve the worship and faith of the church. Theologians must participate in a community of believers to inform the language it uses to articulate the faith. The church's awareness of its identity and calling is apprehended by words it uses to explain its existence. The church's prayers, songs, sermons, and symbols all convey some meaning. These words convey theological meaning within the community and, at the same time, for the community. Theologians are called to participate in the community for their faith and assess the effectiveness of the church's language used to explain the faith.

When the language offers a clear understanding of the gospel, it guides the community in confessing the faith and helps form the community to live out the faith faithfully. Theologians serve the community by helping it reflect well on its confession and deepen the church's understanding. Where there is a misunderstanding of the gospel, theologians can aid by explaining and even reformulating language. The community's life is as much part of its theology as is its language. Taking heed to sound doctrine means watching one's life and practice. Theological articulation is not an end in itself. The worship of God and the transformed life of the worshipper is the end of theologizing.

The Four Signposts of Baptist Dogmatics

Baptist theology is ecumenical and non-sectarian. The apostolic faith is expressed and practiced in different, equally valid ways among Christians throughout history and worldwide. Baptists practice the one faith in ways that are true to Scripture, the Great Tradition, and our historical context. **Baptist dogmatics is rooted in the free** church tradition. This tradition emphasizes local churches worshipping under the Lordship of Christ, the voluntary association of churches with similar theology and practice, the authority of Scripture, a robust conversionism, the necessity of Christian mission, and the priesthood of believers. Baptist dogmatics aids the church to articulate the faith fueling the church's mission, wherein people are invited to know and enjoy the Triune God through faith in Jesus Christ. Believers are priests of God who contribute to the dogmatic task through their ongoing confession of the common faith of other Baptist believers. To define the terrain of Baptist dogmatics, we propose four "signposts" that exemplify theology in action and guide theological reasoning for the believers' church.

Historical Signpost

The historical signpost guides the method for Baptist dogmatics. This signpost situates the project within the historical reality of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection and within the church's historic confession, reminding us that our theological reflection follows the patterns of reading and articulating the faith handed down from the apostles through the church fathers. Nevertheless, the signpost signals that Baptist dogmatics depends on Scripture's authority alone to explain to us and lead us to explore who Jesus is, what he has done, and how he reveals the Triune God to us. The contemporary gathered community shares in the gospel grounded in the historical reality of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection and in how the gospel has been practiced by confessing Christians for millennia. These realities are the basis for the Christian faith and frame the faith the church lives out, explains, and explores through teaching and theological reflection. Baptist dogmatics operates as an ongoing dialogue with the tradition and all those who received that faith, confessed that faith, and participated in the exploration of that faith. The Baptist theologian does more than acknowledge the history of theology. The dogmatician practices his or her discipline as a part of that communion of saints whose history is their own.

Ecclesial Signpost

The ecclesial signpost demonstrates that the Baptist theologian's

context and *telos* is the believing church with Christ as its head (Col. 1:18). Theological reflection, formulation, and reformulation happen as the theologian participates in worship, prayer, proclamation, and spiritual formation. The commitment to a believer's church implies that theologians are reasoning with a redeemed mind, having been formed by the gospel they wish to engage and articulate. Additionally, the Spirit's presence is anticipated because the dogmatic task happens within the believing community. As noted above, Trinitarian, Christocentric orientation of theology and theological epistemology raises the central importance of ontology for dogmatics. For Baptists, ecclesial ontology has always played a significant role in our tradition. To be a Baptist, at a bare minimum, means that one shares the core convictions of believers' baptism and regenerate church membership, both of which are concerned primarily with being. For Baptists, the ontology of the church has always been a primary concern.

When the dogmatic convictions concerning a properly theological (or ontological) objectivity combine with the Baptist commitment to ecclesial ontology, a unique and coherent vision for Baptist dogmatics emerges. Knowledge of God has a clear and natural mooring in our current ecclesial experience because **Baptist churches are composed only of those who confess to be born again in Christ.** Because of our emphasis on ecclesial ontology, for Baptists, objective theology cannot be something "out there," some knowledge of this Triune God and his incarnate Son far off in the distance. Rather, objective theology must be something "in here," a knowledge of the Triune God in the body of Christ. Further, our baptism has a distinct reality connected to it. As we join the catholic tradition of remembering our baptism in Christ in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we recall our real and true renewal in him. In this way, Baptist dogmatics takes on a uniquely ecclesial connection. To do (objective) dogmatics as a Baptist is to always do so in the communion of the regenerate church. As such, Baptist dogmatics must be ecclesial.

Covenantal Signpost

The covenantal signpost guides the believing community into its identity as the people of God and into its commitment to one another. The community is formed by the theological covenant based on the love of God and applied to those who confess faith in Christ through the soteriological covenant that unites God with his people (John 13:35). God's acts to redeem people determine the people's identity as Christ followers, and the application of this identity leads his people to live a common faith in union with one another to be a witness to God's work

in the world. Baptist dogmatics is characterized by agreement to practice the apostolic faith in such a way that the covenant community is itself a witness to the gospel which forms the community. Agreement in life and practice requires theological inquiry to help the participants know the one who united them to himself through his redeeming work and who united them to one another under the Lordship of Christ. The theological inquiry also guides participants in the church to common practice as well as common confession. The covenantal nature of Baptist life guides theologians.

Confessional Signpost

The confessional signpost reminds us that theology is practiced as the church confesses its faith to one another and to the world. Baptist dogmatics begins from the gospel confession—Jesus, Lord and Christ, according to the Scripture. Christians theologize both to understand the gospel and to better articulate their confession. Both ends of the confessional spectrum are essential to proper dogmatics. Furthermore, because the task begins and ends with confession, the work done between those ends is guided by the confessional nature of dogmatics.

This signpost connects with Baptists' well-known focus on missions. Baptists have been distinctly missional—not by doctrinal uniqueness, but by cultural emphasis. We are a missional people. Baptists expect that when Christians speak the gospel, those words are powerful. We expect that as we preach Christ, people across the street and around the world will hear and believe. Those who hear and believe profess their confession of the gospel and are sent to continue that confession inside the church and to the ends of the earth. Integrating Christian theology and the Christian life for Baptists requires that theological language be living and active. Baptist dogmatics must be communicative and empowered by the Spirit. Baptist dogmatics must be confessional.

Conclusion

Baptist dogmatics describes the theological study and articulation of the doctrines of the Christian faith in a distinctly Baptist voice. While Baptist dogmaticians share much in common, we do not propose that all in our community use the same theological method or draw the same theological conclusions. Indeed, Baptist theology is not standardized. Differences among our theologians are many. We are Baptists, after all. However, we share a gospel confession in our baptism, a conviction about the regenerate church. We are conditioned by our common commitment to the authority of Scripture, and we find a communal tradition in the ways Baptists have confessed the Christian faith. We believe our

tradition carries distinctive and formative hallmarks, which we have expressed in the four planks of Baptist dogmatics—historic, covenantal, ecclesial, and confessional. We theologize within the Great Tradition, seeking to join Christians in confessing the faith "once for all delivered to the Saints." More specifically, *we theologize within our shared experience in the believing church and its practice of faith as we consider the New Covenant reality that we are a people in union with Christ and in union with one another.* We do dogmatics from within this covenantal reality and for this covenantal people—the believing church. These claims give us a particular vocation to the theological task; namely, to confess for theological formation and missional faithfulness as a believing people who seek to know the love of God in the Lord Jesus Christ and who seek to invite the world to have this same knowledge.

Interview with Timothy George

Editor's note: Timothy George originally gave this interview as a presentation to the 2022 Baptist Dogmatics Roundtable participants. Through the interview, he shares formative impact of his upbringing, pastoral ministry experience, and academic pedigree to tell the story of how he became a theologian. He was a Baptist boy from the backwoods who grew up to pastor a church in inner city Boston while being shaped by the most significant movers and shakers of mid-20th century American theology. He has practiced convictional ecumenism in contentious contexts and tutored a generation in theological retrieval before many of us knew dogmatics existed. At the end of the interview, he provides a critical engagement of the Baptist Dogmatics Manifesto. We have taken his feedback with great sincerity and made changes to the Manifesto. The revised version of the Manifesto will be published in Confessing Christ.[1]

Tell us about how you became a theologian.

Well, I never intended to be. Karl Barth tells us that when he was 10 years old, he went into dinner one night with a complete plan of his, all of his "collected works" to present to the family. Jaroslav Pelikan was a mere 14 years old when he went to see Wilhelm Pauck at the University of Chicago and said, "I want to do a PhD with you" and on the spot outlined *The Christian Tradition*, in its entirety.

There are some people like that, but I'm not one of them. Luther said, "I became a theologian not by reading or writing or speculating, but by living, dying and being damned—this is what makes one a theologian." So how did that happen to me? It did not happen easily and not by any predictable line of progression.

How do you think your early life impacted your development as a theologian?

Growing up in the American South, I was nurtured in a community

of faith that was part of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, but had no idea that this was so. I never heard those words used to describe the church. We were separatist Baptists. We were also dogmatic, but in a very bad sense of that word—being quarrelsome, self-assertive, guilty of the two major diseases that afflict the church today: amnesia and myopia. That was the background I brought to the study of theology as a young student. It began very early for me, even though I came from a family that was, in every sense of the word, on the margins of respectable society.

We lived in a neighborhood that was actually racially integrated in the 1950s. It was integrated, not because we were uppity liberals trying to make a social statement, but simply because we couldn't afford to live anywhere else. There was a small Unitarian church in my neighborhood, and I remember stopping by there one day to challenge the minister as to why he did not baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as the Bible says one should. I recall being surprised to discover that not only did he not baptize in the name of the Holy Trinity, he didn't baptize at all. This was a strange kind of church! There was also a Roman Catholic church in my town, and I remember calling the priest one day to ask why the Roman Catholic Church had such unbiblical teachings about purgatory, Mary, and the Mass.

For some reason, those kinds of questions were percolating in my mind at that very early age. But it was really through my great uncle, Willy Nash, who lived next door to me in that same little community, that I really learned to become a theologian. Uncle Willy was a Mormon, a convert to Mormonism. He devoted his life to converting me to becoming a Mormon preacher, or as he would put it, a Mormon missionary.

He brought the missionaries from his church to give me religious instruction. We talked about all kinds of things—golden plates, marriage in the temple, the celestial underwear, baptism for the dead, and where the Baptist church came from. We discussed those issues at great length. I scoured the Bible for deeper answers and also read from first to last the Book of Mormon.

This was my introduction to theology. When I think about it now, that's how I learned to become a theologian—by arguing about theology with Uncle Willy and the Mormon missionaries on the front porch in the hot summertime in a section of Chattanooga, Tennessee, called Hell's Half Acre.

After finishing high school, I enrolled at the state university in my hometown where I majored in history and philosophy. Almost all of my teachers were graduates of the University of Chicago. This was in the sixties, near the end of the so called "Death of God" movement. It was

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[1] Steven A. McKinion, Christine E. Thornton, and Keith S. Whitfield, eds., *Confessing Christ: An Invitation to Baptist Dogmatics* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academics, forthcoming).

there, before I went to Harvard, that I experienced a real crisis of faith and faced issues I had never before encountered in my devout Baptist culture.

How did your experiences at Harvard Divinity School shape you as a theologian?

I wish I had $5 for every time somebody has said to me, "How did a person as conservative as you are study at Harvard Divinity School?" The quick answer is I went through there, but I didn't come from there! I came from people who believed the Bible, who loved Jesus Christ, and were committed to the church. Somehow the real stuff of the Christian faith was conveyed to me by osmosis.

Then, when I went to Harvard Divinity School, I discovered several other things that contributed greatly to my becoming a theologian. One is the importance of doing theology in stereo. I was not only studying day in and day out for seven years, I was also a pastor of an inner-city church in Boston—First Baptist Church of Chelsea, Massachusetts. So, as I was learning to study the Scriptures and the patterns of Christian faith throughout history, as my mind was being stretched in all kinds of ways, I'd have to come home at night to deal with what we call the street kids, many of whom became attached to our little church. These were young people that had been won to faith in Christ from the streets of Chelsea. Many of them came from a life of drugs and dysfunction.

Doing divinity school and at the same time serving as a pastor was very important for me. It still is important for how I understand what theological education should be about. It's not simply pursuing the life of the mind and learning, what used to be called the body of divinity. It also has to do with the stuff that happens on the street corners and in the neighborhoods.

Who were some of the people at Harvard Divinity School who had the most significant impact on you?

I did come in contact at Harvard with some of the great figures of the day in terms of theology. Let me just mention four or five of them. They'll be known to some of you. First of all, my Dean at Harvard Divinity School was Krister Stendahl, a Lutheran who later became the Bishop of Stockholm in Sweden. He was certainly not an evangelical in my sense of the word, but he was a person of the church and a great scholar of the Gospel of Matthew.

Every Friday morning in Divinity Hall, he would put on his elaborate Lutheran vestments and lead a Eucharistic service. There were never any more than five or six people who went. I was one of them. I said to him one day, "Krister," (He wanted us to call him Krister. This was the six-

ties.) I said, "Krister, why do you do all this? There are only a handful of us that have any interest in what you're doing on Friday mornings, and you go to all this trouble for just five or six of us." And he said, "I do this because it is a part of my job as the Dean of Harvard Divinity School—to be a leader in the spiritual life and worship of the community." That made a deep impression on me at the time and it still does today.

Another great teacher I had during those years was David C. Steinmetz. He spent a year or two at Harvard as a visiting professor and ended up on my doctoral examination committee. To this day, I've never had a better classroom teacher than David Steinmetz. He made history and theology come alive in the way he lectured, showing what was really important about the ideas and figures we were talking about. From David Steinmetz I learned that it was a mortal sin for teachers to make the study of history boring!

Another person was Heiko Augustinus Oberman. He was from the Dutch reformed tradition—a great Reformation scholar, a person who was very passionate about what he believed and how he dealt with students. I was his teaching fellow and several times had to intervene when things got very sticky in his dealings with students. But he taught us to bring everything we do as scholars—reading, thinking, lecturing, publishing—into the presence of the living God.

The fourth person I would mention was Jaroslav Pelikan. He was at Yale and not Harvard (no one can be perfect). Even so, he became a friend and mentor to me, and I probably learned more from him than anyone else about the craft of historical theology.

Finally, my major professor was George Huntston Williams, best known for his book, *The Radical Reformation*, first published in 1962 and still in print today. It is a *magnum opus* by any reckoning of that term. However, he considered that not to be his greatest work, but simply as he put it a "fresh trench" he had to dig to get on to other things. He was a medievalist by training.

He had been grounded in patristics by his teachers and later explored Celtic monasticism, American Christianity, and much more. He had the idea that a historian should be a generalist. He aimed to write a book which he would call, *The New Testament People and Ecumenical History of Christianity with Allusion at all Important Nodal Points with Judaism and Islam*. He got around to writing the title but he never finished the book. You can see why it never was completed! It belongs to the ranks of unfinished masterpieces like the great *Summa* of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*.

George Williams had a tremendous influence on me, not only histor-

ically in terms of his methodology, but also because he gave attention to the people on the margins—the people who didn't really matter. The big names he knew well, but he was interested in the Anabaptists or the Celtic monks, or the Polish Brethren. He said, "No group is too small. No group is too particular. No group is too weird but that it deserves your full unguarded attention." Relatedly, he said that "Heresies, even heresies, serve a constructive purpose in the life of the church." These are ideas I still retain today.

George Williams was also a Protestant observer at all five sessions of the Second Vatican Council and became a personal friend with Pope John Paul II when he was still a Bishop in Poland in Krakow. It was Williams who introduced me to that world and in some ways infused in me the bug of ecumenism that still inhabits me today.

We all know you as both a Reformation scholar with deep Protestant convictions, but also as a person of the church with a passion for ecumenism. Can you share some of your thoughts on the Reformation and ecumenism?

When you think about the Reformation and ecumenism, Pelikan gave us a phrase helpful to think about—the Reformation as a "tragic necessity." I like that term a "tragic necessity." Now there are many people who will latch onto one side of that or the other—the Reformation as a tragedy because of the division, because of all of the mutual recrimination. There are others (I would put myself in this category) who want to talk about the necessity of the Reformation—the good things that we garner from the Reformation, like the unfolding of the great doctrine of justification by faith alone. There's a necessity about this teaching that is rooted in the gospel itself. In our ecumenical discussion we are often tempted to jump over the Reformation, to leapfrog back to the early church.

I think this is a grave and tragic mistake because we cannot go from our present moment back to the pristine early church without going through the struggles and the hardships of the 16th and 17th centuries because that's our history too. There's a verse in the Gospel of John which describes Jesus's going from Galilee to Jerusalem saying, "he must needs to go through Samaria" (John 4:4). That's the King James Version. He had to go through Samaria. There was another way he could have gone, but no, he must needs go through Samaria. He had business to accomplish there. Well, we must needs also to go through Samaria, through the Reformation, in our effort to recover the Great Tradition.

This is true theologically as well. Again, I'll quote Pelikan, "If the Holy Trinity was as holy as the Trinitarian dogma taught, and if original

sin was as virulent as the Augustinian tradition said it was, and if Christ was as necessary as the Christological dogma implied, then the only way to treat justification in a manner faithful to the Catholic tradition was to teach justification by faith alone."[2] Now, those are the words of a Lutheran who's thought a lot about the Reformation.

Pelikan later ceased to be a Protestant and became Eastern Orthodox. We need not follow him in that way, but he makes good sense to me when he talks about how the Reformation message, the central material principle of the Reformation, is itself an implication of the dogma of the early church.

We know that you've read our Baptist Dogmatics Manifesto. Do you have any responses or suggestions for our project?

Thank you for sharing it with me. I have four or five comments.

The first has to do with definitions. I would encourage you to make a distinction between three different terms: Dogma, dogmas and dogmatic.

First of all, dogma. Dogma, as I see it, is the presupposition of all theology, the whole living act of Christ and his saving work, his self-revelation as the Savior and Lord within his church. That's the Dogma, capital D.

Another word which you use in your document is deposit of faith, *depositum fidei*, the saving happening of Jesus Christ, attested in Holy Scripture. This is the fundamental fact, the central dogma from which all other dogmas and subsidiary doctrines derive. That's what we mean when we talk about the Dogma that is at the heart of the Great Tradition.

Second, dogmas are what is expressed in our creeds and confessions of faith, our liturgies and hymns, which we examine from various perspectives. We study them, their historical origin, their theological language, their theological intent, their interconnectedness, always knowing that the dogmas point beyond themselves to something greater than themselves.

When our children were quite small, our family lived in Switzerland for a year. We bought an old car, and I tried to drive across the Alps on a number of different occasions. It was scary and dangerous. If you've ever gone from Zurich to northern Italy, you'll encounter a lot of twist and turns along the way. I became ever more appreciative of the guard-

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[2] Jaroslav Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964)*, 50–51.

rails that kept us on the road, that kept us from making a horrible turn here or there leading to imminent death. That was always a danger, but the guardrails were our friends. They were there to protect us. They were there to guard us from making terrible mistakes.

In some ways I think of the dogmas, the creeds and confessions of the church as like those guardrails. They serve a protective function for us. Now we don't drive on them. We don't take our car and try to drive on the guardrails. If we do, then we are in danger of imminent death, but we stay on the road and the guardrails help us to stay on the road. The road is Jesus Christ. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, but we need those guardrails on both the right and the left to keep us on the road.

Third, dogmatics is the recovery of Dogma through the reverent and critical study of the dogmas. I want both of those words to be under-lined. We don't just come to the task of dogmatics apart from having first wrestled with these.

In your manifesto, I'd like to hear you say a little more of what you mean about the fact that you're not pursuing here a speculative or con-structive work. I think I know what you mean, and I think I agree. Dogmatics is not speculative in the sense that there's no ground for wandering here or there. This was Calvin's great warning to the church of his day. We're not going to engage in speculation.

We do theology within the limits of revelation alone, but surely it's constructive in some ways. It should obviously not be destructive. What you mean by "not constructive" is that you are not constructing some-thing on your own apart from authorized authority. Both of those are well taken points that you make in the Manifesto, a dogmatics that is neither speculative nor constructive, but that dogmatics is *derived*. It's derived in its authority, from the written Word of God, read in the life of the community of faith across time, as well as within the local cove-nanted congregation.

Let me say a word about another emphasis you make right up front in your document. You say that you're concerned with the final inten-tion of a Baptist dogmatics: spiritual formation. I think you can't over emphasize that too much. Part of the problem of interpreting this to Baptist people in the pews or those who may read your books is that they will be looking with suspicion at what you're writing and see it as somehow a kind of arid intellectualism divorced from the life of faith, divorced from the life of prayer.

I once supervised a ThM thesis by Mark Dever on John Leadley Dagg. He was the person who wrote the first systematic theology text-book, the *Manual of Theology*, used at Southern Seminary when it was

founded in 1859. Dever quotes the opening lines of the *Manual of Theolo-gy*: "The study of religious truth ought to be undertaken and prosecuted from a sense of duty, and with a view to the improvement of the heart. When learned, it ought not to be laid on the shelf, as an object of specu-lation; but it should be deposited deep in the heart, where its sanctifying power ought to be felt. To study theology, for the purpose of gratifying curiosity, or preparing for a profession, is an abuse and profanation of what ought to be regarded as most holy. To learn things pertaining to God, merely for the sake of amusement, or secular advantage, or to grat-ify the mere love of knowledge, is to treat the Most High with con-tempt."[3]

Those words were written a long time ago, but I think they still are relevant today. Spiritual formation means that you have a lively sense of who God is and what he's about. You have what J. I. Packer used to call a full-sized view of God—a God who is greater than anything you can imagine. Where do we find such a God? In the Holy Scriptures? Yes. And in the world he has made, the creation. Both the *opera dei* and the *oraclua dei* bear witness to the God who spoke and speaks still.

This prompts us not simply to know in an intellectual way, but also with our heart and mind and soul. No one said it better than Saint Au-gustine in that wonderful 27th chapter of book 10 of the *Confessions* in which he addresses God, "You called, shouted, broke through my deaf-ness; you flared, blazed, banished my blindness; you lavished you fra-grance, I grasped, and now I pant for you; I tasted you, and I hunger and thirst; you touched me, and I burned for your peace."[4] That's a per-son who has spent time in the presence of God and who calls us even in doing theology to do it, as Barth says in *Evangelical Theology*, with both a window wide open to the world and a skylight open to heaven above. I commend you on that desire to connect Baptist dogmatics to spiritual formation, not understood simply as a course in the curriculum, but as a whole modality of Christian life.

You also mentioned in the manifesto how the Great Tradition you're seeking to recover in a Baptist vein is connected to the four Baptist dis-tinctives, or the four principles that give Baptists their distinctive casting

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[3] John Leadley Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (Charleston: Southern Baptist Publi-cation Society, 1857), 13.

[4] Augustine, *The Confessions, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, trans. Maria Boulding, ed. John E. Rotelle (New York: New City Press, 2012), 262.

within the body of Christ: religious liberty, believers' baptism, the regenerate church, and local church autonomy. I would gently suggest that you revisit the word "autonomy" and maybe think instead of something like the rule of Christ. That's really what we mean when we're talking about the rule of Jesus Christ in his church, isn't it? That might be a task you would want to take on as you explore this even further.

Religious freedom, believers baptism, a regenerate church membership, and the rule of Christ expressed in the congregation of God's people—how exactly are these four Baptist distinctives related to the Great Tradition of which we are a part, which we want to retrieve and reclaim and propagate for others in the past?

I have sometimes used the image of fences and foundations. There's a kind of Baptist theology and Baptist historiography that focuses on these distinctives as markers of Baptist identity over this or that denomination or church down the road. They're fences. We paint them. We're proud of them. Fences can also keep people out as well as keep people in.

At times we put so much emphasis on these fences that I think that we neglect the foundations. Now fences are nice and needed. But if the foundations are eroded, your fences are not going to be very good for very long. It's possible for one to accept all four of these Baptist distinctives and still be a raving heretic. Just take believers' baptism, for example. One of the people who advocated that and practiced that in the 16th century was Michael Servetus. He was not only an anti-Trinitarian. He was also an Anabaptist in the sense that he taught and practiced re-baptism by immersion.

These fences don't really serve the purpose of a robust sense of Baptist identity. I'm not arguing that you eliminate them, but that you find a connection to express them in terms of the Great Tradition.

Next, a word about Scripture. In your manifesto, you commit yourself to treating Scripture as both propositional and narratival. It seems to me that it's very important to hold onto both of those over against whatever trends that hermeneutics might be afoot today. John 1:14 brings them together beautifully: the Word, *Logos,* became flesh, *egenito sarx.*

Read the Bible alongside those who have come before us and be informed by them. The history of Jesus, isn't just an interesting side thing. It ought to be very central to the way we come and study the Scriptures. Not in any way compromising what James Leo Garrett taught us to call *suprema scripture.* I think that phrase was first found, as far as I can tell, in Benjamin Keach, but Dr. Garrett lifted it up and made it shine for many of us in our generation. That's what we mean when we talk about *sola*

scriptura, that Scripture is the supreme standard by which all other lesser authorities are measured.

The final thing I want to say is about the word "missional," because that word comes up in your description of what you were about. How could it not in a Baptist dogmatics? When we think of missional, we think of the Great Commission. We are most familiar with the Matthean version of this great text (Matt 28:19–20). But there's another variant, not as prominent in our discourse, but it's certainly there in the New Testament. It is the Johannine version in John 20:21, where Jesus says, "As the Father has sent me, so also send I you." We do missions, not simply to go and tell and baptize and teach, but we also do it in the way that Jesus did it. We do it in conformity to his pattern of mission of preaching and of teaching. We need to have *the habitus* of theology, not just the knowledge and not just the information we glean. We also need a demeanor, a virtue of gentleness, of meekness, of humility that allows us to be the missional people of God that we ought to be in a world of contention and craziness that we live in today.

Retrieval for the Sake of Renewal: Timothy George's Methodology

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Abstract: *This article explores the theology of retrieval of prominent historical theologian Timothy George, highlighting his emphasis on the importance of reclaiming the past for the present. George's approach to historical theology is examined within his identity as a Christian, an evangelical, and a Baptist. He proposes a hierarchy of ecclesial identity, where his primary identity is as a Trinitarian Christian belonging to the whole company of the redeemed across time. George's work involves understanding the Church's oneness, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. He advocates for an ecumenical approach to theology, understanding the Church's universal nature, while also valuing denominational distinctives. He stresses the need for retrieval to counteract spiritual amnesia and to aid in the progressive holiness of the Church. George's commitment to biblical interpretation within the broader historical context helps foster a deeper understanding of the Scriptures and contributes to the ongoing growth of the Church. His work provides a model for theologians to engage with the past, promoting unity, renewal, and a richer understanding of their ecclesial identity within the context of the Christian tradition.*

Key Words: *Baptist theology, Church, historical theology, retrieval, Timothy George*

As a prominent historical theologian, Timothy George emphasized throughout his teaching and writing ministry the vital need to retrieve the past for the sake of the present.[1] In the 1980s George began his church history course at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary with this memorable statement: "My task is to convince you that there was someone between your grandmother and Jesus, and it matters."[2] He discovered early in his teaching career that his students needed help grounding their understanding of the faith in the history of the church. "I found that students knew little, if anything, about those pioneers of the past," he reflected, and because of that, he said, "I wanted to encourage a program of réssourcement—not a return to 'the good old days' but an appropriation of the warranted wisdom and spiritual insight they can offer to the church today."[3] This article examines Timothy George's theology of retrieval by examining his approach to historical theology as a convictional Baptist within the Great Tradition, and by doing so, it seeks to advance ongoing conversations among Baptists in particular about the importance of retrieval in contemporary theology and practice.

George's Background

Despite growing up in poverty-stricken Hell's Half-Acre in Chattanooga, Tennessee, George's passion for learning and his determination to rise above his circumstances led him to pursue a rigorous education at Harvard University. These formative experiences played a crucial role in shaping the strength of his scholarship and the intensity of his concern for the practical application of historical theology in the lives of believers today. His contribution in these areas elevated his voice as a Baptist theologian both for Baptists and for the wider evangelical movement. From 1978 until 1988, George taught church history and historical theology to students preparing for ministry at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Gregory Wills describes him as an "intellectual leader among Southern Baptist conservatives."[4] In 1989 he founded Beeson Divinity School of Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama, and now teaches as the Distinguished Professor of Divinity. At Beeson he established a History and Doctrine sequence of study that goes beyond the categories of church history or systematic theology. He held leadership roles in the SBC and the Baptist World Alliance, using the wisdom from the past to navigate and discern the fads and dangers of the present. He holds a key role in the evangelicals and Catholics Together dialogue. He also served as a senior editor and executive editor for *Christianity Today*. George's influence within the context of North American evangelicalism, Reformation studies, and theo-

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[1] Portions of this article have been revised and adapted from Christopher Hanna, "Evangelical Ecumenism," in *Retrieval for the Sake of Renewal: Timothy George as a Historical Theologian* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2022).

[2] See "Timothy George," http://archives.sbts.edu/the-history-of-the-sbts/our-professors/timothy-george/.

[3] Timothy George, "The *SBJT* Forum: Profiles of Expository Preaching," *SBJT* 8 (1999): 111.

[4] Gregory Wills, *Southern Baptist Seminary 1859–2009* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 511.

logical education establishes the significance of capturing his vision for an evangelical method of retrieval.

Timothy George's Ecclesial Identity

This article analyzes George's ecclesial identity as a Christian, evangelical, and Baptist and how the four marks of the church encapsulate the major themes of his work to explore the essence and implications of his methodology of retrieval. Proposing a "hierarchy of ecclesial identity,"[5] he presents an insight into his self-perception within the Christian communion, his interactions with other Christians as a historical theologian, and his approach to historical theology. In this context, he positions himself as "a Protestant, an evangelical, and a Baptist" in a hierarchical relationship.[6] However, he does not accept these descriptions as his "spiritual and ecclesial identity at the most basic core level."[7] While he does not minimize these traits, he does not personally see them as his central identity. Rather, these ecclesial traits are, for George, "important markers of my place within the community of faith."[8] He explains, "There is a more primary identity I must confess: I am a Trinitarian Christian who by the grace of God belongs to the whole company of the redeemed through the ages, those who are 'very members incorporate in the mystical body' of Christ (*Book of Common Prayer*)."[9] In essence, he identifies not only as a member of his denomination in his time but also as a member of the whole body of Christ throughout all time.

In proposing a hierarchy of ecclesial identity as a model for organizing theological priorities, George draws on an approach to levels of doctrine that he learned from Catholic theologians, who refer to a "hierarchy of truths."[10] In clarifying the concept of "hierarchy of truths,"[11] George explains that Catholic theologians do not intend to suggest "that some truths are truer than others or that the Catholic faithful are free to

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[5] Timothy George, "Why I Am an Evangelical and a Baptist," in *Why We Belong: Evangelical Unity and Denominational Diversity,* ed. Anthony L. Chute, Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 94.

[6] George, "Why I Am an Evangelical and a Baptist," 94.

[7] George, "Why I Am an Evangelical and a Baptist," 94.

[8] George, "Why I Am an Evangelical and a Baptist," 94.

[9] George, "Why I Am an Evangelical and a Baptist," 94.

[10] George, "Is Jesus a Baptist?," para. 1. Vatican II's *Decree on Ecumenism* includes this concept. See Flannery, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 11.

[11] George, "Is Jesus a Baptist?," para. 1.

pick and choose among the teachings of their church as they please."[12] Observing that "It means, rather, that in the economy of divine revelation, more theological weight, as it were, is given to those teachings that relate directly to the foundational truths of the Christian faith,"[13] he highlights the perspective behind this concept. The truths that are *in accordance* with foundational truths carry more weight, while the truths that are only *in relation* to foundational truths carry less weight. Likewise, George's identity is first as a Christian, second as an evangelical, and third as a Baptist provides a unique point of view from which he carries on his work of retrieval.

Timothy George's Identity as a Christian

Using the story of Polycarp's martyrdom as an example, George emphasizes the central importance of Christian identity rather than other secondary labels or loyalties. He writes, "When Polycarp of Smyrna, a disciple of the apostle John, was brought before the Roman tribunal before being cast into the arena with wild beasts, he confessed publicly the faith that he knew would lead to his certain martyrdom."[14] George imagines what the possible labels could have been, which Polycarp could have self-associated. Ultimately, he points to Polycarp's confession to make his claim about the centrality of Christian identity. Reflecting on Polycarp's potential labels, he explains, "In that critical moment, Polycarp did not say, 'I am a Paulinist. I am a Petrist. I am an Ignatian' (after his great contemporary Ignatius of Antioch). Nor did he say, 'I am an Irenaean' (after his famous disciple, Irenaeus of Lyon). Rather he confessed, 'Christianus sum' ('I am a Christian')."[15] Polycarp's confession of Christian identity amidst the severe persecution of the early church is a challenge to contemporary Christians today to prioritize their commitment to Christ above all other labels. George firmly believes that Chris-

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[12] George, "Is Jesus a Baptist?," para. 1.

[13] George, "Is Jesus a Baptist?," para. 1. For a recent evangelical use of a hierarchical approach to theological truths, see Gavin Ortlund, *Finding The Right Hills To Die On: The Case For Theological Triage* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020). George also points out how Aquinas, in a similar way, distinguishes between articles of faith that are secundum se and others in ordine ad alia. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica Volume 2:II–II*, q.1, a.6. George recommends "the excellent study by the Capuchin scholar William Henn" ("The Hierarchy of Truths Twenty Years Later," *Theological Studies* 48 [1987]: 439–71).

[14] George, "Why I Am an Evangelical and a Baptist," 94.

[15] George, "Why I Am an Evangelical and a Baptist," 94.

tian identification with the person and work of Jesus Christ is a spiritual identity worth dying for in the first and the twenty-first centuries.

The Need for Particularity: Timothy George's Identity as Evangelical

Although George's commitment to Christ is above all labels, it is not without any labels. He warns, "Yet the desire for a Christianity shorn of all particularity carries its own risks."[16] He gives biblical and historical examples of how this has already been attempted and failed.

A biblical example is instructive for George: "The Corinthian church of the New Testament had its own 'factious titles': the Paul-party, the Peter-sect, the Apollos-coterie."[17] He explains how these divisions resulted in frustration, and "another group in the church at Corinth arose claiming to have no mere human leader at all: 'We belong to Christ,' they said."[18] This alternative did not prove to be an adequate solution because "the Christ-party at Corinth was soon beset by the same spirit of arrogance and divisiveness that marked all the other partisan groups in the congregation."[19] This example in the New Testament demonstrates that ecclesial identity should not enable arrogance and divisiveness; solely claiming Christ does not exempt someone from these pitfalls.

To demonstrate "a recurring theme throughout the history of the church,"[20] George selects a representative historical example. He refers to the attempt by Alexander Campbell in the nineteenth century, who tried "to eliminate denominational labels and restore the one true Christian church."[21] Campbell's attempt failed.[22] George explains, "Within a single generation, his movement had subdivided into several distinct and often mutually hostile church bodies."[23] He says that Campbell's failure should not surprise "anyone familiar with the history of Presbyterians in Scotland, Lutherans in America, Reformed churches in the Netherlands,

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[16] George, "Is Jesus a Baptist?," para. 4.
[17] George, "Is Jesus a Baptist?," para. 4.
[18] George, "Is Jesus a Baptist?," para. 4.
[19] George, "Is Jesus a Baptist?," para. 4.
[20] George, "Is Jesus a Baptist?," para. 4.
[21] George, "Is Jesus a Baptist?," para. 4.
[22] For an evaluation of Alexander Campbell's movement and engagement with the Baptist tradition, see Timothy George, "Southern Baptist Ghosts," *First Things* 93 (1999): 18–24.
[23] George, "Is Jesus a Baptist?," para. 4.

Anglicans in Africa, and Baptists almost anywhere."[24] As such, George offers both a biblical and historical model for the need for a more narrow category in which one should identify his role within the communion of faith.

As George applies the need for particularity to his own identity within the Christian communion, he places evangelical as the next tier below his Christian identity. In 1999 George wrote "If I'm an Evangelical, What Am I?"[25] In his argument, he contends that evangelicals "lay claim to the doctrinal legacy of the Reformation, the missionary and evangelistic impulse of the Great Awakening, and a trans-denominational fellowship of Bible-believing Christians with whom we share a common commitment to the Word of God and the task of world evangelization."[26] In George's view, evangelicalism is best described as "a renewal movement within historic Christian orthodoxy."[27] Therefore, "it cannot be equated with any one denomination."[28] Instead, he views evangelicalism by its theological commitments.[29]

According to George, evangelicals are firmly located within Christian orthodoxy and in line with it: "Evangelicals stand in continuity with the Great Tradition of Christian believing, confessing, worshiping and acting through the centuries, while not discounting the many local histories that must be written to give a full account of Christian communities in any given era."[30] In George's view of evangelicalism, he identifies four theological commitments. The first theological commitment is the "trinitarian and Christological consensus of the early church."[31] The second theological commitment is "the formal and material principles of the Reformation."[32] The third theological commitment is "the missionary

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[24] George, "Is Jesus a Baptist?," para. 4.
[25] Timothy George, "If I'm an Evangelical, What Am I?" *Christianity Today* 43 (1999): 62.
[26] George and Dockery, *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, 7.
[27] George, "Is Jesus a Baptist?," para. 5.
[28] George, "Is Jesus a Baptist?," para. 5.
[29] See James Packer and Thomas Oden, *One Faith: The Evangelical Consensus* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 19–20. Packer and Oden also use a theological approach to defining evangelicalism. For a recent historical examination of evangelicalism, see Thomas Kidd, *Who Is an Evangelical? The History of a Movement in Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).
[30] George, "Is Jesus a Baptist?," para. 5.
[31] George, "Is Jesus a Baptist?," para. 5.
[32] George, "Is Jesus a Baptist?," para. 5.

movement that grew out of the Great Awakening."[33] The fourth theological commitment is "the new stirrings of the Spirit that indicate 'surprising works of God' are still happening in the world today."[34]

Timothy George's Baptist Identity

George's Baptist identity forms the bottom tier of his ecclesial identity. In establishing his place as a Baptist, though, he never leaves behind his identity as a Christian and an evangelical. Rather, he understands his role as a Baptist in the community of faith in relation to the two preceding tiers. In doing so, George offers a clarion call for Baptists to understand our unique place within the Great Tradition, not as an isolated sect outside of it.

Throughout the early stages of his Christian journey, George began developing his Baptist identity and later reinforced that identity through his own theological reflection. In retelling his story, he explains, "I am a Baptist because it was through the witness of a small Baptist church that I first heard the gospel of Jesus Christ."[35] He also grew in his spiritual journey through the ministry of his Baptist church: "Many of the things I still believe in I first learned in that modest Baptist community of faith."[36] Having come to know Christ through a Baptist church, he continued to grow as a Christian in a Baptist church.

While George's Baptist identity was influenced by his early conversion and formation, he intentionally embraced it after much careful reflection and study. Further, in this season of development he reinforced his Baptist identity in relation to the other two components of his ecclesial identity. Reflecting on his journey, he recalls, "I came to see that being a Baptist was for me the most faithful way of being an evangelical, a Protestant, and a Christian."[37] It was when he "studied the Bible more

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[33] George, "Is Jesus a Baptist?," para. 5.

[34] George, "Is Jesus a Baptist?," para. 5.

[35] George, "Why I Am an Evangelical and a Baptist," 108.

[36] George, "Why I Am an Evangelical and a Baptist," 108. George mentions the doctrine of Christology and atonement. He says, "Jesus loves me and died on the cross for my sins." He formed a strong conviction about the Bible during this time:" The Bible is the totally true and trustworthy Word of God." He had a basic anthropology "that all human beings are made in the image of God and are infinitely precious in his sight." His calling to the ministry: "When I was called to preach the gospel, it was in a Baptist church that I was set apart and ordained as a minister of the divine Word."

[37] George, "Why I Am an Evangelical and a Baptist," 108.

deeply"[38] and "became aware of many other church traditions, doctrines, and denominations"[39] that his "Baptist convictions grew stronger."[40] As such, George positions the Baptist tradition in line with historical Christianity: "Baptists are orthodox Christians who stand in continuity with the dogmatic consensus of the early church on matters such as the scope of Holy Scripture (canon), the doctrine of God (Trinity), and the person and work of Jesus Christ (Christology)."[41] Further, he sees his Baptist commitments as the best way to be an evangelical. In his line of reasoning, he explains, "If evangelicalism at its best is a renewal movement within the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church, then the Baptist tradition represents a renewal within the renewal."[42] He places his Baptist tradition within evangelicalism, which is within historic Christianity, and so, maintaining clarity in his own hierarchy of ecclesial identity.[43]

By locating his Baptist identity within Christianity and evangelicalism, George presents an ecumenical vision for Baptists, instead of the sectarian identity some Baptists have embraced in our past. In a word of caution, he warns, "There is a fine line between retrieval for the sake of renewal and a projection of a 'Baptocentricity' (that's a word that I'm inventing), an egocentricity that is self-satisfying and self-promoting."[44] Rather, he encourages Baptists to recover and celebrate their shared commitment to Christian orthodoxy. He summarizes:

> With all true Christians, Baptists profess loyalty to Jesus Christ the Lord, the eternal Son of the heavenly Father who "For us and our salvation" became man. He died for our sins on a cross, rose triumphantly over death, ascended to the Father, and one day will come again in power and glory. In the meantime, he still reigns, rules, and redeems through the Holy Spirit.[45]

Baptists are called upon by George to recover their historic Christian commitments: "All Baptists need to cultivate a holistic orthodoxy, based

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[38] George, "Why I Am an Evangelical and a Baptist," 108.

[39] George, "Why I Am an Evangelical and a Baptist," 108.

[40] George, "Why I Am an Evangelical and a Baptist," 108.

[41] George and Dockery, *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, 5.

[42] George, "Why I Am an Evangelical and a Baptist," 102.

[43] George and Dockery, *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, 5.

[44] Timothy George, "Baptist Identity II," Lecture, Union University February 17, 2007.

[45] George, "Is Jesus a Baptist?," para. 6.

on a high view of the Scriptures and congruent with the trinitarian and Christological consensus of the early church."[46] According to his argument, there is no other way to "avoid the dangers of rigid reductionism on the one hand and liberal revisionism on the other."[47]

The Baptist movement, as George envisions it, should be understood in terms of its continuity and differences.[48] First, he establishes the continuity of Baptists with the Reformers and evangelicals: "The Baptist tradition finds a place within this narrative as a distinctive reform movement within the wider evangelical renewal, a reform within the reform, so to say."[49] Second, he distinguishes Baptists from other evangelical groups of the Reformation: "Baptists are indeed heirs of the Reformation, but they are not, nor have they ever been, mere clones of Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, the Anabaptists, or anyone else."[50] Baptists are in continuation with the Reformation yet maintain a unique and distinct ecclesial identity from the other groups of the Reformation.

In his writings, George expounds upon the Baptist tradition's unique formation and contributions. "Persecution and dissent"[51] characterized the context of Baptist beginnings. Highlighting a key historical point, he notes, "Baptists began as a small, persecuted minority in pre-revolutionary England."[52] A unique contribution of Baptists was an "intense advocacy of religious freedom and, especially in the American setting, the separation of church and state (which does not equal the divorce of religion from public life)."[53]

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[46] George and Dockery, *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, 6.

[47] George and Dockery, *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, 6.

[48] For a "good overview of Baptist history," George recommends resources for a general understanding of Baptist history: David Bebbington, *Baptists through the Centuries: A History of a Global People*, 2nd ed. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018); Anthony Chute, Nathan Finn, and Michael Haykin, *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015); H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987). See Timothy George, "A Baptist Theologian: Reflections on Anglicanism," in *The Future of Orthodox Anglicanism*, ed. Gerald McDermott (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 233.

[49] George, "Is Jesus a Baptist?," para. 6.

[50] George, "Is Jesus a Baptist?," para. 6.

[51] George, "Is Jesus a Baptist?," para. 6.

[52] Timothy George, foreword to *Baptists and the Christian Tradition: Toward an Evangelical Baptist Catholicity,* ed. Matthew Emerson, Christopher Morgan, and Lucas Stamps (Nashville: B&H, 2020), 1.

[53] George, "Foreword," to Baptists and the Christian Tradition, 1.

While George is grateful to be a Baptist, he also recognizes that his denominational affiliation has not been without its challenges: "Being a Baptist is a blessing but also sometimes a burden. From time to time, I have considered the possibility of becoming something else."[54] For example, he remembers, "I once prepared a talk called 'The Confessions of a Catholic-friendly, Pentecostal-admiring, Reformed Baptist with a Hankering after Lutheranism and a Strong Affinity for the *Book of Common Prayer*'."[55] While maintaining his Baptist identity, George acknowledges the benefits he has received from other traditions:

> Each of these ecclesial traditions, among others, has enriched my life and calling to serve the Body of Christ. Each brings distinctive treasures to our common labors *pro Christo et ecclesia.* Being a Baptist gives me all the freedom I need to appropriate as fully as I can the gifts they offer without abandoning the Baptist principles and ways that I cherish.[56]

Taking a unique standpoint, George approaches his work of retrieval in the history of the church from the interior of the church as opposed to a secular and reductionist approach. Remaining firmly grounded in the historic community of faith as a Baptist, evangelical, and Christian, he engages in the work of retrieval. His emphasis on mere Christianity opens the scope of his historical interest to the wider church, his evangelical priorities inform his theological engagement with the historical figures and documents, and his Baptist convictions shape his ecclesial perspective and personal reflection.

The Essence of George's Retrieval

As we turn our attention to George's principles of theological retrieval and historical theology, his hierarchy of ecclesial identity begins to surface with methodological relevance. As he sees himself as Baptist, evangelical, and Christian, he also frames his work as theologian with some interplay between those tiered identities. The framework of this retrieval emerges from George's foundational understanding of Church history in relation to the nature of the church as articulated in the Nicene Creed.

The foundation of George's understanding of historical theology be-

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[54] George, "Foreword," to Baptists and the Christian Tradition, 1.

[55] George, "Why I Am an Evangelical and a Baptist," 109.

[56] George, "Is Jesus a Baptist?," para. 10.

gins with George Huntston Williams and his notion of "church history as a theological discipline."[57] George defines church history as "the attempt to recall and recount the story of the people of God, in all of its manifold variations and to do so from the perspective of someone who recognizes that retelling, that reinvestigation, as his or her own story, which is to say from the perspective of faith."[58] Thus, he claims, "This is why church history is not just secular history with a little sanctimonious water of baptism thrown over it."[59]

George bases his approach on the nature and function of history, particularly emphasizing that humans are historical creatures. By our nature, all humans "are finite beings limited in two respects: by space and by time."[60] In terms of space, George expounds, "The fact that you were born in a certain place, in a particular culture, within a specific family is going to a very great extent affect the kind of person that you become. We are spatial beings."[61] In terms of time he explains, "But also the fact that you were born on a certain day, within a given decade or century or millennium is also going to place inescapable parameters around you and the kind of person you become."[62]

As finite humans, then, the purpose of studying history is "to enlarge one's coordinates to move away from that particular intersection of time and space in which we find ourselves and to gain perspective on our self and culture."[63]

We expand those coordinates, though, not by pillaging the past and placing ourselves at the center of the universe. Rather, as we broaden our historical vision, we come to see our place in the whole more clearly. George recognizes that evangelicals have an engrained proclivity to fall

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[57] Timothy George, "George Huntston Williams: A Historian for All Seasons," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 7.2 (1986): 75–93. Reprinted in Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies 51, ed. Raymond A. Mentzer, *The Contentious Triangle: Church, State and University: A Festschrift in Honor of Professor George Huntston Williams,* ed. Rodney L. Peterson and Calvin Augustine Pater (Kirksville, MO: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1999), 15–34.

[58] Timothy George, "Church History as a Theological Discipline," Lecture given at Beeson Divinity School, Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama in 2011, in Lectures on Church History, disc 1, Beeson Media Archive, 2013, 14 CDs.

[59] George, "Church History as a Theological Discipline."

[60] George, "Church History as a Theological Discipline."

[61] George, "Church History as a Theological Discipline."

[62] George, "Church History as a Theological Discipline."

[63] George, "Church History as a Theological Discipline."

prey to "the heresy of contemporaneity or, in less theological terms, the imperialism of the present."[64] Expressing his lament, he points out, "We still place ourselves, our values, our worldview at the center of history, relegating whole epochs to the Dark Ages or pre-Enlightenment culture."[65] He concludes, "Thus the Christian past, including ways earlier generations of believers have understood the Bible, becomes not so much something to be studied and appropriated as something to be ignored or overcome."[66] In relegating our church's history to irrelevance, we lose the vast resources to aid the church's ongoing growth, and so, the lack of retrieval inhibits our efforts in contemporary renewal. We also lose our historical moorings, and so, lack the ability to understand our place in space and time. In some ways, it seems George's understanding of his hierarchical ecclesial identity frames how he understands his own identity in space and time.

Theologians of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church

As George brings together his convictions about the nature and value of church history and his own position as a Christian, evangelical, and Baptist he proffers a vision for the ministry of historical theology and retrieval within the framework of the *notae ecclesiae* from the Nicene Creed. In the process, George emphasizes both the universal nature of the church across space and time and the local church in a particular place and moment in history. He summarizes, "Thus the church has both a local and a universal dimension, both a congregational and an associational form, both a covenantal and an ecumenical thrust, always and ever grounded on our confession in the one God who is forever Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."[67] The four marks of the church in the Nicene Creed provide the exemplar for the church's nature. Within that framework, George carries on the charge of his mentor, George Huntston Williams: "The two parts of the creed that the church historian is to make meaningful are *Una Sancta*, the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church; and *Communio Sanctorum*, the church as the communion

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[64] Timothy George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 23.

[65] George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers*, 23.

[66] George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers*, 23.

[67] George, "The Faith, My Faith, and the Church's Faith," 89.

of saints."[68] In committing himself to this type of work as a theologian, George brings to bear all the facets of his ecclesial identity in his ministry.

The Church Is One

The scope of historical theology should be the *one* church, rather than a single denomination or sect. In other words, historical theology should be ecumenical historiography at its best. Within this broad universal heading, local communities of denominational theologians, like Baptists, can view themselves as contributors to this larger whole. In this way, George holds to "an ecumenism of conviction, not an ecumenism of accommodation. We do not advance the cause of Christian unity by abandoning our biblical understanding of the church. But how do we hold these together?"[69] In light of this tension between conviction and unity, George offers three ways to move forward.

First, Christians should "recognize the centrality of Jesus Christ. The closer we come to Jesus Christ, the closer we come to one another as brothers and sisters in him."[70] Second, Christians should study the Bible together. George explains, "The Bible belongs to the whole people of God, not just to one denomination or church tradition. We can clarify differences and find a deeper unity by going deeper into the Scriptures."[71] Third, Christians should pray together. George writes, "Jesus prayed to his heavenly Father (John 17:21) that his disciples would be one so that the world might believe. We can join our prayer to the prayer of Jesus and in so doing become a part of its fulfillment."[72]

Theologians for *the church*, regardless of denominational conviction, must be theologians for *the whole church*. Highlighting his viewpoint, George argues, "An ecclesial theologian must also be an ecumenical theologian—ecumenical in the sound, orthodox sense of that word."[73] Expanding on this idea, he explains, "That means, a pastor theologian is concerned with the entire people of God through the ages and also with

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[68] George, "Remembering George Huntston Williams," 10:48–11:03.

[69] Berry and Hottman, "Baptists and Ecumenism: An Interview with Timothy George," *CTR* 14 (2017): 90.

[70] Berry and Hottman, "Baptists and Ecumenism," 90.

[71] Berry and Hottman, "Baptists and Ecumenism," 90.

[72] Berry and Hottman, "Baptists and Ecumenism," 90.

[73] Timothy George, foreword to *The Pastor Theologian: Resurrecting an Ancient Vision*, by Gerald Hiestand and Todd Wilson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 8.

the *missio Dei* throughout the entire *oikoumenē* today, that is, the whole inhabited world (Luke 2:1)."[74]

The relationship between the theologian's community of faith and the wider community of faith is elaborated on by George. He says, "Such pastors honor and cherish the discrete traditions from which they come, but they also know themselves to belong to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, which is the Body of Christ extended throughout time as well as space."[75] Therefore, he argues, "Theology that is truly biblical and evangelical is done for, with, and in the context of this enlarged Ecclesia for which Christ died."[76]

The metaphor of gift-exchange is used by George to illustrate the relationship between his particular community of faith and the wider community of faith: "Baptists have special gifts to offer the wider Body of Christ and also lots to learn from our fellow Christians. At Beeson, you can do both at once with grace, goodwill and gospel hospitality."[77] George notes, "One of the most important contributions that Baptists have made to the wider life of the church is the recovery of the early church practice of baptism as an adult rite of initiation signifying a committed participation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ."[78] Baptists have made other contributions to the wider church including: the necessity of personal conversion, a regenerate church, congregational governance, and religious liberty.

The Church Is Holy

The goal of historical theology should be the progressive *holiness* of the church. The task of historical theology contributes to the holiness of the church through its project of retrieval for the sake of renewal. Retrieval rescues the church from its amnesia.[79] George diagnoses the spiritual problems facing the church today: "The two major diseases of the contemporary church are spiritual amnesia (we have forgotten who we are) and ecclesiastical myopia (whoever we are, are glad we are not like

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[74] George, "Foreword," to *The Pastor Theologian*, 8.

[75] George, "Foreword," to *The Pastor Theologian*, 8.

[76] George, "Foreword," to *The Pastor Theologian*, 8.

[77] George, *Baptists at Beeson*, 5.

[78] Timothy George, "The Future of Baptist Theology," 9.

[79] Timothy George, "Remembering David Steinmetz's Quest to Free the Church from Amnesia," *Christianity Today*, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2015/december-web-only/remembering-david-steinmetz-quest-to-free-church-from-amnes.html. See also Steinmetz, "Necessity of the Past," 176.

'them'). While these maladies are not unique to the people of God called Baptists, they are perhaps most glaringly present among us."[80] George's purpose of recalling the history of God's people is renewing the holiness of God's people in the present. He reminds us, "The church on earth is holy not because it is set apart in its external organization, as though it were a sanitarium in the midst of contagion. It is holy only because it is animated by the Holy Spirit and joined with its heavenly Head, Jesus Christ."[81] It is reassuring that the positional holiness of the church is based on the person of Christ, not on the performance of the church. While the holiness of the church is secure in Christ, the church should be reawakened by the Great Tradition and rekindled to obey the greatest commandment (to love God and love our neighbor) and refocused to fulfill the Great Commission (to make disciples).

The Church Is Catholic

The source of historical theology should be an expression of *catholicity* by learning from the grand scope of the Christian tradition, best exemplified by the five-volume work *The Christian Tradition* by Jaroslav Pelikan.[82] It was Pelikan who said, "Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living."[83] There have been recent discussions within different denominations on how each can best pursue catholicity, such as Baptists in *Baptists and the Christian Tradition* (2020),[84] as well as Presbyterians in *Reformed Catholicity* (2015).[85] Mark

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[80] George and Dockery, *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, 1.
[81] Timothy George, "What I'd Like to Tell the Pope About the Church," Christianity Today, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1998/june15/8t7041.html.
[82] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* (100–600) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, vol. 2, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom* (600–1700) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, vol. 3, *The Growth of Medieval Theology* (600–1300) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, vol. 4, *Reformation of Church and Dogma* (1300–1700) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); *The Christian Tradition*, vol. 5, *Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture* (Since 1700) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).
[83] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition: The Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities for 1983* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 65.
[84] Matthew Emerson, Christopher Morgan, and Lucas Stamps, eds., *Baptists and the Christian Tradition: Toward an Evangelical Baptist Catholicity* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020).

Dever rightly observes that church catholicity "came to be used synonymously with 'orthodox'."[86]

According to George, he is a "historical theologian, whose special vocation it is to listen for and expect to find the Word of God in the documents of the church."[87] However, he does clarify the priority of biblical revelation in relation to these church confessions and creeds:

These documents are not infallible artifacts of revelation, but they do identify a consensual interpretation of the Bible within a given community of faith. For this reason, they are very useful in helping Christians to distinguish primary and secondary matters of faith. We must never forget, of course, that all such confessions are accountable to, and revisable in the light of, the Bible itself.[88]

Through his writings and interviews, George commends the "reclaiming of Baptist tradition, especially its catholicity, seen in the writings and work of a number of younger theologians."[89] He highlights the work of "the Center for Baptist Renewal, whose principal participants identify as Southern Baptists."[90] He has promoted the goals of the center by writing an article for *First Things*[91] and interviewing Luke Stamps on the Beeson podcast.[92]

The Church Is Apostolic

The history of biblical interpretation, in George's view, is not a dis-

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[85] Michael Allen and Scott Swain, *Reformed Catholicity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015).
[86] Mark Dever, *The Church* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012), 18. See also Mark Dever, "A Catholic Church: Galatians 3:26–29," in Richard D. Phillips, Philip G. Ryken, and Mark Dever, *The Church: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2004), 71–72.
[87] George, *Dogma Beyond Anathema*, 692.
[88] George, *Amazing Grace: God's Pursuit, Our Response*, 76.
[89] George, "A Baptist Theologian," in *The Future of Orthodox Anglicanism*, 231.
[90] George, "A Baptist Theologian," in *The Future of Orthodox Anglicanism*, 231.
[91] Timothy George, "Retrieval for the Sake of Renewal," *First Things*, https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2017/05/retrieval-for-the-sake-of-renewal.
[92] Timothy George, "Baptist Renewal," Beeson Podcast (MP3 Podcast), https://www.beesondivinity.com/podcast/2019/Baptist-Renewal.

traction from, but an aid to, the church's *apostolicity*. The historical theo-
logian should share a commitment to understand the content of the ap-
ostolic teaching in God's Word by engaging with the long exegetical
tradition of the church. George contributes to the church's understand-
ing of the exegetical tradition through his work *Reading Scripture with the
Reformers* and through his role as the General Editor of the *Reformation
Commentary Series*.

From an evangelical and Baptist standpoint, George defines
apostolicity. He explains, "Baptists do not define apostolicity in terms of
a literal lineal succession of duly ordained bishops who alone have au-
thority to ordain other ministers. Instead, Baptists define apostolicity in
terms of the primordial character of the gospel, the inscripturated wit-
ness of the apostles, and the succession of apostolic proclamation."[93]

Contemporary Christians, George argues, should read Scripture in
community with "the fathers, the scholastics and the reformers."[94] He
observes, however, a "dialectic of primitivism or presentism establishes
two centers of scriptural engagement—the first Christian generation,
which means the writings of the New Testament, and the most recent
generations, notably my generation."[95] He warns, "This dichotomy gov-
erns the way Scripture is read in much of the Christian community to-
day, both in liberal mainline churches and in conservative evangelical
ones. There is, we might say, a presentist imperialism of the left and a
presentist imperialism of the right."[96] Baptists are above all people of the
book, but they are not the first people to read the book. While Baptists
excel in championing biblical authority in the present, there must also be
an engagement with the biblical interpretation of the past.

In expressing his high view of the Holy Bible and the role of histori-
cal theology in its interpretation, George states: "If we are to take this
word seriously, we must engage simultaneously in a threefold hermeneu-
tical move."[97] He states that the first hermeneutical move must address
"what it meant in its original setting."[98] He categorizes this step in the
process of determining the meaning of a text as the "special task of *Old
and New Testament study*." The second hermeneutical move according to

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[93] George, "A Baptist Theologian," 242.
[94] George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers*, 23.
[95] George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers*, 23.
[96] George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers*, 23.
[97] Timothy George, "Dogma Beyond Anathema: Historical Theology in the
Service of the Church," *RevExp* (1987): 701.
[98] George, "Dogma Beyond Anathema," 701.

George is to investigate "what it means today."[99] He understands this as
the *"*combined task of biblical, systematic, and practical theology."[100]
The third hermeneutical move focuses on "what it has meant through-
out the vast continuum of the Christian experience."[101] He claims that
this question regarding the history of biblical exegesis is the "special task
of historical theology."[102] Just as Gerhard Ebeling claimed, "Church
history is the history of the exposition of Scripture."[103]

Thus, George provides contemporary Baptist theologians with a
model for historical theology and retrieval in which we can seek to con-
tribute to the universal church, foster renewal in our ecclesial sanctifica-
tion, reinforce our catholicity, and offer the contribution of our apostol-
ic convictions. In doing so, we locate ourselves rightly in our own space
and time.

The Implications of George's Retrieval

Retrieval in the Seminary

To borrow imagery from C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, The Witch and the
Wardrobe*, Timothy George's perspective of historical theology is the
wardrobe that seminary students can walk through to get to Narnia, an
exciting new place where they discover the wonderful works of Augus-
tine, Aquinas, Calvin, Luther, Wesley, and many others. In many ways,
George's vision of Beeson Divinity School is the embodiment of
George's convictions about the nature of history, theological and hierar-
chical ecclesial identities.

With conviction, George asserts, "At Beeson we practice an ecumen-
ism of conviction, not an ecumenism of accommodation."[104] He ex-
plains the unique ecumenical seminary environment of Beeson Divinity
School: "Our charter documents call for us to be Christian, Protestant,
evangelical, and interdenominational. We also like the words 'catholic,'
'orthodox,' 'Reformational,' and 'ecumenical.' Beeson is a place where
Baptists and Anglicans alike, along with believers from many other de-

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[99] George, "Dogma Beyond Anathema," 701.
[100] George, "Dogma Beyond Anathema," 701.
[101] George, "Dogma Beyond Anathema," 701.
[102] George, "Dogma Beyond Anathema," 701.
[103] Gerhard Ebeling, *The Word of God and Tradition: Historical Studies Interpret-
ing the Divisions of Christianity*, trans. S. H. Hooke (London: Collins, 1968), 11.
[104] George, "A Baptist Theologian: Reflections," 228.

nominations, have been able to find *koinōnia* in our core commitment to Jesus Christ and in our love for his body, the church—the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church."[105]

The theological curriculum of Beeson Divinity School was revised by George based on his perspective of historical theology and the needs of the evangelical and interdenominational context. When referring to systematic theology and church history, he claims, "We've abolished them."[106] He clarifies, "That is to say, we no longer have two stack poles and try to relate them disjunctively, but we brought them together in a sequence we call history and doctrine."[107] He describes the sequence of history and doctrine saying, "The effort is to look chronologically, but in a more systematic doctrinal way at the movement in the history of God's people of how these ideas have arisen and how they shape Christian life."[108]

At Beeson Divinity School, George's approach to Christian theology has become known in the curriculum as "history and doctrine."[109] George's perspective on historical theology is the missing piece to the puzzle of how to train and teach students in the evangelical and interdenominational context of Beeson Divinity School. He reveals how his understanding of historical theology influenced the theological curriculum of Beeson Divinity School, as well as informed all of his writing ministry:

> Several years ago at Beeson Divinity School we undertook a major revision of our curriculum, bringing together church history and systematic theology into an organic whole, a new integrated discipline that we call History and Doctrine. This approach has shaped everything I have written, including *Theology of the Reformers*. There is no such thing as a disembodied theology divorced

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[105] George, "A Baptist Theologian: Reflections," 227.

[106] Timothy George, "A Conversation on Theology," Beeson Podcast (MP3 Podcast), Episode 417, 20:12–14, https://www.beesondivinity.com/podcast/2018/transcripts/Beeson-Podcast-Episode-417-vanhoozer.txt.

[107] George, "Conversation on Theology," 20:14–23.

[108] George, "Conversation on Theology," 20:24–35.

[109] See "Historical and Doctrinal Studies," Beeson Divinity School, https://www.beesondivinity.com/master-of-divinity. "Unique in theological education, Beeson teaches theology and church history together in an integrated four-course sequence. Students learn key doctrines such as Scripture, Christology, Pneumatology, justification, creation, and anthropology as they unfold and develop in the history of the Christian church."

from the mess and muck of real life. This is clearly stated in the central affirmation of the Christian faith: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).[110]

Within the context of theological schools, George elevates the place of historical theology in the curriculum. According to him, "Church history is the most important subject in the theological curriculum."[111] He makes this claim not because of his identity as a church historian, "but simply because it is true."[112] Explaining further he states, "Without a good grasp of the history of God's people through the ages one cannot understand the Bible, doctrine, ethics, ecumenism, spiritual formation or any other topic related to the life of faith."[113] Central to his argument is the belief that historical theology provides the necessary perspective, background, and formation for all the other fields of study.

Retrieval in the Church

Historical theology, as George understands it, is "a theological discipline rooted in the self-revelation of the biblical God, the God who makes and keeps covenant with his people."[114] Therefore, George regards historical theology as "enormously relevant to the task of proclamation, the primary job of every God-called minister of the gospel."[115] He concludes, "I dare to say that, apart from the direct study of the Holy Scriptures themselves, no discipline in the theological curriculum is more important for the sermon preparation of the preacher."[116]

For effective ministry leaders, George stresses the importance of the history of exegesis. He encourages the preacher: "We do not come to the study of the Bible alone but in the company of the whole people of God, the body of Christ scattered throughout time as well as space."[117] Thus, historical theology offers the history of exegesis as an indispensa-

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[110] Trevin Wax, "Reformation Theology or Theologies? A Conversation with Timothy George (Part 2)," *The Gospel Coalition*; October 17, 2013, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/reformation-theology-or-theologies-a-conversation-with-timothy-george-part-2/.

[111] Timothy George, "An Evangelical Reflection on Scripture and Tradition," *Pro Ecclesia* 9 (2000): 191.

[112] George, "An Evangelical Reflection on Scripture and Tradition," 191.

[113] George, "An Evangelical Reflection on Scripture and Tradition," 191.

[114] George, "The *SBJT* Forum," 89.

[115] George, "The *SBJT* Forum," 89.

[116] George, "The *SBJT* Forum," 89.

[117] George, "The *SBJT* Forum," 89.

ble resource in the preacher's study.

Preachers, warns George, should be careful to not fall into the pitfalls of primitivism or presentism: "It is not sufficient for the preacher to have the New Testament in one hand and the latest word from Bultmann, Käsemann, or Conzelmann, or even the current evangelical gurus, in the other."[118] Therefore, the preacher must embrace the history of exegesis or else go the way of Harvey Cox through either a fundamentalist reduction or liberal revision.

The theological basis of George's reasoning is pneumatological: "The Holy Spirit did not abandon the Church with the death of the apostles, and we have much to learn as we 'read along side' the church fathers, schoolman reformers, and theologians of ages past."[119] The spiritual gift of teaching God's Word in the present and the past has the same source, the Holy Spirit. The ministry leader should benefit from the Holy Spirit's illumining work among God's people as they study the Bible throughout church history.

The limitations of the history of exegesis are addressed by George: "None of their interpretations is inerrant, and we must subject them all to the divine touchstone of God's perfect revelation in the Bible—*sola scriptura*!"[120] Thus, he reinforces the ultimate authority of Scripture and the importance of engaging the history of exegesis and evaluating the claims of past interpretation in light of sound biblical interpretation.

Examining the role of church history, George considers its impact in writing on his commentary on Galatians.[121] He remembers, "In writing my commentary on Galatians for the *New American Commentary Series*, I gained much insight from Tertullian, Chrysostom, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, William Perkins, John Brown, and many others."[122] These voices from the past contain insight and wisdom for today.

For George, the sermons from the past have value in the present: "In addition to studying commentaries and exegetical works, it is also good to see how a particular text has been preached in different historical moments. The sermons of Spurgeon, Wesley, and Knox are a rich treasury."[123] Thus, the preacher can discern not only what the text

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[118] George, "The *SBJT* Forum," 89.

[119] George, "The *SBJT* Forum," 89.

[120] George, "The *SBJT* Forum," 90.

[121] Timothy George, *Galatians* NAC 30 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994).

[122] George, "The *SBJT* Forum," 90.

[123] George, "The *SBJT* Forum," 90.

meant to the original audience, but what the text has meant throughout history.[124]

The development of doctrine, George argues, equips the ministry leader: "The discipline of symbology, that is, the study of confessions, creeds, and catechisms, reveals the ebb and flow of doctrinal understanding throughout the history of the church. God has frequently used the occasion of heresy to bring orthodoxy to full clarity."[125] Therefore, the ministry leader does not need to re-invent the wheel with every doctrine every time he or she faces a difficult theological question.

George raises the question: "Why do we need these humanly constructed statements of faith, the creeds and confessions of the church, to proclaim the faith, once for all entrusted, passed on?"[126] He answers this question by referring to when his family lived for a year in Switzerland. He especially took note of the dangerous curves while driving through the Alps and remembers relying on the guardrails.[127] He compares the purpose of the development of doctrine with the necessity of guardrails: "Our confessions of faith are like those guardrails."[128] He starts by addressing the danger involved, "When you are traveling dangerous mountain roads, you are glad someone has put those guardrails in place."[129]

The metaphor of the guardrails and the road is used by George to distinguish between the development of doctrine and the biblical revelation of Jesus Christ. He explains, "Now you do not want to confuse the guardrails with the road and start driving up there on the guardrails—then danger is really imminent! Stay on the road. The road is Jesus Christ. He said: 'I am the Way (the Road), the Truth and the Life' (John 14:6)."[130] In the same way that the guardrails support but are secondary to the road, the development of doctrine supports but is secondary to the biblical revelation of Jesus Christ. He concludes why the church needs these guardrails to stay faithful to God's Word: "But we need guardrails as we are tempted this way and that in the history of the church, guardrails to keep us on the road guided by the light that is the Holy Scriptures: 'Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my

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[124] Timothy George, "Dogma Beyond Anathema: Historical Theology in the Service of the Church," *Review and Expositor* (1987): 701.

[125] George, "The *SBJT* Forum," 90.

[126] George, "The Faith, My Faith, and The Church's Faith," 84.

[127] George, "The Faith, My Faith, and The Church's Faith," 84.

[128] George, "The Faith, My Faith, and The Church's Faith," 84.

[129] George, "The Faith, My Faith, and The Church's Faith," 84.

[130] George, "The Faith, My Faith, and The Church's Faith," 84.

path' (Ps 119:105 KJV)."[131] Thus, he maintains the primacy of Scripture and the centrality of Jesus Christ while urging the use of necessary secondary sources.

The doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of grace are offered by George as examples for which the ministry leader must appreciate their historical development: "How can anyone preaching on the doctrine of the Trinity ignore the great struggle between Arius and Athanasius in the fourth century? Likewise, in studying the doctrines of grace, we are theologically bereft if we know nothing of the debate between Augustine and Pelagius, or between Luther and Erasmus."[132] In clarifying his point, George asserts, "This does not mean that every sermon must be filled with historical allusions to these doctrinal developments. But every sermon should be informed by them as we seek in our own day to pass on the faith intact to the next generation."[133]

Thus, George provides contemporary Baptist pastors with a model for historical theology and retrieval in which we can seek to contribute to the local church, encourage evangelical renewal in our congregations, reinforce our Christian unity, and offer the contribution of our Baptist distinctives. In doing so, we locate ourselves rightly as Baptists preaching, worshipping, and serving within the Great Tradition.

Conclusion

The central question of this article, Timothy George's understanding of historical theology, has been answered by demonstrating how George's approach to historical theology emphasizes the theological value of church history, or in his words, "church history as a theological discipline."[134] The four marks of ecclesiology summarize George's approach to historical theology. He looks to the church throughout time and space to learn from its oneness (the unity of the church), holiness (the renewal of the church), catholicity (the whole tradition), and apostolicity (the basis of Scripture), in relation to his proposal of a hierarchy of ecclesial identity. He carries out his work of retrieval through his identity first as a Christian, second as an evangelical, and third as a Baptist. As a historical theologian, George commits to the four marks of the church through his emphasis on Christian unity, spiritual formation,

Christian doctrine, and biblical exegesis. The implications of his understanding of historical theology for Baptist academic-theologians and pastor-theologians demonstrates the relevance for theological schools and local churches.

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[131] George, "The Faith, My Faith, and The Church's Faith," 84–85.

[132] George, "The Faith, My Faith, and The Church's Faith," 84–85.

[133] George, "The *SBJT* Forum," 89.

[134] George, "Church History as a Theological Discipline," disc 1.

John Gill and the Rule of Faith: A Case Study in the Baptist Retrieval of Tradition

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Abstract: *This article explores the overlooked legacy of John Gill (1697–1771), an influential figure within eighteenth-century Particular Baptist circles. Central to the article's argument is Gill's deliberate utilization of the "regula fidei" (rule of faith) in his scriptural interpretation derived from the Apostles' Creed and the theological debates of the fourth century. This approach positions Gill as a compelling exemplar for contemporary Baptists seeking to engage in theological retrieval. Despite occasional rhetorical criticisms of tradition, Gill's pragmatic approach as an exegete and theologian reveals a nuanced methodology. He consistently referenced the works of early church theologians to enrich his own writings, demonstrating a belief in reading Scripture through the lens of the rule of faith—a condensed summary of gospel truths distilled from tradition. Gill's endorsement of the reliability of the Apostles' Creed further underscores its pertinence as a guiding framework for modern theological projects.*

Key Words: *Baptist theology, hermeneutics, historical theology, John Gill, rule of faith*

John Gill (1697–1771) was an influential eighteenth-century Particular Baptist minister. He pastored an important London church, a congregation that would generations later become the Metropolitan Tabernacle associated with Charles Haddon Spurgeon. He was the first Baptist to compose a commentary on every book of the Bible and likely the first Baptist to author a complete systematic theology.[1] Gill's significant pulpit ministry and extensive publications afforded him tremendous influence not just over British Particular Baptists but also over North American theologians. Citations of Gill's works appear in the writings of Jonathan Edwards, J. L. Dagg, and William G. T. Shedd.[2]

Despite his labors, Gill does not often appear on lists documenting the Baptist tradition's great luminaries. Perhaps two reasons account for this neglect. First, some readers perceive Gill's writings as dense and inaccessible. Robert Hall once famously declared Gill's works to be "a continent of mud."[3] This sentiment has appeared not infrequently; for example, the Baptist historian Henry C. Vedder reflected that Gill's biblical commentaries were "more learned than perspicuous."[4] Second, many historians associate Gill with a virulent form of Reformed theology often known as high or hyper-Calvinism. This theological position denied gospel offers and duty faith and so departed from the traditional Baptist emphasis on evangelism.[5]

Recently, Gill's proficient use of the tools associated with the Protestant scholastic method and deep engagement with the broader

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[1] For a brief survey of Gill's life and publishing legacy, consider the introduction to Gill found in Timothy George, "John Gill," in *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition,* rev. ed., ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2001), 11–33.

[2] See Jonathan Edwards, *The Freedom of the Will,* ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019), 374; J. L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology, Second Part: A Treatise on Church Order* (Charleston: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1859), 50; William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology,* ed. Alan W. Gomes (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2003), 585, 636.

[3] This anecdote appears in *The Works of the Rev. Robert Hall.* The text summarizes a conversation between Robert Hall and Christmas Evans and reports that Rev. Hall "did not like Dr. Gill as an author. When Mr. Christmas Evans was in Bristol, he was talking to Mr. Hall about the Welch language, which he said was very copious and expressive. 'How I wish, Mr. Hall, that Dr. Gill's works had been written in Welch.'—'I wish they had, sir; I wish they had, with all my heart, for then I should never have read them. They are a continent of mud, sir." Robert Hall, *The Works of the Rev. Robert Hall,* ed. Olinthus Gregory (New York: J & J Harper, 1833), 3:82.

[4] Henry C. Vedder, *A Short History of the Baptists* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 240.

[5] For a defense of Gill against the charge of hyper-Calvinism, consider George M. Ella, "John Gill and the Charge of Hyper-Calvinism," *Baptist Quarterly* 36.4 (1995): 160–77; Tom J. Nettles, "John Gill and the Evangelical Awakening," in *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697–1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation,* ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 131–70. For a recent claim that Gill held to views associated with hyper-Calvinism, see David Mark Rathel, "John Gill and the Charge of Hyper-Calvinism: Assessing Contemporary Arguments in Defense of Gill in Light of Gill's Doctrine of Eternal Justification," *SBJT* 25.1 (2021): 43–62.

Christian tradition has led to fresh readings of his works.[6] This new research into Gill is producing a positive reconsideration of his value to theologians—or at least a willingness to accept the portions of his writings that scholars do not perceive to be tainted by hyper-Calvinism.

This reassessment of Gill is long overdue. Many heroes of the Baptist tradition—for example, Daniel Taylor, Andrew Fuller, and Benjamin Keach—were primarily occasional theologians who published sermons and tracts designed to answer pressing pastoral questions or engage in the polemics of their day.[7] As valuable as such projects were, Gill authored an expansive collection of biblical commentaries and an erudite systematic theology. The Baptist tradition has not always produced such lengthy, deliberate works. To interact critically with Gill's corpus is to engage with an important part of Baptists' intellectual heritage.

With this essay, I demonstrate Gill's value to Baptist dogmatics by surveying his engagement with the broader Christian tradition. I contend that Gill deliberately drew from the church tradition in his scriptural interpretation and that his use of tradition can inform contemporary projects in theological retrieval.[8] Specifically, as Gill interpreted Scrip-

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[6] For Gill in relation to Protestant scholasticism, see Asselt who concluded that Gill was "one of the most important representatives of Reformed scholasticism in the eighteenth century" (Willem J. van Asselt, "Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism," in *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism,* ed. Willem J. van Asselt [Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2011], 179–80). For Gill's engagement with the broader Christian tradition, consider David Mark Rathel, "A Case Study in Baptist Catholicity: The Scriptures and the Tradition in the Theology of John Gill," *Baptist Quarterly* 49.3 (2018): 108–16; Steven Tshombe Godet, "The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill (1697–1771): Context, Sources, and Controversy" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 122–80.

[7] Fuller did begin to write a systematic theology near the end of his life but was unable to complete the project before his death. See Andrew Fuller, "Letters on Systematic Divinity," in *The Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller,* ed. Andrew Gunton Fuller and Joseph Belcher (Harrisonburg: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 1:684–711.

[8] Numerous works on theological retrieval have emerged. The literature is extensive, featuring both academic and popular-level material. For the purposes of this essay, theological retrieval entails the sentiment captured by Darren Sarisky who writes that retrieval theologians are "focused simply on attending to, indwelling, and commending what they take to be the most compelling articulations of the Christian gospel." Often, such retrieval projects find especially compelling articulations of the gospel in early church literature. This fact is true

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ture, he employed a *regula fidei*, a rule of faith, drawn from the Apostles' Creed and interpretive judgments refined during the fourth-century Trinitarian debates. This rich use of tradition allows Gill to serve as a model for contemporary Baptists who engage in theological retrieval work.

After briefly contextualizing Gill's remarks about church tradition, I consider Gill's use of tradition in scriptural interpretation, surveying his prescriptive statements in favor of a *regula fidei* and analyzing his use of a *regula fidei* in his construction of Trinitarian theology. I conclude with brief reflections on Gill's value for contemporary retrieval projects.

Contextualizing Gill's Remarks About Christian Tradition

Gill might not at first seem like an exemplar of Baptist engagement with church tradition because, at least upon an initial read, some of his rhetoric appears to reject tradition's value. In a 1750 sermon entitled "The Scriptures the Only Guide in Matters of Religion," Gill warned his audience that "in religious matters, the way-marks or way-posts to guide and direct men in the way, are the scriptures, the oracles of God, and they only." He contended that such a firm commitment to scriptural authority necessitates rejecting "education traditions" and "the traditions of men." These false traditions, Gill reasoned, are Pharisaical in nature and do not accord with the freeness of the gospel. Citing Paul's admonition to avoid "philosophy and vain deceit," he exhorted his listeners not to labor "under the notion and pretense of an apostolic tradition" because "unwritten traditions are not the rule." Only "the word of God is the rule of our faith and practice."[9]

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for many Protestant thinkers who might not have received wide exposure to early church literature during their formative years. See Darren Sarisky, "Introduction," in *Theologies of Retrieval: An Exploration and Appraisal* (London: T&T Clark, 2017), 2. For introductions to retrieval in a distinctly Baptist key, consider Steven Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity: Essays on Tradition and the Baptist Vision* (Milton Keyes: Paternoster, 2016); Matthew Emerson, Christopher Morgan, and R. Lucas Stamps, eds., *Baptists and the Christian Tradition: Towards an Evangelical Baptist Catholicity* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020); Cameron H. Jorgenson, "Bapto-Catholicism: Recovering Tradition and Reconsidering the Baptist Identity" (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 2008); Stephen R. Holmes, *Tradition and Renewal in Baptist Life* (Oxford: Whitley, 2003).

[9] Gill preached "The Scriptures the Only Guide to Matters of Religion" in Barbican on November 2, 1750. For the text of the sermon cited here, see John Gill, *A Collection of Sermons and Tracts* (London: George Keith, 1773): 2:480–81.

Similar warnings appear in other works by Gill, including his systematic theology, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*. *Body of Divinity* opens with a brief history of Christian theology's development and, with very stark language, presents a narrative of decline. In this narrative, Satan began to corrupt the church soon after the time of the apostles. Many patristic theologians "were originally pagans," and so while they were perhaps skilled in "demolishing paganism," there was a "want of clearness, accuracy, and consistence in their doctrine." Medieval theologians such as Bonaventure and Aquinas too often engaged in philosophical speculation, and "their whole scheme was chiefly directed to support Antichristianism."[10] Though the time of the Protestant Reformation brought a brief respite from these Satanic corruptions, doctrinal confusion continued in the church. For this reason, Gill deemed the writing of his systematic theology necessary. He claimed that he composed his work out of a simple desire to "search the scriptures," for the Scriptures—not tradition—serve as "the only rule of faith and practice."[11]

Though Gill's statements about tradition could be unsparing, his actual practice as a biblical exegete and theologian evidences a different, more nuanced approach. Throughout his published works, he cited with a remarkable level of frequency the "traditions of men" that he warned about in his 1750 sermon. In polemical tracts such as *The Cause of God and Truth,* he appealed to Irenaeus, Origen, Augustine, and Aquinas, not as foils with whom he disagreed, but as sources of doctrinal and spiritual authority.[12] Throughout his biblical commentaries, he associated his interpretation of biblical texts with readings provided by patristic sources.[13] Perhaps most interesting, in some of the same passages in

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[10] John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, rev ed. (London: Tegg & Company, 1839), 1:xxvii.

[11] Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, xxx.

[12] E.g., Gill featured numerous quotations from earlier theologians throughout *The Cause of God and Truth*. For an incomplete list of such quotations, see John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth,* rev. ed. (London: Thomas Tegg and Son, 1838), 580. At times, Gill drew these quotations from Reformed guides to patristic literature such as André Rivet's *Critici Sacri Specimen* (see, e.g., *The Cause of God and Truth*, 425, 441, 453–54, 463, 473, 480). However, Gill's use of these guides did not prevent him from engaging with the primary source material directly (see *The Cause of God and Truth*, 581–600).

[13] For example, Gill's commentary on Song of Songs explicitly used interpretive traditions drawn from Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. See John Gill, *An Exposition of the Book of Solomon's Song* (London: William Hill Collingridge, 1854),

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which he passionately contended for the authority of the Scripture alone, he explicitly stated that Scripture should not be read alone and should receive interpretation according to the *regula fidei*, the rule of faith.[14]

Understanding Gill's polemical context resolves his seemingly contradictory opinions about church tradition. Like many Baptists in his era, Gill often debated the practice of believers' baptism and the validity of Roman Catholicism. In such debates, he called his audience away from what he perceived as theological errors and directed them to the teachings he believed accorded with the Bible. In the 1750 sermon in which he bemoaned the "traditions of men," he devoted most of his attention to defending credobaptism against its paedobaptist critics.[15] The attacks on tradition that he offered in that sermon sought to counter paedobaptist arguments that, in his estimate, relied too heavily on appeals to church tradition and insufficiently attended to the biblical text. The passages in Gill's systematic theology that expressed discontent with such figures as Origen and Aquinas primarily sought to present his volume as a trustworthy, Bible-based text in a time of religious confusion. Such language was a rhetorical strategy intended to give Gill's audience confidence in his work.[16] Even Gill's association of Thomas Aquinas with the spirit of the antichrist—admittedly bracing language for modern audiences—can receive at least some contextual explanation. Gill had Aquinas's contributions to Roman Catholic theology in view, and associating Roman Catholicism with the antichrist was common among Baptists

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55–56, 201. Gill's New Testament commentary features frequent appeals to and citations from such figures as Athanasius and Augustine. See, e.g., John Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament* (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1809), 1:796, 2:6, 3:162, 3:469, 3:653. 3:749.

[14] See Gill, *Body of Divinity,* 1:x–xiii.

[15] Although this sermon is ostensibly a meditation on tradition's role in theological construction, it actually serves as a polemic against pedobaptism. Likely for this reason, the sermon does not appear alongside Gill's other sermons in his published corpus—such as his annual sermons, occasional sermons, or funeral sermons. Rather, it appears under the heading "polemical tracts" (see Gill, *Sermons and Tracts*, 2:479–96).

[16] The introduction to Gill's systematic theology features lengthy warnings about the theological errors Gill perceived as being rampant during the time of its release. It seeks to assure its readers that Gill's work will provide a trustworthy guide. See the rhetorical strategy employed in Gill, *Body of Divinity*, 1:ii—xxx.

both before and after Gill's time.[17]

Given this contextual data, careful readers can discern internal consistency within Gill's thought. When Gill responded to what he perceived as theological corruption within the church's tradition, he issued clarion calls to accept the Bible as the only authoritative source for faith and practice. However, when he engaged in biblical commentary or theological writing, he carefully mined the tradition to enrich his work. Gill was not against church tradition—or even the use of church tradition in theological construction. He was against theological claims that he deemed unbiblical and was willing to attack those claims if arguments made for them appealed to tradition.[18]

What distinguished Gill from many of his Baptist contemporaries was his extensive reading—and his willingness to use the knowledge gained from his reading in meaningful ways. An impressive autodidact, Gill was fluent in multiple languages and had first-hand knowledge of patristic texts and texts written by near contemporaries who were not Baptist.[19] At times, he could cite patristic theologians such as Irenaeus, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Augustine. At other times, he could cite

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[17] E.g., the Second London Confession of Faith describes the Roman Catholic Pope as "that antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the Church against Christ." See W. J. McGlothlin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1911), 265. For a survey of Gill's rhetoric against Roman Catholicism, consider Tom J. Nettles, "'Egregious Folly:' John Gill's Picture of Roman Catholicism in Proverbs," *SBJT* 25.1 (2021): 29–42. Baptist relations with Roman Catholics have thankfully improved since Gill's time, as evidenced by the 2010 formal conversations between the Baptist World Alliance and the Roman Catholic Church. A helpful summary of those proceedings appears in David Chapman, "Roman Catholics and Baptists in Dialogue: Convergence and Divergence Assessed," *Ecclesiology* 11 (2015): 84–92.

[18] Gill's willingness to employ church tradition as a ministerial authority under Scripture's final authority generally accords with the approach taken by other Protestant and Baptist theologians. Consider the brief survey of Protestant interaction with tradition found in Richard J. Bauckham, "Tradition in Relation to Scripture and Reason," in *Scripture, Tradition, and Reason: A Study in the Criteria of Christian Doctrine—Essays in Honour of Richard P. C. Hanson*, ed. Richard Bauckham and Benjamin Drewery (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 117–45.

[19] For a survey of Gill's educational development and language fluency, see the biographical survey provided in Robert W. Oliver, "John Gill (1697–1771): His Life and Ministry," in *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1997–1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 7–50.

Protestant scholastic theologians such as Johannes Piscator, Johannes Cocceius, and Hermann Witsius. This approach imbued his writings with a depth not always found in Baptist works. Gill used this depth to interact substantively with the church's tradition.

Gill's Call for a *Regula Fidei* in Scriptural Interpretation

Gill was a prolific commentary writer, and though he commented on biblical books that represented a range of historical contexts and literary genres, he employed a consistent methodology. He explicitly stated this methodology in the introductions to his commentaries and in portions of his theological tracts. Though these remarks were often brief, examining them as they appear throughout his corpus allows a complete picture to emerge.

For Gill, biblical interpretation begins with careful attention to the Scripture, the "infallible rule of faith and practice."[20] Interpreters must first consult the "original text"—that is, the biblical text in its original languages—as well as the "versions of several learned men."[21] Throughout this process, they must rely on the Holy Spirit, who "dictated the sacred scriptures" and can "serve as the best interpreter of them."[22] The historical context of a given passage must also receive attention; for example, Gill informed his readers that "knowledge of the affairs of the Jews … such as they were in and about the times of Christ and his apostles … is not the most inconsiderable."[23]

However, Gill devoted most of his attention to clarifying how church tradition should shape biblical interpretation. While Scripture is the infallible source of truth, one must read Scripture according to the rule of faith or analogy of faith.[24] For Gill, the rule of faith serves as a summary of gospel truths received from the tradition. It is not the Scripture but is a time-tested statement that presents Scripture's key teachings. Such a rule is "a set of principles upon the plan of the Scriptures, deduced from them, and agreeably [sic] to them … from which the

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[20] John Gill, *An Exposition of the Old Testament* (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1810), 1:xxii.

[21] Gill, *Solomon's Song*, iii.

[22] John Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament* (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1809), 1:iv.

[23] Gill, *Exposition of New Testament*, 1:v.

[24] Gill used the terms analogy of faith and rule of faith synonymously.

prophesier or preacher should never swerve."[25]

Referring to a rule of faith was not a new practice in Christian theology. Several ante-Nicene theologians employed the concept to significant effect. Irenaeus frequently mentioned a κανών τῆς ἀληθείας, a rule of truth, in his *Adversus Haereses*; Origen provided a rule in his preface to *De Principiis*; and Tertullian offered several expositions of a rule of faith in *De Virginibus Velandis* and *De Praescriptione Haereticorum*.[26] Such appeals to an accepted interpretive rule sought to, in the words of Paul Blowers, offer a "narrative construction" that "set forth the basic 'dramatic' structure of the Christian vision of the world." This narrative construction followed the biblical account of creation, incarnation, redemption, and consummation. It provided a "hermeneutical frame of reference for the interpretation of Christian Scripture and Christian experience."[27]

Gill knew these historical developments well. He quoted several ante-Nicene definitions of the rule of faith and noted that, though the rule's precise wording (*verba*) might vary depending on the author in question, its central doctrinal claims—its substance (*res*)—remained stable. This theological consistency demonstrated that there was indeed a shared "*regula fidei,* a rule of faith" that was "professed very early in the Christian church."[28]

This doctrinal consistency led Gill to commend to his readers the Apostles' Creed as a serviceable rule of faith, though that text did not

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[25] Gill, *Exposition of New Testament*, 2:546.

[26] I focus primarily on ante-Nicene figures here because they featured most prominently in Gill's justifications for a rule of faith. For surveys of early Christian expressions of the rule of faith, see Joseph Lienhard, "Canons and Rules of Faith," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Biblical Interpretation,* ed. Paul Blowers and Peter Martens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 55–70; Everett Ferguson, *The Rule of Faith: A Guide* (Eugene: Cascade, 2015), 1–15.

[27] Paul M. Blowers, "The *Regula Fidei* and the Narrative Character of Early Christian Faith," *ProEccl* 6.2 (1997): 202. Also consider Paul Hartog, "The 'Rule of Faith' and Patristic Biblical Exegesis," *TJ* 28 (2007): 65–86; Prosper S. Grech, "The *Regula Fidei* as a Hermeneutical Principle in Patristic Exegesis," in *The Interpretation of the Bible: The International Symposium in Slovenia*, ed. Jože Krašovec (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 589–601.

[28] Gill, *Body of Divinity*, 1:xi–xii. Ferguson, a modern writer, appears to have reached the same conclusion that Gill drew. He has recently written, "There was not a fixed name in the second and third centuries for what is now called the rule of faith, nor was there a fixed wording for what it included. There was nonetheless a definite content, however varied the formulation of that content might be" (*Rule of Faith,* 32).

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feature in the writings of Irenaeus, Origen, and Tertullian. In Gill's estimate, the Creed had value because it adequately summarized the various ante-Nicene definitions of the rule. It also succinctly narrated God's saving works in the economy, recounting God's work in creation, redemption, and the coming eschaton. In *Body of Divinity,* he wrote, "This is the rule of all prophesying (or preaching); therefore, according to the rule of sacred Scripture and the Apostles' Creed, all interpretations, disputations, questions, and opinions in the church, are to be examined, that they may be conformable thereunto."[29]

Gill did not envision the Creed serving as a church confessional document or baptismal symbol per se; rather, he found its contents useful for retrieving the ante-Nicene practice of a ruled reading of Scripture. With his call to have a "set of principles upon the plan of the Scriptures, deduced from them … from which the prophesier or preacher should never swerve," he envisioned a return to the approach he found in such writers as Irenaeus and Tertullian.[30]

Following the lead of these early theologians, Gill concluded that one should read Scripture in accordance with an accepted interpretive tradition, a tradition whose material content is drawn from the church's kerygma, systematized, and then passed down through the church's tradition. Because the Apostles' Creed conveys this tradition in succinct form, it can serve as a reliable interpretive guide. The Creed provides a metanarrative that recounts God's works in the divine economy, and Bible readers should assume its content antecedent to their reading of a particular biblical passage.

Gill possessed a high view of the rule of faith's value, and he claimed that it could aid in many matters related to church life, from determining proper theology to mitigating church disputes. His esteem of the rule of faith was so high that he made the rhetorically-significant decision to refer to two rules—the rule of Scripture, which is the final "rule of faith and practice," and then the interpretive rule that governs Scripture's reading, the "analogy of faith" or "rule of faith." Throughout his writings, he deliberately placed these two rules together and appealed to both as he offered interpretive decisions and theological arguments.[31]

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[29] Gill, *Body of Divinity*, 1:xi–xii. With this statement, Gill offered a paraphrase of the German Reformed theologian David Pareus, though he offered no extensive citation.

[30] Gill, *Body of Divinity*, 2:546.

[31] E.g., notice how Gill carefully used the term "final rule of faith" to refer

For example, Gill advised ministers to avoid theological error by reading Scripture alongside the rule of faith, for though Scripture is sufficient, it requires correct interpretation. The rule of faith provides a reliable interpretive frame by which one might read Scripture. Contending that all Christian teaching should accord with both "the Scriptures of truth, and the analogy of faith," Gill warned that false teachers fail to understand the divine perfections or the nature of Christ because they attend only to the Scripture and not the tradition-approved rule that can govern Scripture's interpretation.[32] He further instructed Christian leaders to avoid sharing their opinions and to instead preach "the oracles of God" according to "the proportion and analogy of faith." Doing so would allow ministers to discern the "mind of Christ" found in the Scriptures.[33]

Gill also highlighted how employing the two rules, the rule of Scripture and the rule of faith, might address questions that arise in ministry. Noting the dispute over 2 Peter's canonicity, he advised his readers to accept the epistle, not only because several leaders in the early church did, but because he found its theological content agreeable to both "the analogy of faith" and "the rest of the Sacred writings."[34] In addition, although congregations may debate the propriety of certain hymns, Scripture and the rule of faith can provide the theological material by which one might assess a given hymn's merits.[35]

Gill's Trinitarian Theology: Exemplifying a Ruled Reading of Scripture

Gill commended a ruled reading of Scripture throughout his writings, and as he developed his Trinitarian theology, he exemplified how such a ruled reading might occur in practice.[36] Gill lived in an era

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to Scripture and the terms "analogy of faith" or "rule of faith" to refer to tradition. This trend appears throughout his biblical commentaries and systematic theology.

[32] Gill, *Exposition of New Testament*, 3:355, 486.

[33] Gill, *Exposition of Old Testament*, 5:223.

[34] Gill, *Exposition of New Testament*, 3:583.

[35] Gill, *Sermons and Tracts,* 3:590. Gill pastored the church once led by Benjamin Keach, the minister who helped to introduce hymn singing to Baptists. For a survey of Keach's life and an analysis of Keach's engagement with church tradition, see D. B. Riker, *A Catholic Reformed Theologian: Federalism and Baptism in the Thought of Benjamin Keach, 1640–1704* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009).

[36] I choose to analyze Gill's Trinitarian theology to demonstrate his use of a

marked by controversy over the Trinity.[37] He responded to objections against Trinitarianism in his systematic theology and polemical tracts such as *The Doctrine of the Trinity Stated and Vindicated* and *A Dissertation Concerning the Eternal Sonship of Christ*.[38] With these writings, Gill sought to recover the exegetical judgments of earlier interpreters—particularly interpreters who wrote during the fourth-century Trinitarian debates.[39] He set these judgments out as interpretive rules; in his estimate, they represented *how* one should read Scripture. This fact reveals that although Gill upheld the Apostles' Creed as his stated *regula fidei,* and though he often cited ante-Nicene writers to justify and defend his use of a rule of faith, in practice, he drew from the broader Christian tradition, particularly the rich period of the fourth century.

Gill's focus on the fourth century was intentional. As the Baptist theologian Stephen Holmes has explained, the "only possible definition" of Trinitarianism is "historical" because the term refers to a set of doc-

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ruled reading of Scripture because of the deep engagement with Scripture and tradition that Gill's Trinitarian theology evidences.

[37] The Salters' Hall debates serve as but one noteworthy example of Trinitarian debates during Gill's lifetime. Timothy George observes that the Salters' Hall controversy occurred the same year that Gill became pastor at Horsleydown (see George, *John Gill,* 22). For a survey of the Salters' Hall controversy, consider Stephen Copson, ed., *Trinity, Creed and Confusion: The Salters' Hall Debate of 1719* (Oxford: Centre for Baptist Studies, 2020).

[38] Gill composed *Doctrine of Trinity Stated* in 1731; the work received publication as John Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity, Stated and Vindicated* (London: Aaron Ward, 1731). Gill's *A Dissertation Concerning The Eternal Sonship of Christ* was one of the last works he composed; it received publication in 1768. For the details concerning the publication of *Eternal Sonship*, see Roberts, *John Gill*, 30–32.

[39] With the phrase "exegetical judgments," I have in mind reading strategies that emerge from the biblical text—i.e., the text seems implicitly to direct readers to read it in a certain manner—that are then drawn out and developed by exegetes and commentators in the church's tradition. These judgments originate from both the text and the tradition, and they provide a *regula fidei* that directs interpretation. Consider, e.g., Augustine's remark that "scattered throughout the Scriptures" and "marked out by learned" expositors there exists "a kind of canonical rule" (Augustine, *The Trinity*, 2nd ed., trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John Rotelle [Hyde Park: New City Press, 2015], 98). I assert that Gill modeled just such an approach as he developed his Trinitarian theology, though I concede the phrase exegetical judgments is of a more modern provenance. The phrase appears significantly, e.g., in R. B. Jamieson and Tyler Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning: Christological and Trinitarian Rules for Exegesis* (Baker: Grand Rapids, 2022).

trinal commitments refined during the fourth-century theological debates.[40] The conceptual categories that undergird the church's definition of Trinitarianism came to the fore especially between Nicaea in 325 and Constantinople in 381 and received late refinement by Augustine in the fifth century. The material from this era informs and illuminates the affirmations and anathemas presented in the Nicene Creed. By resourcing this material, Gill sought to ensure his reading of Scripture stood in accordance with the broader Nicene tradition.

Gill's exegesis of Prov 8:22 illustrates how strongly he sought to appropriate fourth-century interpretive practices. Proverbs 8:22 was, in many ways, the *locus classicus* during fourth-century Trinitarian debates. Interpreters of the era read Prov 8:22, which in the LXX states, "The Lord made me [created me at] the beginning of his ways for his works," as figurally pointing to the Son.[41] Athanasius, for example, considered Prov 8:22 extensively in his *Orations Against the Arians,* contending against his opponents that the passage does not present the Son as a creation of God. Rather, through the process of partitive exegesis, Athanasius believed one could discern the text's true, albeit hidden, meaning. The phrase "the Lord made me" could only reference the Son's incarnate state. This reading operates proleptically; it anticipates the Son's work in the economy.[42]

Gill was aware of this fourth-century tradition and allowed it to shape his interpretation of Prov 8:22.[43] Like Athanasius and many other pre-critical interpreters, Gill read Proverbs 8 Christologically.[44] He arrived at this conclusion through an intertextual reading of the term wisdom. Gill connected the *logos* of John's Gospel with the wisdom mentioned in Proverbs 8. In this interpretation, the *logos* of God in John 1 and the wisdom of God in Proverbs 8 have the same referent—Christ.[45] Gill then explained that if the Son, the "the wisdom of God" mentioned in Proverbs 8, "was created by God, then God must be without his *logos,* word, and wisdom, until he [wisdom] was created," which would, in Gill's estimate, be absurd.[46] This reasoning deliberately echoed the judgments reached in the fourth century. As Gill well knew, Athanasius challenged his opponents by stating, "According to you, God does not possess that in which and through which [i.e., wisdom] he makes all things."[47] In the end, Gill determined that through partitive exegesis, Prov 8:22 could uphold eternal generation and an allusion to the Son's mediatorial work in the economy—the same conclusion that Athanasius

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[40] Stephen R. Holmes, "Classical Trinitarianism and Eternal Functional Subordination: Some Historical and Dogmatic Reflections," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 35.1 (2017): 92. Holmes defines classical Trinitarianism in the following way: "this core Christian doctrine is determined by the debate that, roughly put, occurs between Nicaea and Constantinople" while noting that "I want to add Augustine's interpretation of the Nicene heritage also" ("Classical Trinitarianism and Eternal Functional Subordination," 93–94). With this framing, Holmes follows Michel René Barnes, "The Fourth Century as Trinitarian Canon," in *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric, and Community,* ed. Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones (London: Routledge, 1998), 47–67. See also the rich survey of fourth-century Trinitarian thought found in Lewis Ayers, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[41] The LXX reads, "κύριος ἔκτισέν με ἀρχὴν ὁδῶν αὐτοῦ εἰς ἔργα αὐτοῦ. See Rick Brannan et al., eds., *The Lexham English Septuagint* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2012), Prov. 8:22.

[42] Athanasius offered this exegesis of Prov 8:22 in *Orations Against the Arians.* For an accessible translation of the relevant portions of this text along with a helpful commentary, consider Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius* (London: Routledge, 2004), 110–75.

[43] Gill documented the fourth-century interpretive history of this passage most notably in the tracts *Doctrine of Trinity Stated* and *Dissertation Concerning Eternal Sonship.* For a survey of Gill's treatment of Prov 8:22 throughout his corpus, see Jonathan Elliot Swan, "'The Fountain of Life:' John Gill's Doctrine of Christ's Eternal Sonship" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021), 149–53.

[44] Interpreting wisdom as an identifier for Christ was a common exegetical strategy, in part because of the reference to *logos* in John's prologue and Paul's description of Christ as the power and wisdom of God in 1 Cor 1:24. For brief introductions to this exegetical judgment, consider J. Warren Smith, "The Trinity in the Fourth-Century Fathers," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, ed.\ Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 117; Frances Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 33–38; Matthew Emerson, "The Role of Proverbs 8: Eternal Generation and Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern," in *Retrieving Eternal Generation,* ed. Fred Sanders and Scott Swain (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 44–66. Gill knew this interpretive tradition and referenced many early interpreters who espoused it (see Gill, *Sermons and Tracts,* 2:541–43, 546–47).

[45] Consider this example, drawn from Gill's Old Testament commentary: Gill, *Exposition of Old Testament,* 4:333. See also Gill, *Sermons and Tracts,* 3:86.

[46] Gill, *Body of Divinity,* 1:222.

[47] See Anatolios, *Athanasius,* 111. Gill paraphrased this argument made by Athanasius—and credited Athanasius as its originator—in Gill, *Sermons and Tracts,* 2:547.

and other early interpreters drew.[48] In this way, Gill allowed fourth-century judgments about figural readings and partitive exegesis to direct his interpretation of Scripture.

This desire to interpret Scripture in accordance with fourth-century theologians grants theological authority to the church's tradition, a fact that Gill openly championed. In the tract *A Dissertation Concerning the Eternal Sonship of Christ*, he explained that his aim was "not to give the proof of this doctrine from the sacred Scriptures" but rather to provide a historical argument.[49] He surveyed Trinitarian thought through the church's first eight centuries, starting with apostolic fathers such as Ignatius of Antioch and concluding with brief references to Boethius. However, he devoted most of his attention to highlighting the important concepts clarified and defined during the fourth century. From this survey, Gill concluded that the church's tradition has authority for Bible interpreters. It offers theologians a sophisticated set of exegetical and theological judgments. This material *is* what the church confesses to be Trinitarianism; to deny it is equivalent to denying Christianity.[50]

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[48] See Gill, *Body of Divinity*, 1:225. There, commenting on Prov 8:22, Gill wrote, "For wisdom, or Christ, proceeds in this account of himself, in a very regular and orderly manner; he first gives an account of his eternal existence, as the Son of God, by divine generation; and then of constitution, as Mediator, in his office-capacity."

[49] Gill wrote, "My design in what I am about is, not to give the proof of this doctrine from the sacred scriptures, but to shew who first set themselves against it, and who have continued the opposition to it, more or less, to this time; and, on the other hand, to shew that found and orthodox Christians, from the earliest times of Christianity to the present, have asserted and defended it" (*Sermons and Tracts,* 2:534).

[50] With some hyperbole, Gill offered, "The church of God has been in the possession of this doctrine of the eternal generation and Sonship of Christ, from the beginning of Christianity to the present age, almost *eighteen hundred years*; nor has there been any one man who professed to hold the doctrine of the Trinity, or of the three distinct divine persons in the unity of the divine essence, that ever opposed it" (*Sermons and Tracts,* 2:562). Gill's pastoral practice reveals how seriously he took this point. In 1768, he led his church at Carter Lane to excommunicate a member for denying eternal generation. He then directed the church to accept a revised confession of faith that upheld the Nicene formulation of the Son as begotten, not made, and consubstantial with the Father. For details about the excommunication, see Seymour J. Price, "Sidelights From an Old Minute Book," *Baptist Quarterly* 5.2 (1930): 93; R. Philip Roberts, *Continuity and Change: London Calvinistic Baptists and The Evangelical Reviv-*

Gill, the Rule of Faith, and Contemporary Theological Retrieval

Gill's extensive use of a rule of faith is one that contemporary Baptists—and contemporary evangelicals more broadly—have not always embraced. Evangelical literature often uses the phrases "rule of faith" or "analogy of faith" to denote the Protestant principle that Scripture should interpret Scripture.[51] Typical evangelical uses of a rule of faith do not, as Gill did, seek to recall an interpretive standard such as the Apostles' Creed or significant fourth-century theologians and then use that standard as a framework by which to interpret Scripture. This reluctance to engage with tradition perhaps emerges from a fear of minimizing Scripture's sufficiency and authority.

For his part, Gill expressed no such concerns and argued that both Scripture and the Protestant tradition commend the sort of ruled reading he envisioned. He claimed that the French Reformer John Calvin and two German Reformed ministers, David Pareus and Johannes Piscator, believed that Paul's command in Rom 12:6 to "prophesy according to the proportion of faith" referenced the need to interpret Scripture according to "the first axioms of religion."[52] In his reading of the Romans text, the word faith serves as a referent for the central tenets of Christianity; therefore, to prophesy or teach according to faith is to interpret Scripture in accordance with accepted doctrinal statements.

This understanding of Rom 12:6 was once common among Protestants, and though contemporary Bible commentators have largely rejected it, Gill used it to argue for the rule of faith's biblical warrant.[53] He contended that the rule does not violate Scripture's primacy. Rather,

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al, 1760–1820 (Wheaton: Richard Owens Publishers, 1989), 176–84. For a reproduction of the new confession of faith, see R. E. Seymour, "John Gill: Baptist Theologian, 1697–1771" (PhD diss., The University of Edinburgh, 1954), 90.

[51] E.g., consider the helpful survey of contemporary evangelical presentations of the rule of faith found in Todd Hains, *Martin Luther and the Rule of Faith: Reading God's Word for God's People* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Academic, 2022), 13–14.

[52] Gill, *Body of Divinity*, 1:xi–xii. See also Gill's comments on Rom 12:6 in his New Testament commentary, which accord with the statements made in *Body of Divinity* (*Exposition of New Testament,* 2:545–46).

[53] For a list of significant pre-critical and contemporary commentaries that address this issue in relation to Rom 12:6, see Hains, *Luther and the Rule of Faith*, 12–20.

its content is "perfectly agreeable" to Scripture because it is "deduced" from Scripture's teaching.[54] Scripture, then, supplies the material content for the rule of faith and condones the process of objectifying Christian truth in summary form.

This objectification of Christian truth, passed down by church tradition, serves as a pre-understanding that can direct Bible interpreters to read Scripture in light of God's economic work. The reception of the rule of faith through the medium of tradition allows a shared reading culture to emerge. In Gill's phrasing, employing the rule of faith permits Bible interpreters to show their "agreement" with other Christians in the "principal parts" of the gospel.[55]

Both Scripture and tradition play a role in scriptural interpretation, though Scripture retains its singular authority. Scripture features conceptual categories that exegetes in the tradition explicate and form into exegetical judgments. These judgments serve as guides for Bible readers across the church universal. In this way, Scripture serves as the source of the tradition's content, and the tradition aids in reading Scripture well.

As a Baptist theologian, then, Gill upheld a commitment to Scripture's authority and employed the rich resources of church tradition in his reading of Scripture. In this way, he serves as a model for contemporary Baptists who wish to retrieve a ruled reading of Scripture.[56] His work demonstrates that such an approach is not discordant with the Baptist tradition. Furthermore, as conversations about theological retrieval and an attending ruled reading of Scripture continue to rise in evangelical circles, Gill can serve as a Baptist representative in those discussions.[57]

Conclusion

Gill advocated for a ruled reading of Christian Scripture that employed the resources of the church's tradition, most notably the Apostles' Creed and material developed during the fourth-century Trinitarian debates. His use of a ruled reading of Scripture did not demote Scripture from its authoritative position; instead, it allowed for a rich reading of Scripture that engendered continuity with the broader church catholic. Gill's work in this area can serve as an exemplar for contemporary Baptists interested in theological retrieval.

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[54] The full quotation reads thus: "Upon the whole, it seems no ways incongruous with the sacred writings but perfectly agreeable to them, that articles and heads of faith, or a summary of gospel truths, may be collected from them" (see Gill, *Body of Divinity*, 1:xii). Consider also Gills remarks in *Exposition of New Testament,* 2:546.

[55] Gill, *Body of Divinity*, 1:xii.

[56] E.g., Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity*, 3–6.

[57] Contemporary literature on a ruled reading of Scripture is becoming expansive, but at the popular level, consider the helpful J. Todd Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God: An Entryway to the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010). Consider also Robert Jenson, *Canon and Creed*, Interpretation Series (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010); Joseph Gordon, *Divine Scripture in Human Understanding: A Systematic Theology of the Christian Bible* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019).

Believers' Baptism in the Patristic Writings[1]

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Abstract: *This article examines the early Christian perspectives on the subject and purpose of Christian baptism, shedding light on its universal practice within the early Church and its significant role in the church's life. Although the article acknowledges the practice of baptizing children in the early church, it emphasizes that the key consideration was the individual's faith in Jesus Christ and repentance from sin, rather than their age. The writings from the third and fourth centuries reveal varying opinions regarding infant baptism, ranging from considering it a departure from traditional paedo-baptism to resisting the innovation of infant baptism. Jeremias's work on infant baptism in the first four centuries highlights how the practice evolved, tracing its roots to Jewish proselyte baptism and incorporating Old Testament cultic language. However, debates persisted, with Tertullian presenting arguments against infant baptism and emphasizing faith as the basis for baptism. This article also explores how early church writings like the Didache, Justin Martyr's First Apology, and Aristides's Apology offer insights into baptism practices of the second century. Overall, the patristic writings reveal the evolving nature of baptism practices, influenced by theological considerations, views on sin, and the challenges posed by infant mortality.*

Key Words: *baptism, Baptists, Baptist theology, believers' baptism, dogmatic theology, early church fathers, Tertullian*

The purpose of this article is to present the early Christian views of who was to be the subject of Christian baptism. An examination of patristic writings in which the Church Fathers specifically addressed the ordinance of baptism, including the purposes for which baptism was to be administered, will be made to determine what the attitudes were toward the notion of baptizing only believers.[2]

Baptism was practiced universally in the early Church, from the New Testament forward. For those Christians who came after the New Testament period, baptism remained an essential component of the church's life and practice.[3] Christians celebrated baptism to mark a new convert's confession of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. The rite of baptism also served as a means of initiation into the community of believers, the church. Use of the Triune Name in the administration of baptism assisted the church's faithful passing on of the faith once for all delivered to the saints by confessing the saving work of all three Persons of the Godhead.[4] Baptism had special meaning not just for the believer but for the entire Christian community; it was an ordinance of the Church. Baptism's role in the early church was central to the formation and discipline of the body of believers.

Our purpose is limited in that our focus is on the early church's practice of believers' baptism. Some clarification of this purpose is in order as it relates to early Christianity. Believers' baptism is the practice of baptizing *only* those who profess faith in Jesus Christ for their salvation, having repented of their sins. An essential element of the practice is that baptism is subsequent to repentance and faith.[5] Adherents narrowly de-

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[2] In Christian history the time following the deaths of the Apostles until approximately AD 596 is called the patristic period. "Patristic" is derived from the Latin term for "father" and thus refers to the period of the so-called Church Fathers.

[3] See S. A. McKinion, *Life and Practice in the Early Church: A Documentary Reader* (New York: NYU Press, 2002), 5–41. See also A. W. Argyle, "Baptism in the Early Christian Centuries," in *Christian Baptism*, ed. A. Gilmore (Philadelphia: Judson, 1959), 187–222; E. Ferguson, ed. *Conversion, Catechumenate, and Baptism in the Early Church (Studies in Early Christianity)* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993); G. Kretschmar, "Recent Research on Christian Initiation," *Studia Liturgica* 12 (1977): 87–106; G. W. H. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit: A Study in the Doctrine of Baptism and Confirmation in the New Testament and the Fathers* (London: Longmans, Green, 1952).

[4] Jesus's command in Matt 28:19 to baptize "in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" became, for early Christians, the formula used in baptism ceremonies. This passage of Scripture, and its derived formula, played an important role in Athanasius of Alexandria's explication of the Trinity against the Arians (see Athanasius, *Letters to Serapion*).

[5] Generally ascribed to Peter's statement in his Pentecost sermon recording in Acts 2:38: "Repent, and be baptized … for the remission of sins" (KJV). Some writers insist that baptism is inseparable from repentance.

fine baptism as an act that follows salvation. Consequently, believers' baptism excludes infant baptism. While both Baptists and paedo-baptists may agree that the function of the ordinance is to outwardly profess faith, Baptists deny that the rite professes *future* faith.[6]

The question we are then seeking to answer is, "Is there a consensus opinion in the patristic writings that accepts believers' baptism as the ancient and normative practice of the church?" In other words, do we discover in early Christians an attitude toward baptism that in an ideal setting the church would baptize children and adults who have *first* repented of their sins and professed faith in Jesus Christ? Does baptism follow salvation or precede (or even produce) it?

A Debate over *Infant Baptism*

We can readily dismiss the notion that normative baptism was *adult* baptism. As our investigation will demonstrate, the early Church baptized children, but these children had at least some understanding of the faith, and had accepted Christianity's tenets. What we know of baptism from the patristic writings is that the question was really not about the age of the one being baptized. Rather, the question was about that person's state in relation to faith in Jesus Christ and repentance from sin. We will see that the debates in the early church were not over adult baptism versus child baptism, but believers' baptism versus paedo-baptism.[7]

Christian writings from the third and fourth centuries show a difference of opinion over the practice of baptizing infants. There is no doubt that infant baptism was practiced quite early in the church's history, but the prevalence of the practice, its significance, and its origin are a matter of contention. The sources are, in many ways, themselves unclear. Two questions emerge from an examination of the documents, as we shall see. First, does the existence of infant baptism, with or without claim to apostolic precedence, necessarily imply that the practice is ancient? That is, does the fact that Christians baptized infants without necessarily arguing that the tradition has a biblical origin mean that the practice is derived from the earliest church's practice? Second, do the debates regard-

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[6] Many forms of paedo-baptism exist, each with different opinions regarding the purpose and the effect of baptism. Suffice it to say that believers' baptism requires the ordinance follow active, saving faith.

[7] See D. F. Wright, "The Origin of Infant Baptism—Child Believers' Baptism?" *SJT* 40 (1987): 1–23; and "At What Ages Were People Baptized in the Early Centuries?" *StudPat* 30 (1997): 389–94.

ing infant baptism in the fourth and fifth centuries indicate a rejection of the ancient practice of paedo-baptism in favor of something novel, or do the documents show a continued resistance to the innovative practice of infant baptism over and against a more ancient believers' baptism? These questions will be crucial to our investigation.

To lay a foundation for the discussion of believers' baptism in early Christianity, we will briefly survey the classic debate regarding the origin of paedo-baptism in early Christianity; an exchange between Joachim Jeremias and Kurt Aland.[8] Three short volumes, the first by Jeremias, a challenge by Aland, and a final reply by Jeremias, comprise the scholarly debate. Jeremias's first volume, *Die Kindertaufe in den ersten vier Jahrhunderten*, appeared first in 1938, then in a revised German edition in 1958. An English translation was published as *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries* two years later. Much of the study is concerned with baptism in the apostolic period and the New Testament. Important elements of Jeremias's conclusions from the first century merits some discussion here due to the direct correlation he sees between first century practice and later practice.

Jeremias's purpose is to examine the practice of infant baptism in the first four centuries of the church's existence. His study breaks down nicely into two chapters addressing the apostolic period, which form the foundation for the remainder of the book, one chapter on developments in the second and third centuries, and one on infant baptism in the fourth century. He begins with the question, "Were the children of converts [in the New Testament period] baptized along with their parents?" To answer this question Jeremias turns to the New Testament statements regarding the baptism of converts and to the origin of Christian baptism.

In the first instance Jeremias focuses his attention on the *oikos* formula found in several New Testament passages.[9] In these passages one finds that converts and their households are baptized. Jeremias contends that these "households" include all the children of the house, regardless

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[8] J. Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960); Jeremias, *Origins of Infant Baptism* (London: SCM Press, 1963); K. Aland, *Did the Early Christian Church Baptize Infants?*, trans. and an introduction G. R. Beasley-Murray (London: SCM Press, 1963). See also E. Ferguson, "Inscriptions and the Origin of Infant Baptism," *JTS* 30 (1979): 37–46; A. N. S. Lane, "Did the Apostolic Church Baptise Babies? A Seismological Approach," *TynBul* 55.1 (2004): 109–30.

[9] Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, 19–24.

of age. To support his conclusion Jeremias reads the New Testament *oikos* statements in the light of Old Testament references to a "household" meaning all those living in the home, including infant children. He concludes, "[T]he New Testament *oikos* formula was adopted from the Old Testament cultic language (and in particular, we may say, from the terminology of circumcision) and introduced into the formal language employed in the primitive Christian rite of baptism."[10] A second argument for Jeremias's reading of the *oikos* passages is his view of "family solidarity" in the ancient world.[11] In the Jewish-Christian church, Jeremias contends, unbaptized members of the family are not allowed to join in table-fellowship. He finds it highly unlikely that parents would not baptize their children and thus exclude them from family meals! When the New Testament states that because of the faith of one member of the family the entire family, including any infant children, is baptized (e.g., his reading of Acts 16:30–34), it is because, "The faith of the father who represents the household and the faith of the mother also embraces the children."[12]

The second part of Jeremias's answer to the question of whether or not the infant children of converts were baptized along with them is his examination of baptism's origins. In summary, Jeremias's concludes that Christian baptism is derived from Jewish proselyte baptism in its terminology, its outward administration, and its theological understanding.[13] The final point is most appropriate for our discussion: When Gentile adults converted to Judaism, "the children, even the smallest children, were admitted with their parents to the Jewish faith."[14] Jeremias contends that because Jewish proselyte baptism is the progenitor of Christian baptism then "with the admission of Gentiles to Christianity children of every age, including infants, were baptized also."[15] Jeremias concludes that infant baptism was the normal practice in the Christian church from the apostolic period onwards. His argument is predicated on the belief that Christian baptism is strikingly akin to Jewish proselyte baptism. In fact, he concludes that Christian baptism is the offspring of proselyte baptism, claiming about their relationship, "the only possible conclusion is that the rites are related as parent [Jewish proselyte bap-

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[10] Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, 21.
[11] Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, 22–23.
[12] Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, 24.
[13] Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, 24–40.
[14] I Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, 39.
[15] Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, 39

tism] and child [Christian baptism]."[16] Having first concluded that Christian baptism was taken over from proselyte baptism, Jeremias then argues that the infant children of Gentile converts to Judaism were baptized along with their newly-converted parents.[17]

These two conclusions—that the *oikos* formula for baptism in the New Testament necessarily included infants and that proselyte baptism, which included infants, is the progenitor of Christian baptism—drawn at the beginning of his study form the basis for his reading of the later evidence. Jeremias reads the Church Orders, inscriptions, and other documentation from this perspective, and the remainder of his study is based on these conclusions.

Chapter 3 moves beyond NT times and up to the "crisis" of the fourth century. Jeremias surveys evidences for infant baptism in both East and West. He finds references in the accounts of martyrs' lives written in the second century in which believers were said to be faithful to Christ from childhood to be indirect evidence of infant baptism. Polycarp, having been born in the first century, claimed to have served Christ for over eighty years. Jeremias conjectures that he must have been baptized as an infant even *before* the second century.[18] Aland demonstrates that the evidence need not be read as indirectly affirming the practice of infant baptism.[19] It is just as likely that the references are to *child* baptism, but not infant baptism.

Jeremias's reading of the inscriptions and patristic writings is guided by his belief that this is a difference in early Christianity between "missionary" baptism and the baptism of believers' children. Missionary baptism, reflected almost exclusively in the New Testament baptism accounts, entailed the entrance of converts into Christianity from non-Christian religions. These instances of baptism involved adult converts and their now-Christian children, including infants. Jeremias reads the catechetical instructions regarding baptism as intended for these converts to Christianity. In addition to this missionary baptism, Jeremias contends that the church, from the New Testament on, baptized the infant children of believers in a practice parallel with Jewish circumcision. He then reads later evidence in the light of this two-fold purpose for baptism.

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[16] Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, 36.
[17] Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, 37–38.
[18] Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, 62–63.
[19] Aland, *Did the Early Christian Church Baptize Infants?*, 70–74.

Who Was Baptized in Early Christianity

In this section of our chapter we will survey chronologically the relevant discussions of baptism in the patristic writings. We will discover a shift in the discussions in the third century, when the question of infant baptism arises. There is no defense of infant baptism prior to the third century. In fact, each instance of instruction regarding baptism supports a conclusion that the baptism of believers only was the normative practice in the second century, with the possible exception of emergency baptisms of mortally ill infants later in the century.[20] This novel practice became widespread in the third century, leading Origen to conclude that, at least in Palestine, infant baptism was the standard practice of the church. The debate over the innovation of infant baptism continued into the fourth century where Gregory, Bishop of Nazianzus, allowed infant baptism in emergency situations but otherwise rejected it on the grounds that infants have no sins to confess and therefore do not need a baptism which is rightly related to repentance.

There are several types of documents that inform us of early Christian attitudes toward baptism. There are works dedicated to the topic, such as Tertullian of Carthage's *On Baptism* or Cyprian of Carthage's *Epistle 58* announcing an African synod's decision regarding baptism. There are also references to the Christian practice of baptism that are intended to clear up misunderstandings or instruct those who are perhaps outside of the church about the practice. An example is a paragraph in Justin Martyr's *First Apology*. A third type of writing, and one very important for us, is the Church Manual, such as the late first- or early second-century *Didache*. These manuals tell us about prevailing contemporary attitudes toward practices in the church while also giving us a glimpse into liturgical tradition. What is most helpful is the fact that church manuals are intended to project current practice onto the past church while also influence future church practice. These works are important both for what they do say and for what they omit.[21] Finally,

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[20] Ferguson has argued that these instances, deduced from funerary inscriptions, demonstrate that Christians who believed in the importance of baptism began to baptize infants in emergency situations as an accommodation (see Ferguson, "Inscriptions and Origin of Infant Baptism").

[21] As an example, were a manual in the second century to mandate one element of practice that is missing from a later manual, one might reasonably conclude that the practice fell out of favor, particularly if a competing description of the practice is given in the later work. As this type of writing intends to make current practice normative, it may or may not be helpful in conveying accurately

there are works intended to offer instruction to the catechumen, or believer who is preparing for baptism. Normally, new believers, including children, would spend a considerable amount of time being taught the fundamental beliefs of Christianity, including the meaning of the baptism for which they were preparing. These writings, such as Cyril of Jerusalem's *Catechetical Lectures*, are enlightening.

Second Century

Three sources from the second century are significant for our study: the *Didache*, Justin Martyr's *First Apology*, and Aristides's *Apology*.[22] A church manual written just after the turn of the second century, *The Teaching of the Lord through the Twelve Apostles*, known usually by the first word of the Greek title, the *Didache*, detailed contemporary practice regarding the ordinance of baptism?[23] First, the manual states that the Triune Formula is to be used in baptism: one should be baptized in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Second, the church is to use running water when available, though standing water, such as a pool, is acceptable. Presumably, this instruction is to make current Christian baptism parallel to Christ's baptism, which was in a river of running water. The candidate should be immersed in water, provided enough is available. Where there is not water deep enough for immersion, water can be poured over the baptizand's head three times. Most important for our study is the requirement that the person being baptized [along with the one doing the baptism and the rest of the church] is to fast for one or two days before the baptism. In fact, the *Didache* states that the one being baptized should be instructed in this regard. The necessary implication of the statement that the church should "Instruct the one being baptized to fast one or two days before," is that the one being baptized is of the age and mental capacity to comprehend and obey the instruction. It would seem entirely unlikely that an infant would be able to obey this command. Moreover, had the *Didache* conceived of an instance in which infant baptism would be practiced the instructions

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past practice. However, this fact makes Church Manuals all the more important to our study: they tell us what was happening at a given time in a given area.

[22] See J. Lewis, "Baptismal Practices of the Second and Third Century Church," *ResQ* 26 (1983): 1–17.

[23] *The Didache* 7 in *ANF*, vol. 7 ed. A. Cleveland Coxe (reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), See A. H. B. Logan, "Post-Baptismal Chrismation in Syria: The Evidence of Ignatius, the *Didache* and the *Apostolic Constitutions*," *JTS* 49.1 (1998): 92–108.

for such a ceremony would most certainly have been included in the manual. The absence of specific instructions for baptizing infants in the baptismal liturgies and church orders long into the fourth and fifth centuries imply that the infant baptism was a liturgical innovation that did not find universal acceptance.

In his *First Apology*, written in the middle of the second century, Justin Martyr concerns himself with an explanation of the rite of Christian baptism. His interest is to ensure that his readers understand the meaning of the ordinance. Consistent with the command of the *Didache*, Justin claims that Christian baptism was done in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[24] Four elements of Justin's exposition deserve comment, as they relate directly to the topic at hand. First, Justin, like the *Didache*, states that those who are to be baptized are those who are "persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to live accordingly."[25] Clearly, believers are in mind here. They already believe the truthfulness of Christianity. Baptism comes subsequent to their being persuaded regarding Christianity. Moreover, they have offered their own commitment to live a Christian life. Justin presents these candidates for baptism as already having begun to live according to their faith. Infants cannot be included in Justin's description of those coming to baptism on either of these counts. Infants do not possess the rational capacity to believe the truths of the faith nor can they have committed to live according to them.

Second, they were to fast and pray for the remission of past sins.[26] As with the *Didache* one is hard-pressed to consider infants fasting and praying for the remission of their past sins. In fact, as will become clearer, many of the patristic writers denied that infants were guilty of any sins that needed forgiving. Once again, Justin appears not to be calling infants to preparing for their baptisms by fasting and praying. These are instructions reserved for older children and adults.

Third, Justin describes candidates for baptism as those who "choose and repent."[27] This is consistent with the command in Peter's Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:38) to "repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins." Justin is in a long line of patristic writers to follow the New Testament lead of linking repentance and baptism. As was previously the case with Justin, he cannot be referencing infants who have chosen to

[24] In fact, this Triadic Confession is referenced twice in the same chapter.
[25] Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 61.
[26] Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 61.
[27] Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 61.

become believers and who repented of their sins. Even if one accepts the need for infants to receive forgiveness for original sin (a theme in the third century and in the West even after), the subjects of baptism for Justin cannot be infants.

Finally, Justin says that those who are illuminated in their understandings are those who are washed in baptism.[28] Were Justin an advocate of paedo-baptism, he would have at least allowed for one to be washed and then, at a later time, illuminated. This is the argument of later writers who advocate infant baptism. Their claim is that the washing precedes the awakening to faith, and perhaps even aids its coming. For Justin, though, candidates for baptism are those who have been awakened already to their need for salvation.

A passage in the *Apology* of Aristides is important for a second-century picture of baptism.[29] The passage, in which the apologist describes Christian behavior as superior to others in the empire, speaks of how Christians act toward the servants and children of Christians who themselves are persuaded to become Christians. After the servants or the children become Christians they are called "brothers and sisters without distinction." In other words, it is only after their conversion that the children of believers are considered a part of the community of faith. Such a bold statement appears to contradict directly the notion of "household" baptisms, for clearly Aristides does not have "missionary" baptism in mind. These are the children of believers. As Aland rightly notes, Aristides's Apology "indirectly excludes infant baptism."[30]

Even Jeremias acknowledges no *direct* evidence of infant baptism in the second century. However, he does assert that patristic references to believers who have served Christ faithfully from a young age qualify as indirect evidence of infant baptism.[31] These references, mainly from biographical statements about martyrs such as Polycarp, who is said to have served Christ for 86 years, can all be grouped together as efforts by patristic writers to highlight a believer's faithful devotion to Christ from "youth." Such statements do not necessarily mean, however, that the subject was baptized as an infant. It is just as likely that the martyr, or other believer, was baptized as a young child, or even an older child, as it

[28] Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 61.
[29] Aristides, *Apology* 15, in J. R. Harris, *The Apology of Aristides* (Cambridge: 1891).
[30] Aland, *Did the Early Christian Church Baptize Infants?*, 58.
[31] Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, 59–61.

is that she or he was baptized as an infant. Such "evidence," important as it is to Jeremias's cause, does not appear to pose a serious threat to the notion that infant baptism was not the norm in second century Christianity.[32]

In the second century, then, there is no direct reference to baptism for the infant children of converts or believers. Even the indirect evidence cited by Jeremias, such as Polycarp and the other martyrs who had served Christ for nearly their entire lives, is open to other, more plausible interpretations. In the absence of any direct reference to the baptism of infants, one might consider interpretations other than infant baptism to be more likely. In fact, the evidence that does exist from the second century argues more convincingly for one common practice of baptizing believers after their repentance of sin. The methods described in patristic writings along with the description of those who were to be baptized are direct evidence of believers' baptism as the normative practice of the church in the second century. Even Jeremias's "missionary baptism," having no direct evidence supporting its supposed existence, appears to be a construction that fits a presupposed conclusion regarding infant baptism rather than evidence supporting the conclusion that paedo-baptism was the norm. For Jeremias to categorize the direct references to believers' baptism in the patristic writings to some sort of missionary baptism seems to be a reach.

Third Century

Tertullian of Carthage, apologist and the founder of Western Theology, wrote the earliest extant treatise on the subject of baptism. In fact, his work entitled, appropriately, *On Baptism*, is the only surviving treatise on the ordinance of baptism from the time before the First Ecumenical Council (Nicaea, AD 325). The treatise is written prior to his conversion to the Montanist sect and in response to the innovative practice of infant baptism. Tertullian claims that the church's act of baptism is remarkable because of its simplicity. The rite itself is a simple act: a person

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[32] Anecdotally, for many years my own description of my conversion (or testimony) began, "I was raised in a Christian home." Someone writing of my view of baptism a hundred years from now would be mistaken to conclude either that I was baptized as an infant or that I believed in household baptisms. A lifelong Baptist, I was baptized as a twelve year old believer, and have never intended by my earlier statement to imply that I was a Christian prior to my conversion.

is simply immersed in water.[33] Once baptized, the individual is no cleaner than before the baptism. However, the result is a spiritual cleansing that far exceeds any physical cleansing one might desire. While the washing with water is a mere external act, the cleansing from sins is spiritual and eternal.[34]

Tertullian advises patience when determining to whom the ordinance is to be administered.[35] The apologist offers an alternative to a practice already in existence of baptizing infants. The practice, Tertullian argues, is fraught with danger. In the first place, the message conveyed by paedo-baptism is that the infant is in need of salvation; which Tertullian denies. Moreover, those who serve as "sponsors" for the infant being baptized might not be able to ensure that the baptized will grow up to live in accordance with the promises made at baptism.[36] In other words, Tertullian recognizes that inherent in the ordinance of baptism is both a repentance for sins and a commitment to right living. Infants have not sinned and therefore are not responsible for the former. The "sponsors" are incapable of keeping the latter and cannot therefore be responsible for it. Why should the church do something that is both unnecessary and irresponsible? "Why does the innocent period of life hasten to the 'remission of sins'?"[37] Tertullian also asked, "Why should sponsors be thrust into danger if baptism is not necessary for salvation?"[38] Clearly, for Tertullian, baptism is not a requirement for salvation. Were that to be the case, indeed one might argue for the validity of paedo-baptism.

Tertullian continues his exposition of baptism by arguing that infants are not given adult responsibilities in "worldy" matters, so why should they be given the responsibility of living a Christian life, the presumed result of baptism, when they are not ready? As we saw earlier with Justin Martyr, the baptizand was expected to commit to live a Christian life. A child cannot be expected to either make or keep such a commitment.

He concludes chapter eighteen with two strong statements. The first is "If any understand the weighty importance of baptism they will fear its reception more than its delay."[39] By this Tertullian clearly refers to

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[33] Tertullian, *On Baptism* 2, in *ANF* vol. 3.
[34] Tertullian, *On Baptism* 7.
[35] Tertullian, *On Baptism* 18.
[36] Tertullian, *On Baptism* 18.
[37] Tertullian, *On Baptism* 18.
[38] Tertullian, *On Baptism* 18.
[39] Tertullian, *On Baptism* 18.

the great responsibility of post-baptismal Christian living. Baptism is not to be taken lightly, for a grave responsibility comes with it.

Second, and most importantly, Tertullian claims that "sound faith is secure of salvation."[40] No stronger statement could be made to divorce the rite of baptism *in se* (inherently) from saving faith. Salvation is not procured by baptism, and faith is the sure indicator of salvation. In other words, for Tertullian salvation is by faith alone, even when devoid of a subsequent baptism. What can we glean from this text about the role of baptism for the believer? First, it should come subsequent to agreement with Christian belief and commitment to Christian practice, as with Justin. Second, baptism is not the means to salvation, faith is. Third, the baptized is held to a higher standard of Christian moral practice, presumably because of his or her identification with the church. While catechumens possess salvation because of their saving faith, they are not "Christians" in the sense of being identified with the church. This identification comes with baptism.

In the following chapter Tertullian turns to the purpose of baptism. Passover is the best time for baptism, he argues, because we are baptized into the death of Christ (Rom 6:1). Interestingly, Tertullian refers to Jesus's statement to his disciples to watch for a man carrying water as a reference to baptism, as water is associated with the Passover. The second most solemn occasion for baptism is Pentecost because it was at that time that the promised Spirit descended on the disciples. Tertullian is quick to end with a statement that every day is the Lord's, and every hour is apt for baptism. Though the solemnity might differ, the significance does not.

In the next chapter Tertullian describes what is to be done at the baptismal ceremony itself, and how one should prepare for it. In preparation, the candidate for baptism is to "pray with repeated prayers, fasts, and bending of the knee."[41] None of these acts of preparation are appropriate for infants. Only older children and adults can respond to these instructions.

More significantly, however, is Tertullian's statement that in preparation "there should be vigils all through the night accompanied by the confession of all past sins."[42] Obviously, infants, even if one accepts that they are guilty of sins, are not going to be holding a vigil throughout the night and confessing those sins. As Tertullian has already mentioned,

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[40] Tertullian, *On Baptism* 18.
[41] Tertullian, *On Baptism* 20.
[42] Tertullian, *On Baptism* 20.

though, he believes infants are innocent of sins and thereby not in need of their remission. What "past sins" do infants have to confess?

Baptism is tied inextricably to "satisfaction of former sins" and to a defense against "temptations which will closely follow."[43] The catechumen, already possessing saving faith, comes to the fount having confessed former sins. But baptism, besides it role relative to past sins, also serves as a source of strength for the believer to overcome future sins. Baptism is the foundation, or beginning point, of the Christian's life of obedience in the sense that its sins prior to saving faith have been "washed." Those temptations that come subsequent to repentance and baptism are like those of Christ, who was baptized immediately following his own baptism. What is the lesson to be learned? At Christ's baptism the Spirit is said to descend on him "as a dove." So too the anointing following baptism is representative of the Spirit anointing the believer. Tertullian emphasizes not only the Spirit's work in the remission of sins, but also in the overcoming of temptation following conversion.[44]

Tertullian's primary concern is that infant baptism negates the church's practice, already seen clearly in the documents from the second century, of a time of preparation for baptism which would include repentance of sin, fasting, and prayer. None of these necessary precursors to baptism are possible for infants. Each is possible, however, for young children. Tertullian argues that the practice of triple immersion has long-standing tradition but is not commanded in Scripture or handed down from the apostles[45] For him to defend this practice as traditional, yet reject infant baptism without making a similar argument, leads one to conclude that he did not know it as a traditional practice, but as a novel one.

Following chronologically from Tertullian is the mid-third century *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus.[46] In chapter 42, Hippolytus states that there is to be a three-year period from conversion to baptism in which the catechumen is to be tested regarding his or her faith and Christian lifestyle. This period is also to be a time of instruction in the faith of the church. In the following chapter the *Tradition* instructs that catechumens

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[43] Tertullian, *On Baptism* 20.
[44] Tertullian, *On Baptism* 20.,
[45] Tertullian, *On the Chaplet* 3 in *ANF* vol. 3.
[46] See C. M. Edsman, "A Typology of Baptism in Hippolytus Romanus," *Stud Pat* 2 (1957): 35–40.

are to attend worship and participate fully in the life of the church, with the exception of taking the Eucharist, from which they were excluded.[47] The next chapter is concerned with catechumens who are martyred before they are baptized. Their martyrdom serves as their "blood baptism."[48] Chapter 45 details the final preparation for the baptism, including the use of witnesses to verify their faithfulness during the catechumen period, Scripture reading, fasting, and praying. Then, in chapter 46, Hippolytus instructs that the children who are catechumens are to be baptized. Clearly, he intends those children who have gone through the process described in the preceding chapters. Next, he makes allowance for those little ones who cannot speak for themselves to profess their faith. The allowance is for a believing parent or other believing family member to confess on behalf of the child. Following the children, the adult catechumens are baptized.

What is one to make of Hippolytus's allowance for children who cannot speak for themselves? It is possible that the text is a later interpolation.[49] Even if it is original to the third century, it only confirms that infant baptism was permissible in Hippolytus's context, and nothing more. It certainly cannot be an example of Jeremias's missionary baptism, as the children were baptized *before* the adults. These children must be the children of believers if their parents are to speak on their behalf. So why is no distinction made between children who speak for themselves and children who do not, if paedo-baptism is the norm? It appears that paedobaptism was the exception, provided the text in question is not an interpolation. Hippolytus describes the baptism of believers who had previously demonstrated fidelity to Christianity and the Christian community during the period of instruction preceding baptism, with an allowance for the baptism of infants.

Cyprian of Carthage's *Epistle 58* was written to announce the decision of an African synod in AD 253 to require the baptism of infants, Cyprian relays to his readers disagreements among the bishops at the synod over the relationship between baptism and circumcision. The addressee of the letter believed that baptism should be performed on the eighth day, commensurate with the practice of circumcision. The synod did not make a pronouncement on this because of the disagreement

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[47] Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 42, in G. Dix *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome, Bishop and Martyr* (London Alban Press, 1992). See also chapters 48, 50, 62.

[48] Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 43.

[49] Aland, *Did the Early Christian Church Baptize Infants?*, 49–50.

over the relationship. One might inquire as to whether some of the bishops rejected the belief that infant baptism is the Christian replacement of Jewish circumcision. Cyprian's announcement does not state this categorically, simply claiming that the "law of circumcision" was not required. However, it might equally be surmised that were the bishops united in their belief that baptism is a replacement for circumcision, they would have been much more prone to follow instructions regarding its application much more closely.

What is apparent is that while church leaders in this part of North Africa might have disagreed over circumcision as the origin of infant baptism, they affirm *in solidum* (on the whole) that infant baptism was proper for the church. That a synod would even need to meet to decide this matter shows that paedo-baptism was not universally practiced. In fact, were it merely a few who opposed it, such as Tertullian, would an African synod be necessary? Whatever the background to the council, its decision is significant. "No one," the council decided, "should be hindered from baptism and from the grace of God."[50] Baptism, for Cyprian and the council he reports on, believe that baptism is a means of grace; that its recipients receive "divine mercy."[51] Moreover, baptism is even more important for infants, Cyprian argues, because they enjoy the help, mercy, and grace of God from the very beginning of their lives, helping them to overcome sin.[52] A shift from Tertullian to Cyprian is quite obvious. Whereas Tertullian emphasizes baptism's relationship to our past sins as well as future ones, Cyprian emphasizes only its relationship to future need.

Writing in the middle of the third century Origen of Alexandria, on three occasions, defended the practice of baptizing infants.[53] In each instance Origen has one purpose in mind: to explain how infant baptism could be the practice of the church without infants needing the forgiveness of sins. In other words, Origen is responding to the challenge, it appears, that infant baptism is unnecessary, as infants have committed no sins.[54] Origen concludes that while infants themselves have commit-

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[50] Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle* 58.2, in *ANF* vol. 5.

[51] Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle* 58.6.

[52] Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle* 58.6.

[53] The works in view date from Origen's time in Caesarea in Palestine (C. 231–250).

[54] Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 7, in *Fathers of the Church*, vol. 83, trans. G. W. Barkley (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1992).

ted no sins, they share in the universal stain of Adam's sin and are thus benefited by baptism.[55] It is for this reason that infant baptism is the "custom of the Church,"[56] a custom Origen claims was handed down from the Apostles.[57] Origen makes two arguments for infant baptism. One, it is the current practice of the church, which he believes is an apostolic practice. Of course, had infant baptism arisen in Palestine in the late second century, it could have easily found widespread acceptance in the churches of the region by the time Origen writes around 250.[58]

In the third century we see the obvious beginning of paedo-baptism as normative for parts of the church. The practice is certainly not universal, as Tertullian's aggressive defense of believers' baptism and Origen's need to mount an apology for infant baptism, both attest. Despite Origen's statement that paedo-baptism is an ancient practice in the church, his argument rests on its intended outcome rather than its apostolic origin. In other words, we can conclude that in the third century a debate rages between those who desire infant baptism and those who resist it. Ardent defenders of baptizing infants rely primarily on their argument that the sacrament is needed to cleanse infants of the stain of original sin. The evidence from the third century points to the origin of infant baptism in the practice of baptizing mortally ill infants due to an increasing belief that baptism was necessary for the salvation of the child. The opposing viewpoint, found in Tertullian's argument against paedo-baptism, was that faith was sufficient for salvation, despite his equivocation in allowing infant baptism in times of "necessity."

Fourth and Fifth Centuries[59]

The *Apostolic Constitutions*, written near the end of the fourth century, is a compilation of portions of earlier church manuals including the *Didache* and Hippolytus's *Apostolic Tradition*. Christ's command in the Great Commission to baptize served as the explicit basis for the practice in the

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[55] Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 5.9 in Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 1–5*, in *Fathers of the Church*, vol. 103, trans. T. P. Scheck (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001).

[56] Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 7.

[57] Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 5.9.

[58] Aland, *Did the Early Christian Church Baptize Infants?*, 48–49.

[59] See T. M. Finn, "Baptismal Death and Resurrection: A Study in Fourth Century Eastern Baptismal Theology," *Worship* 43 (1969): 175–89; E. Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: Baptismal Homilies of the Fourth Century*, 2nd rev. ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994).

church.[60] Regarding the ceremony itself, the bishop was to anoint the head of the one to be baptized, both the men and the women. A presbyter then was to immerse them into water in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If the baptized is a man, then a male deacon was to receive them out of the water. But if it was a woman, then a deaconess was to receive her to preserve modesty (as baptism was done in the nude).[61]

One is baptized into the death of Christ, using water instead of a burial. An anointing that follows the immersion is a "confirmation of the confession." Importantly, the author states that "the descent into the water *represents* the dying together with Christ, and the ascent out of the water the rising again with him."[62] This is the clearest example thus far of the symbolic character of baptism, though we have seen it implicitly elsewhere. Faith is the means to the true sharing in the death and resurrection of Christ.[63] Baptism is a graphic representation of that death and resurrection.

The representative character of baptism is sensible considering that the one being baptized is to "be free of all [past] iniquity."[64] As we have seen in the predominance of earlier writings, baptism is contingent upon the confession of past sins. The rite is subsequent to repentance and faith. Moreover, he is to be already a "son of God."[65] Later, the author reiterates the point that baptism follows conversion, when he says that "the water is the symbol of the death of Christ."[66] The one being baptized has already repented, has been cleansed of sin, and has died with Christ. Baptism symbolizes the conversion of one who already possesses faith.

Before baptism he is to fast.[67] Jesus fasted after his baptism, but the author explains this difference by stating that Jesus has no sins to confess; no cleansing was needed. Moreover, Jesus was not baptized into his own death and resurrection, as his baptism looked forward to these events. Thus, fasting followed the baptism. For the believer, baptism looks back to one's participation in the death and resurrection of Christ

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[60] *Apostolic Constitutions* 7.2.22, in *ANF* vol. 7.

[61] *Apostolic Constitutions* 3.2.16.

[62] *Apostolic Constitutions* 3.2.17 (emphasis added).

[63] *Apostolic Constitutions* 7.3.41.

[64] *Apostolic Constitutions* 3.2.18.

[65] *Apostolic Constitutions* 3.2.18 (cf. 7.3.41).

[66] *Apostolic Constitutions* 7.2.22.

[67] *Apostolic Constitutions* 7.2.22.

by faith. Fasting thus precedes baptism. Jesus's baptism was for the purpose of confirming John's message while the believer's baptism is in recognition of one having received the message of Christ.

Church manuals such as the *Apostolic Constitutions*, and its constituent documents, indicate both current church practice and what a given author or set of authors wishes to see remain standard practice, and are thus invaluable to our study. But just as important are those theologians who seek to justify or explain the church's practice or challenge certain practices. Gregory of Nazianzus is one of those fourth-century pastor-theologians who both explains the church's baptismal practice and joins those third century opponents of the innovation of infant baptism who had challenged the practice earlier. Gregory is one of the Cappadocian Fathers, along with Gregory of Nyssa and his brother Basil the Great.[68] Interestingly, none of the three, despite being the children of Christian parents, were baptized while infants. Nazianzus, whose father was a bishop, was not baptized until he was about 30 years old.[69] He dedicated his *Oration* 40 to the topic of baptism. He explains that in baptism one symbolizes outwardly what is an inward reality.[70] Baptism is an outward type of the inner cleansing of the soul. Water is an outward cleansing of the body, but the inward cleansing of the soul occurs "apart from the body."[71]

Regarding infant baptism, Gregory is basically opposed to the practice, except where there is a danger of death.[72] Where this imminent danger exists, he says it is better for them to depart "unconsciously sanctified" than "unsealed and uninitiated."[73] But what does he mean by "uninitiated"? While it is possible that he means by this "unsaved," it is also plausible to read "not initiated into the life of the church." With the emphasis on the corporate and initiatory effects of the act of baptism on the believer, transferring the believing catechumen from "outsider" to "insider" status, one might plausibly find Gregory accommodating infant baptism as a pastor leading the community into closer communion with grieving parents.

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[68] See E. Ferguson, "Preaching at Epiphany: Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom on Baptism and the Church," *CH* 66.1 (1997): 1–17.

[69] Zosimus, *Historia Romana*, 4.39, ed. L. Mendelssohn (Leipzig, 1887).

[70] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 40.8, in *NPNF*, series 2 vol. 7, ed. W. Sandy (repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994).

[71] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 40.8.

[72] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 40.28.

[73] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 40.28.

Reading Gregory's allowance for infant baptism as a pastoral accommodation is supported by his immediate appeal to avoid the practice in other than emergency circumstances.[74] Only children who are old enough to understand the "basic outlines" of the faith should be baptized. Children are responsible for their lives only when their reason has matured to the point that they recognize a need for forgiveness. Until then, Gregory says, they have no account to give for sins of ignorance.[75] His instruction is consistent with the contention that paedo-baptism arose among Christians in response to infant mortality, a conclusion clearly supported by evidence from the inscriptions.[76]

In preparation for their initiation by baptism into full participation in the life of the church, Cyril of Jerusalem delivered a series of *Catechetical Lectures* to explain Christian belief and practice to catechumens.[77] In lectures 19 and 20 he described for them the baptism ceremony in which they would participate, explaining the various elements of the ceremony. The description is detailed, instructing the one being baptized to face west, to renounce Satan and his ways, and to commit to live an obedient Christian life[78] The emphasis is on the ceremonial display of one's conversion, repentance, and faith in Jesus Christ. The second message on baptism explained that those being baptized would be naked, "imitating Christ, who was stripped naked on the cross."[79] Immersion into the water symbolized death and burial. Arising from the water pictured the believer's sharing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.[80] All of these instructions are clearly intended for those old enough to understand, believe, and obey them. Cyril has believers in mind.

Augustine of Hippo is one of the most revered theologians in the Western Christian tradition. He has influenced Protestants and Catholics, paedo-baptists and Baptists in similar and strikingly different ways. He spoke of baptism in writings directed against two of his staunchest opponents, Pelagius and the Donatists. In his *On Baptism against the Donatists*, Augustine argued that the practice of baptizing infants is "the

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[74] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 40.28.

[75] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 40.28.

[76] See Ferguson, "Inscriptions and the Origin of Infant Baptism."

[77] See H. M. Riley, *Christian Initiation: A Comparative Study of the Interpretation of the Baptismal Liturgy in the Mystagogical Writings of Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1974).

[78] Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lecture* 19.1–6, in *NPNF* 2.7.

[79] Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lecture* 20.2.

[80] Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lecture* 20.2, in *NPNF* 2.4.

invariable custom of the church handed down from the apostles."[81] Augustine defends the practice on the grounds both of its antiquity and its supposed meaning. He argues that the apostles instructed the church to baptize infants because baptism is "a parallel of circumcision."[82] God's covenant with the church is both symbolized and effected through the administration of baptism to the children of believers, themselves heirs of the promise of God's salvation.

But Augustine's primary defense of the practice of baptizing infants is the work which baptism accomplishes in the life of the one being baptized. In his *Enchiridion* Augustine writes, "From the newborn infant to the elderly man bent by age, no one is closed off from baptism, so there is none who in baptism does not die to sin."[83] Baptism's effect—the remission of sins—is available to infants just as adults. This is needed because infants, as well as adults, are in *need* of the forgiveness of sin. Unlike advocates of infant baptism in the East, Augustine rejects the innocence of infants; even newborns need forgiveness, though one of original sin, not sins "added to the sin they brought with them."[84]

What one finds in the fourth century is that the church remains conflicted, as in the third century. Some writers, such as Augustine, argue that infant baptism is to be the rule and requirement of the church. Those writers from the West who defend infant baptism typically do so because of the need to deal with original sin. Baptism cleanses the infant from original sin, thus establishing their salvation.

In the East, however, writers defend paedo-baptism without attributing to infants sinfulness that needs addressing. Instead, infants, though innocent and without need of the forgiveness of sins, still benefit from baptism through a reception of "sanctification, justice, filial adoption, inheritance, that they may be brothers and members of Christ, and become dwelling places of the Spirit."[85]

However, even writers such as Gregory of Nazianzus, himself not baptized until an adult despite being the son of a bishop, allowed for infant baptism in extreme, emergency situations and attributed some benefit to the practice. Nevertheless, he preferred believers' baptism

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[81] Augustine, *On Baptism Against the Donatists* 4.32, in *NPNF* 2.7.

[82] Augustine, *On Baptism Against the Donatists* 4.32.

[83] Augustine, *On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins, and on the Baptism of Infants* 2.43.

[84] Augustine, *On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins, and on the Baptism of Infants* 2.43.

[85] John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instruction* 3.6, in *NPNF* 1.9.

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because of the proper connection of baptism with repentance.

In the East there is a clear picture of baptismal practice and theology for believers being adapted for infants. Importantly, though, in the East baptism is not believed to remit the sins of the infants. There are other benefits articulated by theologians, however. Gregory of Nazianzus does not attribute original sin or guilt to infants.[86] Rather, he argues that infants who die without baptism are not punished.[87] Chrysostom[88] similarly assumes the innocence of newborns, stressing numerous blessings beyond merely the forgiveness of sins.[89] The infant receives sacramental membership in the body of Christ, the indwelling presence of the Spirit, etc. In the West, things are much different. As seen with Cyprian, "The infant approaches that much more easily to the reception of the forgiveness of sins in baptism because the sins remitted are not his own, but those of another."[90]

Conclusions and Implications

There are several conclusions we can draw from our investigation of baptism in the patristic writings. Baptism in the patristic writings has less to do with age than with the role of repentance, profession of faith, and entrance into the full life of the church. In each period we surveyed, the emphasis was invariably on the catechumen who began a new stage in her or his life as a believer. Having demonstrated a commitment to the teachings and lifestyle of the church, the catechumen was initiated into full communion with the church through the rite of baptism. The normal order of conversion, preparation for church life, and baptism is reflected not only in direct references from the second and third centuries, but in the church orders both ancient and later. The practice of infant baptism, arising most likely in the second century, required accommoda-

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[86] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 22.13, in *NPNF* 2.7.

[87] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 40.

[88] Ferguson, "Preaching at Epiphany"; T. M. Finn, *The Liturgy of Baptism in the Baptismal Instructions of St. John Chrysostom* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1967); T. Harjunpaa, "St. John Chrysostom in the Light of his Catechetical and Baptismal Homilies," *LQ* 29.2 (1977): 167–95; L. L. Mitchell, "The Baptismal Rite in Chrysostom," *AThR* 43 (1961): 307–403; P. Pleasants, "Making Christian the Christians: The Baptismal Instructions of St. John Chrysostom," *GOTR* 34.4 (1989): 379–92.

[89] Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instruction* 3.6 (see list on p. 14).

[90] Cyprian, *Epistle* 64.5, in *ANF* 5.

tion of the church's baptismal liturgy to the innovative practice and is not reflected in the manuals.[91]

Prior to the third century there is no voice found in the patristic writings that rejects the baptism of only believers. Even if the inscriptions are to be read as reflecting a quite early practice of emergency baptism, which they most certainly do, that accommodation does not constitute an explicit rejection of a normative practice of believers' baptism.

In the West particularly the patristic writings show a defense for infant baptism that corresponds with a more refined view of original sin. In Augustine, for example, baptism is the means by which original sin is removed. Because infants are guilty of this sin, and in need of forgiveness, baptism is quite logically to be extended to them. Tertullian is aware of this in the third century, but rejects the notion on two counts. First, infants are innocent, guiltless, and not in need of forgiveness. Second, faith alone is sufficient for salvation. Baptism is subsequent to faith. As children are neither in need of forgiveness nor able to possess faith, baptism is unnecessary.

Missionary baptism seems to be an idea generated to make allowance for a position already held by Jeremias. There is nothing in the patristic writings prior to the third century that either states or implies that the church conceived of two different baptisms: paedo-baptism for the infant children of believers and missionary baptism for converts from Judaism or paganism.

The ceremony appears to be adapted to suit infants, seeing that it does not give any specific instruction about their baptism. It would seem that an existing practice of baptism of adults and children old enough to believe was adapted to the baptism of infants in time. It would seem that emergency baptism and the rise of the doctrine of original sin drive the desire to institute paedo-baptism. It is hard to imagine how the patristic descriptions and instructions regarding baptism would have developed within a church that already and regularly practiced infant baptism. Why is there no description of how this would happen? Why, even in the fourth and fifth centuries, do the documents not even hint at how infant baptism might be performed? It seems more likely that the ancient practice of baptizing only believers was adjusted slightly to allow for the baptism of non-believing infants in addition to believing children and adults.

Jeremias's conclusion of a "crisis" in the practice of infant baptism in

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[91] A possible exception is Hippolytus, but even this evidence is debatable.

the fourth century is not the only, or even most plausible, explanation of the evidence. Rather, the most plausible conclusion is that the debate which ensues in the third century continues into the fourth. While paedo-baptism is allowed in emergency situations and even functions as a rule in some churches, it is not the universal practice of the church. Tertullian's position seems to have supporters even into the fourth and fifth centuries. There is no legitimate reason to dismiss such a conclusion so easily, as Jeremias does.

We can say then with some confidence that the patristic writings demonstrate a challenge to the ancient practice of baptizing only those who had repented of sin, placed their faith in Jesus Christ, and committed to live a faithful Christian life following a time of instruction and testing. Catechumens were Christians, but were not considered fully participating members of the church. They were not allowed to participate in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, for instance.

Due to the dual pressures of infant mortality and evolving views of the sinfulness of even newborn infants, the novel practice of baptizing infants became widespread by the third century. This practice was not accepted as universal even by the fourth century, as infants' need for forgiveness continued to be questioned. In both the third and fourth centuries theologians continued to argue for only the baptism of believers. These writers ended up where Peter, in his Pentecost sermon began: "Repent and be baptized." The account in Acts then records, "Those who received his word were baptized."

The Possibility of Baptismal Baptist Theology: Retrieving Irenaeus for Contemporary Baptists

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Abstract: *This article delves into the intricate relationship between believer's baptism and the interpretation of the Bible within Baptist theology. Acknowledging that this connection is more intricate than a straightforward progression from biblical interpretation to church practice, the study draws upon the insights of early Church Father Irenaeus of Lyons to elaborate on the profound significance of baptism as a guiding framework for Christian faith and Bible interpretation. Irenaeus's perspective highlights that baptism provides not only an ontological foundation but also a conceptual framework for comprehending the Christian faith. This perspective resonates with Baptists, whose emphasis on regenerate church membership and believer's baptism aligns with Irenaeus's focus on the ontological reality of baptism and its shaping influence on Christian thought. By adopting Irenaeus's approach, Baptists can expand their understanding of baptism from a micro-church practice to a macro-theological category, enriching their theological outlook and the interpretive lens through which they engage with Scripture. This approach does not require creedal authority but enables Baptists to embrace their distinctive theological identity while deepening their understanding of the ontological underpinnings of faith.*

Key Words: *baptism, Baptist theology, dogmatics, dogmatic theology, Irenaeus of Lyons, St. Irenaeus*

Believer's baptism defines Baptists both in name and in practice. While there are additional distinctive marks of Baptist churches, it would be difficult to overstate the significance of believer's baptism in defining this tradition. At the same time, in many contemporary Baptist texts, believer's baptism is relegated to a mere church ordinance. Baptists treat baptism as a biblical and ecclesial necessity central in the life of the local church. Believer's baptism is what Baptists do, but Baptists have not often developed its impact on the way they think.

If the relationship between baptism and Baptist thought[1] is considered at all, it is oft treated in a linear manner, moving from a right reading of the Bible to church practice. Baptists of the past and present read the Bible to hear its intent and conclude that the church should baptize only the regenerate. Without question, Baptists should move from Bible interpretation to drawing conclusions of church practice. However, the interplay between baptism and Bible interpretation can be more complex than just a linear movement from the Bible to church practice—for any denomination. Christians can move from their baptism and baptismal confession back to the Bible as a guide for biblical interpretation. At a basic level, most Christians receive their thoughts on church practice and Bible interpretation from their experiences in and with the church itself and interpret the Bible according to that received tradition. Baptism and Bible interpretation have a multidirectional relationship, wherein Christians move from the Bible to their views of baptism but, also, can move from baptism to clarity in Christian thinking and Bible interpretation.

Recognition of the multidirectional relationship raises the question—can there be a Baptist way of thinking and interpreting the Bible that emerges from the practice of believer's baptism? For some, this may seem to teeter on the edge of an unhelpful theological innovation (as some have accused Baptists of before). However, this question has deep moorings in the history of the church. In fact, a close tie between baptism and Christian thought was quite common and even defining for the early church Fathers.[2] This common thread provides grounding for contemporary Baptists to consider the relationship between our defining practice and the framework of our theological thought patterns.[3] Alt-

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[1] By "Baptist thought" or "Christian thought" one could also say "theology" or "doctrine." "Theology" and "doctrine," though, are terms with a plethora of definitions. As such, I have chosen to use the more general "Christian thought" in this essay to refer to the conceptual frameworks in the mind of Christians.

[2] For someone who maps some of this trajectory and connection, see Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 36–41..

[3] This is not to say I am arguing that all the early church fathers practiced believer's baptism. However, there are legitimate claims that the some of them did. Steven A. McKinion, "Baptism in the Patristic Writings," in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn Wright (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2007). See also Everett Ferguson, *Bap-*

hough we might look at multiple early church fathers to explore this connection, Irenaeus of Lyons offers to contemporary Baptists a well-defined connection between baptism and Christian thinking making him a fruitful interlocutor. The intersection between baptism and Bible interpretation plays a significant role in the whole of his theology. Further, his views on this point influence later church leaders.[4]

I will argue that, for Irenaeus, baptism provides the ontological and conceptual framework for the Christian faith and Bible interpretation, and this framework can be appropriated for contemporary Baptists. I will argue for this thesis in two parts. First, I will outline the three key components of Irenaeus's thought regarding baptism and Christian thinking/Bible interpretation. (1) Baptism is an ontological reality. (2) The conceptual categories emerging from baptism create a framework through which we understand the Christian faith and interpret the Scripture. (3) Baptism is a macro-theological category, not a micro-church practice. Second, I will argue that, for Baptists, believer's baptism is an ontological reality and thus agrees with Irenaeus's first component. As a result, Baptists can develop a framework of thought and treat baptism as a macro-theological category in a way akin to Irenaeus's second and third components. I will conclude with a brief proposal for such a baptismal framework.[5]

Retrieving Irenaeus on a Baptismal Way of Thinking

In the introduction to *The Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching* and scat-

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tism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 856–57.

[4] According to John Behr, Irenaeus's proposal was "the most significant transition in early Christianity. Thereafter, Christians were committed to a common body of Scripture, including the apostolic writings … the canon of truth, apostolic tradition and succession … in a unity of faith" (*The Way to Nicaea* [Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001], 111).

[5] I should note at the outset that the question of Irenaeus's own view of baptismal practice is up for some debate. See Peter-Ben Smit, "The Reception of the Truth at Baptism and the Church as Epistemological Principle in the Work of Irenaeus of Lyons," *Ecclesiology* 7.3 (2011): 354–73. This essay does not intend to engage in that discussion. Rather, I argue regardless of Irenaeus's own views of the relationship between baptism and regeneration, his way of thinking can be appropriated in a Baptist context. I am not arguing that Irenaeus himself appropriated his own thought in the exact way I will propose, which would be anachronistic.

tered across *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus provides three clear commitments on the relationship between baptism and Christian thought. First, baptism is an actual participation in the reality or ontology of God in Christ. It is no mere sign or symbol, but rather, in baptism we have life in God through union with Christ by means of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Christians participate in God through union with Christ. Second, the conceptual categories emerging from the ontological reality of Christian baptism create a Trinitarian/Christological framework through which we understand the Christian faith and interpret Scripture. Third, baptism is a macro-theological category, not a micro-church practice. The first two commitments combine to cause the third. Irenaeus builds his framework for the Christian faith and interpreting the Bible out of the faith received in Christian baptism.

Before exploring these three components, we must bear in mind that in Irenaeus's way of thinking the ontological and conceptual components are inseparable. I am only dividing them in this essay for heuristic value and to highlight the unity and coherence of Irenaeus's proposal. All conceptual, articulate[6] categories of Christian thinking and Bible interpretation emerge from the ontological reality of God in Christ and his church. In this way, ontology has logical primacy over verbal categories of our knowledge. At the same time, in the lived experiences of Christians, the ontological reality and the articulate framework cannot be bifurcated. Christians always experience reality and our verbal framework simultaneously. The ontological reality and conceptual categories are essentially inseparable—two sides of the same coin.

First, baptism is an actual participation in the reality of God in Christ—ontologically.[7] For Irenaeus reality, or Truth, plays a significant role in his understanding of the Christian faith and its Scripture. In the opening paragraph of *Demonstration*, Irenaeus explains he intends "to demonstrate by means of a summary, the preaching of the truth so as to

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[6] By "articulate" I mean the words we use in our theological thinking and discourse.

[7] T. F. Torrance defines ontology as "the doctrine of being or of what really exists, the objective reality to which our thought refers and which gives it meaning" (*Belief in Science and in Christian Life: The Relevance of Michael Polanyi's Thought for Christian Faith and Life* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1998], 141). This sense is consistent with my usage in this paper. In this case, that what "really exists" is the Triune God and the hypostatic union of the Jesus Christ Son of God, and then, the church's participation in *this* God in *this* Christ.

strengthen your faith."[8] For Irenaeus, "the truth" preached is not solely propositional but rather is itself living. This living, textual truth brings life to those who understand it in faith. Irenaeus's goal of exposition of the "things of God" is "so that … it will bear your own salvation like fruit."[9] This personal, textual truth brings life through salvation, which blossoms in the life of the believer bearing "salvation like fruit."

Irenaeus concludes his preface with an appeal to the rule or canon of faith, which is anchored in God *in se*. He writes, "We must keep to the rule of faith unswervingly, and perform the commandments believing in God and fearing him, for he is Lord, and loving him, for he is Father."[10] In this rule of faith, Irenaeus intends something far more pervasive than a mere conceptual framework—both because of the object of faith, and our response. In terms of Christian response, as we keep the rule of faith, we also perform the commandments of God. As Irenaeus explains, "Action comes by faith."[11] The faith that produces the obedient action in the believer is moored in the ontological reality (or "truth") of God who is the object of our faith. He writes, "The truth brings about faith, for faith is established upon things truly real, that we may believe what really is, as it is, and believing what really is, as it is, we may always keep our conviction firm."[12] This sentence provides the premise upon which the rest of Irenaeus's argument depends. Christians cultivate faith through engaging with the Scripture wherein we know the God who really is and seek to conform our believing to him as he really is. In other words, Christians begin and end with God in himself and continually conform our minds and actions to this true God, which involves words and concepts. This real and true God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

As Irenaeus continues, he makes a direct connection between God who really is and the ontological reality of Christian Baptism. He explains that this faith, brought about by the truth of God, "exhorts us to remember what we have received in baptism."[13] He defines this baptism as "for the remission of sins, in the name of God the Father, and in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, [who was] incarnate, and died,

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[8] Irenaeus Saint Bishop of Lyon, *On the Apostolic Preaching*, trans. John Behr (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003). *Demonstration,* 1.

[9] *Demonstration*, 1.

[10] *Demonstration*, 3.

[11] *Demonstration*, 3.

[12] *Demonstration*, 3

[13] *Demonstration*, 3.

and was raised, and in the Holy Spirit of God."[14] Irenaeus outlines the reality of our baptism and its confession. He makes this connection by referring to Matt 28:19 and Jesus's command to baptize "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."[15] Irenaeus clarifies this biblical framework of baptism in the Name by adding "incarnate, died and was raised." In doing so, he brings Matt 28:19 and Rom 6:1–11 together by asserting the Trinitarian, Christological reality of Christian baptism.[16] This baptism in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, into the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, is "the seal of eternal life and rebirth unto God … that we may … be sons … of the eternal and everlasting God."[17] As Christians are baptized into Christ we are changed in being—moving from death to "eternal life" as we are given "rebirth unto God." According to Irenaeus, in salvation Christians participate in the Triune life in Christ.[18] Christians hold unswervingly to the rule of faith by remembering our baptism into the divine life through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. As Christians participate in Christ, baptism affects our being, and as such, it requires the ontological reality of God in Christ and a Christian's rebirth in him. In this way, Christian baptism is real—the church's real participation in a real God.

When referring to baptism "for the remission of sins," Irenaeus does not clarify whether he intends that the church's practice of H_2O water baptism is saving or whether our baptism in the Water of the Holy Spirit (John 7:39) saves. However, two components of Irenaeus's proposal are clear and relevant for Baptist appropriation of his thought. First, baptism requires faith. Everett Ferguson claims, "Irenaeus strongly asserted

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[14] *Demonstration*, 3.

[15] In *Against Heresies* he makes the Great Commission connection explicit. He writes, "For [God] promised that in the last times He would pour Him [the Spirit] upon [His] servants and handmaids, that they might prophesy; wherefores He did also descend upon the Son of God, made the Son of man, becoming accustomed in fellowship with him to dwell in the human race, to rest with human beings, and to dwell in the workmanship of God, working the will of the Father in them, and renewing them from their old habits into the newness of Christ" (*Against Heresies* 3.17.1).

[16] Irenaeus does not make a direct connection to either of these biblical passages. Of course, he never cites biblical passages because such citations were not the practice of his time.

[17] *Demonstration*, 3.

[18] Irenaeus explains the same idea in his exposition of Romans 5–6 in *Against Heresies* 3.16.9.

the necessity of faith for salvation."[19] In *Demonstration,* as already noted Irenaeus provides a close tie between faith/rule of faith and baptism. In *Against Heresies* he makes a similar claim that "Human beings can be saved in no other way … except by believing."[20] Second, any view where the candidates are not regenerate would be foreign to Irenaeus's proposal. If Irenaeus intends the church's practice in baptism at all, that sacrament must be observed in conjunction with our regeneration in Christ. Either the baptismal candidates are regenerated by faith through the H$_2$O waters of the church's practice and the water of the Spirit simultaneously, or the baptismal candidates are regenerate by the Spirit in Christ prior to their baptism in the H$_2$O waters of the church. It would be incoherent to Irenaeus's proposal for baptismal candidates to be regenerated after their baptism in the H$_2$O waters of the church. In this way, baptism requires the ontological reality of the Christian's regeneration in Christ which occurs through faith.

Second, the conceptual categories emerging from Christian baptism create a Trinitarian/Christological framework through which one understands the Christian faith and interprets the Scripture. Irenaeus develops this argument in *Demonstration* and in *Against Heresies*. As noted above, Irenaeus functions with an inner coherence of ontology and conceptual frameworks, and they cannot be separated. To keep this point at the forefront, I have opted to refer to this as "onto-conceptual" to reinforce the essential connection between the Christian way of thinking and that which is "truly real."

In *Demonstration*, Irenaeus provides a direct presentation of the conceptual categories which emerge from God *in se* and provide the thought-framework of the Christian faith. He does not move beyond Trinitarian/Christological ontology but rather proposes that the conceptual categories of the Christian faith are the articulation of Trinitarian/Christological ontology of our baptism. This claim harkens back to his admonition at the beginning of the introductory section that the faith, brought about by the truth, "exhorts us to remember that we have received baptism."[21] In short, Irenaeus's proposes that the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in whom the Triune God reveals himself should provide the framework for Christian thought and Bible interpretation. Faith in God through Christ occurs conceptually in three articles which accord ontologically with the three persons of the Trinity.

[19] Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 304.
[20] *Against Heresies* 4.2.7.
[21] *Demonstration*, 3.

Article 1: "God, the Father, uncreated, uncontainable, invisible, one God, the Creator of all."[22]

Article 2: "the Word of God, the Son of God, Christ Jesus our Lord, who was revealed by the prophets according to the character of their prophecy and according of the nature of the economies of the Father, by whom all things were made, and who, in the last times, to recapitulate all things, became a man amongst men, visible and palpable, in order to abolish death, to demonstrate life and to effect communion between God and man."[23]

Article 3: "the Holy Spirit, through whom the prophets prophesied and the patriarchs learnt the things of God and the righteousness, and who, in the last times, was poured out in a new fashion upon the human race renewing man, throughout the world, to God."[24]

Irenaeus organizes the articulate, verbal aspect of the Christian faith to correspond with the structure of God's being and the Christian gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and his Son has affected "communion between God and man." Here he expands the baptismal summary he introduced in paragraph 3. He punctuates this expanded introduction to the verbal articles of the Christian faith and ties them inseparably to baptism. He states, "For this reason the baptism of our regeneration takes place through these articles."[25] In Christian baptism we receive both personal renewal in being and an articulate framework of thought which accords with that renewal.

For some contemporary ears, Irenaeus's summary of the Christian faith's articles may sound like embellishing the creeds. Irenaeus predates the creeds, but he is rehearsing the faith once for all delivered to the saints that would later be inscribed in the ecumenical creeds.[26] John Behr notes that Irenaeus's aim in these creedal-like statements "is not … to give fixed, and abstract statements of Christian doctrine."[27] Irenaeus does not defend creedalism. He is not protecting a particular set of codified, authoritative words. Rather, he defends a particular Christian way of thinking that accords with the being of God and our salvation in him.

[22] *Demonstration*, 6.
[23] *Demonstration*, 6.
[24] *Demonstration*, 6.
[25] *Demonstration*, 7.
[26] For a similar thought, see Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, 66.
[27] Behr, *The Way to Nicaea*, 35.

He does so, not for the sake of the creed, but rather as an exposition of the faith into which we are baptized. He makes the point in plain writing, "For this reason the baptism of our regeneration takes place through these articles."[28] Our real baptism into a real God and affecting real regeneration occurs with a conceptual framework or "articles" corresponding to the being of God into whom we are baptized.

In *Against Heresies* Irenaeus introduces a different way of considering the onto-conceptual framework of the faith into which we are baptized by using the analogy of a mosaic. He refutes the heretics who "disregard the order and connection of the Scriptures."[29] The heretics ignore the inherent conceptual framework of the Bible. He describes the Scripture as "a beautiful image of a king … constructed by a skillful artist out of precious jewels."[30] The false teachers have rearranged "the gems, and so fit them together to make them into the form of a dog or a fox."[31] Frances Young explains that Irenaeus's appeal to "the King's face" can be equated to "the Christological reference" of the text. This picture of the King is the onto-conceptual framework of the Christian faith—Christ, the King.[32] One cannot rightly interpret the Scripture without beholding the King through the textual jewels.

Later, Irenaeus makes a direct tie between his mosaic analogy and baptism. He begins the section by using Homer's writings. He pulls well-known quotations and rearranges them to create a narrative structure foreign to Homer's own works. He moves from his Homeric example back to his analogy of a jeweled mosaic, wherein baptism delivered to us the picture which allows Christians to properly locate to constituent pieces of the Scripture. He explains, "anyone who keeps unchangeable in himself the rule of truth received through baptism will recognize the names and sayings and parables from the Scriptures."[33] In baptism, Christians have received a way of thinking necessary to properly interpret the Bible, and as long as we hold fast to the faith of our baptism, we will read the Bible rightly and reject any heretical teaching which scrambles the textual image of our King. He writes, "For if he

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[28] *Demonstration*, 7.
[29] *Against Heresies* 1.8.1.
[30] *Against Heresies* 1.8.1.
[31] *Against Heresies* 1.8.1.
[32] Frances M. Young notes that Irenaeus's appeal to "the King's face" can be equated to "the Christological reference" of the text (*Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002], 20).
[33] *Against Heresies* 1.9.4.

recognizes the jewels, he will not accept the fox for the image of the king. He will restore each one of the passages to its proper order and, having fit it into the body of truth, he will lay bare their fabrication and show that it is without support"[34] The faith received and professed in baptism is the framework of Bible interpretation and Christian thinking.

As Irenaeus continues, he follows a nearly identical pattern of logic as in the introduction to *Demonstration*. First, he asserts that the faith received in baptism provides the framework (or *hypothesis*) to understand the Bible according to its intent, and then, he articulates that faith. He writes that the church's faith accords with three articles corresponding to the three Persons of the Trinity. This faith begins with belief "in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea and all things that are in them"[35] followed by belief "in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation;"[36] and finally belief "in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God."[37] From there Irenaeus outlines precisely what the Spirit proclaimed through the prophets:

> the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and his future [manifestation] from heaven in the glory of the Father … to raise up anew all flesh of the human race, in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord and God, and Saviour, and King, according to the will of the Father, "every knee should bow … and that every tongue should confess to him.[38]

John Behr remarks of this section that "Though not formally called a 'canon of truth,' this is the fullest such statement given by Irenaeus."[39]

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[34] *Against Heresies* 1.9.4.
[35] *Against Heresies* 1.10.1.
[36] *Against Heresies* 1.10.1.
[37] *Against Heresies* 1.10.1.
[38] *Against Heresies* 1.10.1.
[39] John Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity*, reprint ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 79. See also "Just as a cento of Homeric verses taken out of their context and strung together to produce a new story will not fool anyone who actually knows Homer, so someone who has received at baptism the 'measuring rod of truth' will be able to recognize as scriptural the names, phrases and parables usurped by the heretics, but will not accept as true the blasphemous tales they have woven from them (*AH* I.9.5). As the reference

Similar to *Demonstration*, in *Against Heresies* Irenaeus argues for an onto-conceptual framework of the Christian faith received in baptism which accords to the being of God.[40]

Third, baptism is a macro-theological category, not a micro-church practice. The resultant conclusion of points one and two is that baptism can play a major role in Christian thinking and Bible interpretation. For Irenaeus, the significance of the faith of our baptism and our reception of it extends far beyond a moment where Christians enter the baptismal waters in the church. Rather baptism involves participation in God himself and affects the very being of Christians as we confess the Christian faith—the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. As explained above, in our baptism we hold fast to the canon of truth/rule of faith. This rule of faith, then, provides the proper framework for Christian thought and Bible interpretation. J. N. D. Kelly explains that by canon of truth Irenaeus meant "a condensed summary, fluid in its wording but fixed in content, setting out the key-points of the Christian revelation in the form of a rule."[41] This "condensed summary" creates for Christians a framework to properly read the Bible according to its nature and purposes. According to Behr, "For Irenaeus, the canon of truth is the embodiment or crystallization of the coherence of Scripture, read as speaking of the Christ who is revealed in the Gospel, the apostolic preaching of Christ 'according to the Scripture.'"[42] Behr appeals to the gospel of Christ as a way of explaining Irenaeus's understanding of the canon of truth. Christians receive the gospel through the preaching of the church according to the Scripture, confess the gospel in our baptism, and then,

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to baptism suggests, the 'measuring rod of truth' is related to a creed, but the relationship is to the content of the creed, rather than to a particular credal formula. It does not appear to have had a fixed form, but to have been adaptable to the polemical context in which it was invoked. Its fundamental features are that there is but one God, who created everything from nothing by his Word, and who is the Father of Jesus and the author of the whole history of salvation. In the *Demonstration* Irenaeus speaks of a κανών (the Greek word is transliterated in the Armenian) of faith rather than of truth, and tells us that this faith is arranged under the three headings by which baptism is completed—faith in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Dem 3)" (Denis Minns OP, *Irenaeus : An Introduction* [London: T&T Clark, 2010], 12).

[40] Behr notes that it's likely *Demonstration* preceded *Against Heresies* (*The Way to Nicaea*, 112).

[41] J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco : Harper & Row, 1978), 37.

[42] Behr, *The Way to Nicaea*, 36.

interpret the Scripture according to its own gospel grid.

As Christians implement this way of Bible interpretation, they break-through to the reality of God—who reveals himself through his Word. Irenaeus instructs that "If anyone … reads Scripture with attention, he will find in them an account of Christ.… For Christ is the treasure which was hid in the field, that is, in this world … but the treasure hidden in the Scripture is Christ since he was pointed out by means of types and parables."[43] As we hold fast to the Rule of Faith, we behold the face of Christ the King as a treasure hidden in the field of the Scripture. We do so by seeing him in the smaller components in "types and parables." T. F. Torrance, commenting on *Against Heresies* 4.20.7, expounds that Irenaeus's ruled reading of the Scripture "means that interpretation must penetrate through the text of the Scriptures into the actual pattern of the saving events as proclaimed in the Old and New Testaments and discern how various passages and statements refer to and reveal that inner sequence and consequence in the operations of God."[44] Torrance continues, as we read the Bible with this expectation to penetrate to the reality of God in Christ it "takes us deep into the Gospel, into the coordinated work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and into the interconnection between redemption and creation running throughout all history from the very beginning to the final consummation."[45] As we read the Bible according the Rule of Faith received in our baptism, the gospel serves as the framework for Christian thinking and Bible interpretation, and we are drawn again to the reality of our union with God in Christ. As Christians interpret the Bible this way, we do so "in accordance with their own *system of truth*, that is, according to the rule of truth or faith already developed by the Apostles themselves who gave us the Scriptures."[46] For Irenaeus, reading the Bible through our baptismal confession means reading according to its nature and intent.

Appropriating Irenaeus for a Baptismal Baptist Theology

Irenaeus proposes baptism as the ontological reality of our participation in God and the conceptual Trinitarian/Christological framework of Christian thought. This proposal can be appropriated by contemporary

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[43] *Against Heresies* 4.26.1.

[44] Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (New York: T&T Clark, 1995), 119.

[45] Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 119.

[46] Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 128.

Baptists. Baptists and Irenaeus share a core conviction about ontological reality in baptism. When we begin with ontology as a point of agreement, we can appropriate the conceptual framework proffered by Irenaeus as well. In other words, Irenaeus and Baptists agree in some sense on this first commitment outlined above, and so we can follow his lead in developing commitments two and three.

To explain this further, I will briefly justify the claim that all Baptists share a bedrock and defining conviction about the importance of ontology in baptism and church membership. Second, I will follow Irenaeus's logic to propose key components to expand our understanding of baptism from a micro-church practice to a macro-theological category. In doing so, Baptists can cultivate a way of thinking inseparable from the lived experiences we already share in our churches week-by-week.

First, Baptists share a core conviction of ontological reality of baptism. Baptists are a wily folk, and even agreeing on our defining distinctives is contested and difficult. Although there are legitimate reasons to include multiple defining marks of Baptist theology,[47] by and large, Baptists agree that the twin commitments of regenerate church membership and believer's baptism play a foundational role in defining our tradition.[48] John Hammett asserts, "Central to the idea of the vision of the church is the insistence that the church must be composed of believers only."[49] Gregg Allison follows suit defining the church as "the people of God who have been saved through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and have been incorporated into his body through baptism with the Holy Spirit."[50] Stanley Grenz couples this logic of regenerate church membership with believer's baptism by calling baptism "the logical outworking of … regenerate church membership."[51] Thus, we can consider

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believer's baptism and regenerate church membership as inherently connected. Hammett explains, "They form part of the believer's church tradition, and believer's baptism promotes and preserves that type of church."[52]

Both believer's baptism and regenerate church membership focus on the church's being. While Baptists stake claims about the mode and meaning of baptism, our core conviction lies in the being of the baptismal subject. Our unity emerges from a commitment to the *being* of the church and the subject of believer's baptism. For Baptists, in all aspects of ecclesiology it matters who you are. To be baptized, one must first have already confessed faith and been raised to new life in Christ. In the words of the *Abstract of Principles* baptism is "a sign of his fellowship with the death and resurrection of Christ."[53] Baptismal subjects participate in God in Christ. The baptism of believers serves as the gateway into the regenerate church. The baptism of our being into Christ is inseparable from participating in the church's practice, and so, perhaps more than anything else, believer's baptism is about an ontological reality.[54] In this way, Baptists are aligned with Irenaeus and his concern to anchor the Christian faith in a God who is "truly real" and in a baptism of rebirth in Christ in fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Thus, because Baptists share an inseparable connection between baptism and ontology, we can retrieve Irenaeus's argument for an onto-conceptual framework received and professed in baptism. While this idea may seem new or unfamiliar to some contemporary Baptists, the idea that baptism and a way of thinking go hand in hand is not new in Baptist history. For example, Thomas Helwys in his 1610 confession explains, "The Holy Baptism is given unto these in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, which hear, believe, and with peni-

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[47] E.g., William H. Brackney's six "genetic traits" of Baptist theology (*A Genetic History of Baptist Thought: With Special Reference to Baptists in Britain and North America* [Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004], 527–38).

[48] These two twin pillars map loosely onto Stephen Holmes's two poles of Baptist theology. Stephen R. Holmes, *Baptist Theology. Doing Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 5–6.

[49] John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2019), 91.

[50] Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*," Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 29.

[51] Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 711–12. John Hammett appeals to Grenz's logic, as well (*Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 109).

[52] John S. Hammett, *40 Questions About Baptism and the Lord's Supper* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2015), 104.

[53] *Abstract of Principles*, XV.

[54] I suspect some readers may desire more specificity about the relationship between the practice of H_2O water baptism in the church, and Spirit baptism in regeneration. This desire is valid. However, my point here is rather simple—for Baptists our baptism of regeneration by the Spirit and our participation in the church's practice baptism should be held closely together. In Baptist faith and practice, they inherently do, even if there may some divergence on the proper timing of baptism in relation to conversion. The inseparable connection between the church's baptismal practice and our baptism of regeneration fits well with the inseparability of the two in the Scripture, as well.

tent heart receive the doctrines of the Holy Gospel."[55] For Helwys and his followers, in baptism we have received "the doctrines of the Holy Gospel." Baptism not only accords with the being of God and our being in Christ, but also, an articulate framework of thought—"the doctrines of the Holy Gospel." More recently, Mark Dever claimed, "Baptism is itself a summary of our faith."[56] For Dever, baptism's value extends beyond the moment of its practice into a way thinking as it summarizes the Christian faith. The idea of conceptual categories received in baptism is not altogether new in Baptist history or in contemporary Baptist scholarship, and yet, there remains a chance to develop its centrality more fully.

For Baptists to appropriate Irenaeus's logic, we must grant primacy to the categories of being in our ecclesial practices and in the framework of our thought. In doing so, baptism moves from being a micro-church practice to functioning as a macro-theological category. Then, the God we confess in baptism and the Christ in whom we are regenerate shape core articulate categories for our theology.

In a baptismal Baptist theology, the conceptual framework of thought emerges from the ontological reality of our baptism. As far as doctrinal affirmation, all Baptists confess the Triune God and the Incarnate Son and consistently give proper articulation of those as stand-alone doctrines. However, most Baptists anchor the coherence of Scripture in something other than (though, not opposed to) the baptismal confession. For some Baptists, the biblical idea of covenant forms the core framework of our theology and Bible interpretation. Sometimes this takes the form of proper covenantalism as expressed in the *Second London Baptist Confession* or more recently Stephen Wellum and Peter Gentry's proposal for Progressive Covenantalism which focuses on the historic covenants of the Bible as the shaping conceptual framework of their thought.[57] Still others see dispensations, in various ways, as the

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[55] *A Short Confession of Faith* (1610), article 29 (*Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 2nd ed., ed. William L. Lumpking and Bill J. Leonard (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 2011).

[56] Mark E. Dever, "Baptism in the Context of the Local Church," in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn Wright (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2007), 329.

[57] For example, one might consider Stephen Wellum and Peter Gentry's proposal for Progressive Covenantalism. Peter John Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015).

framing concern for Bible interpretation and Christian thought.[58] These models offer much to Baptists of many stripes and should be commended for their commitment to the text of Scripture and desire to edify the church. Yet there remains another option for Baptist beyond Covenantalism or Dispensationalism. Should Baptists follow Irenaeus's model, our articulate, onto-conceptual framework would emerge from our baptism in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and our dying and rising with Christ. In this way, the Trinity and Christology play a shaping role in every aspect of Baptist thought and Bible interpretation, as God in Christ acts in growing his church into maturity

My purpose in this essay has not been to provide an entire proposal of a baptismal Baptist theology, but rather to justify the possibility for Baptists to follow Irenaeus's logic because of our shared conviction about ontology. That being said, let me proffer two concluding thoughts regarding baptism as a macro-theological category: (1) the Bible presents baptism in this light and (2) this way of thinking does not require creedal authority.

First, the Bible presents baptism as a macro-theological category for Bible interpretation. In brief, this big picture emerges from the combination of Matt 28:18–20, 1 Cor 10:2, and 1 Pet 3:21.[59] In Matt 28:19, Jesus invokes the Old Testament category of "the Name" in association with our baptismal confession. "The Name" looms large from God's naming of himself in Exod 3:14 as YHWH and is woven throughout the Old Testament. Here in Matt 28, the Name, YHWH of the Old Testament, gains definition as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit into whom we are baptized. In 1 Cor 10:2, Paul associates baptism with the Exodus. The Exodus, too, looms over the Old Testament as a paradigm for the salvation of God's people. When Paul brings the Exodus and baptism together, he introduces another way in which baptism plays a significant role in Bible interpretation. Finally, in 1 Pet 3:21, Peter says that our baptism corresponds to Noah and the flood. Thus, when these key texts from the New Testament associate baptism with such significant textual components of the Old Testament, baptism begins to emerge as a mac-

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[58] For example, one might consider Craig Blaising's and Darrell Bock's proposal for Progressive Dispensationalism. Craig A. Blaising, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1993).

[59] For a more robust exposition of the role of Baptism in relationship to the interpretative categories for the whole Bible, see G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973).

ro-theological category for Bible interpretation, and less something to be relegated as a micro-church practice.

Second, while Irenaeus's proposal may be associated with later creedalism, it does not require creedal authority. Some Baptists may bristle at any notion of the rule of faith on the grounds that it has been associated with an ecclesial authority outside of the context of the local church, which would transgress our shared commitments on church governances. This concern holds muster. In time, Irenaeus's somewhat flexible rule or canon took solid form as it was codified in the Magisterium. Those creeds do function authoritatively for Christians of other traditions. However, for a Baptist appeal to the rule of faith need not require us to import foreign authority structures into our polity. Rather, we can follow in Irenaeus's footsteps. While creeds may be a useful tool as a trustworthy articulation of the faith of our baptism, the church's codified language need not rule over us. Rather, "Christ … clothed in his gospel" according to the Scripture rules his church.[60] He is the King of our confession and whom we behold in the Scripture. The words we use that accord with his being may vary some depending on the context.

Conclusion

For Irenaeus, baptism provides the ontological and conceptual framework for the Christian faith and Bible interpretation, and this framework can be appropriated for contemporary Baptists. For Irenaeus, (1) baptism involves ontological participation in God in Christ. (2) The conceptual categories emerging from baptism create a framework through which we understand the Christian faith and interpret the Scripture. (3) Baptism is a macro-theological category, not a micro-church practice. Because Baptists share a commitment to ontology and baptism by way of our Baptist distinctives of believer's baptism and regenerate church membership, we can appropriate Irenaeus's logic to create a baptismal Baptist theology. In doing so, Baptists have leeway to lean into baptism as a macro-category, not a micro-ordinance. Let's be brazenly Baptist in the best kind of way. Let our defining ordinance define not only our ecclesial commitments (believers' baptism and regenerate church membership), but also our way of thinking.

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[60] John Calvin,. *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 3.2.6.

The Free Church Form of Dogmatics:
Covenant and Conscience under Christ

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Abstract: *This article explores the distinct dogmatic framework of free churches within the context of their personal and congregational commitment to the illuminated Word of God. The study draws from Acts 15 and the early Church Fathers to emphasize the church's role in adjudicating interpretations of the Word and highlights the significance of covenant in English Baptist and evangelical Anabaptist traditions. Focusing on covenantal freedom, the article underscores the need for a recovered understanding of this concept within Baptist theology, especially regarding dogmatic construction. By referencing Paul Fiddes's conceptualization of the "vertical" and "horizontal" dimensions of covenant, the study traces the development of covenant theology and ecclesiology in Baptist thought. Emphasizing the harmonization of personal justification and communal Christian life, the article demonstrates how covenant theology informs various aspects of Baptist doctrine. The analysis also addresses the anthropological challenges faced by free churches and advocates for the integration of intellectual doctrine and moral practice through the lens of progressive revelation and the work of the Holy Spirit within the covenanted community of faith.*

Key Words: *Anabaptist, Baptist theology, covenant, covenantalism, dogmatics, English Baptist, free church theology*

For the free churches of Jesus Christ, dogma is formally established only in the context of covenant life in, with, and under the Lord Jesus. In the free church context, which today includes Baptists, Churches of Christ, Mennonites, Methodists, and other communions which historically championed religious liberty in their early days, the practice of church dogma is intricately bound with the problems of church authority and freedom of conscience. The burden of this essay is to describe how the free churches have a distinct form of dogmatics which derives from their simultaneously personal and congregational commitment to be faithful to the Word of God illumined by the Spirit. The thesis of this essay is that free church dogmatics is characterized by a dynamic dialectic between communal covenant and liberty of conscience where Christ is present to his people and offers them blessings.

A Biblical Basis for Dogma

In Acts 15, various δόγματα, "dogmas" or "decisions," were promulgated by a local church acting as a democratic body to consider disputed teachings. The church of Jerusalem was led in its discussions by the apostles and elders, but the whole church deliberated, agreed to James's summary of the matter, and affirmed the dogmatic letter sent to Antioch (vv. 4, 12, 22).[1] Jerusalem's dogmas were received with joy, thus necessarily according to free conscience, by the other New Testament churches (Acts 15:30–31; 16:4–5).

The Word of Christ proclaimed by the apostles and elders, and by the various evangelists, prophets, and pastors and teachers given by God to the church, was the sole normative authority for the construction of the early churches' dogmas. The body of Christ was assigned the sole adjudicatory responsibility under Christ to decide between disputed interpretations of the Word among its various preachers (cf. 1 Cor 14:29–33; Eph 4:7–16). From the perspective of authority, the doctrinal systems crafted by individual theologians remain personal and speculative enterprises which carry no dogmatic weight. Dogma is determined through the interpretive authority of the church, and the church is necessarily a covenantal body.

A Distinct Reformation Strand of Churches

In 2017, Paul Fiddes of the University of Oxford, the leading British Baptist theologian, gathered several Baptist scholars to consider the "Fourth Strand of the Reformation." Fiddes argued that a certain group

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[1] The two views of church polity advocated by Daniel L. Akin (Single-Elder-Led Church) and James Leo Garrett Jr. (Congregation-Led Church) are ultimately compatible as demonstrated by those authors and in the experience of multiple Southern Baptist Churches. Replying to Akin, Garrett agreed, "Congregational polity is fully congruent with effective pastoral leadership of a servant type, wherein mutual trust, mutual accountability, and Christian love and forbearance are the norm." "Response by James Leo Garrett Jr.," in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity*, ed. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2004), 79. Replying to Garrett, Akin showed great admiration, even as he offered friendly criticisms. "In sum, Dr. Garrett does an excellent job in defending Congregational polity." "Response by Daniel L. Akin," in *Perspectives on Church Government*, 198. The models advocated by Akin and Garrett are compatible not only with each other, but with the historic dogmatic model uncovered in this essay.

of churches arising during the Reformation possessed a unique identity in contrast with the magisterial identities of the Lutheran, Reformed, and Anglican strands of the Protestant Reformation. While Fiddes analyzed the covenantal identity of the English Separatists, Bill Brackney and I evaluated covenant within the English General Baptist and evangelical Anabaptist traditions.[2] That conference recalled the previous studies of covenant by Champlin Burrage,[3] Charles Deweese,[4] and, more succinctly, Jason Lee.[5] It also coincided with the recent doctoral treatments of Baptist covenant theology by Samuel Renihan[6] and Baptist covenant ecclesiology by Travis Trawick.[7] I herein build upon those previous studies.

In the final chapter of my earliest systematic monograph, I identified five historical-theological themes which derive from the Great Commission and require further deliberation in the Baptist theological context: missions and evangelism; church polity; Trinitarian revelation; personal salvation; and covenantal freedom. In both expected and surprising ways, those five themes continue to prompt deliberation by Southern Baptists in both popular and academic venues. For instance, as widely expected, the Calvinist-Arminian debate continues to unfold in discussions of personal soteriology. But in a surprising development, many of us now perceive the classical doctrine of the Trinity has been challenged by a peculiar anthropology of male hierarchy which fuels the theological error of Eternal Functional Subordination.[8]

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[2] Paul Fiddes, ed., *The Fourth Strand of the Reformation: The Covenant Ecclesiology of Anabaptists, English Separatists, and Early General Baptists* (Oxford: Centre for Baptist History and Heritage, 2018).

[3] Champlin Burrage, *The Church Covenant Idea: Its Origin and Its Development* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1904).

[4] Charles W. Deweese, *Baptist Church Covenants* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990).

[5] Jason K. Lee, "Baptism and Covenant," in *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches*, ed. Thomas White, Jason G. Duesing, and Malcolm B. Yarnell III (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 119–36.

[6] Samuel Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance: The Federal Theology of the English Particular Baptists, 1642–1700* (Oxford: Centre for Baptist History and Heritage, 2018).

[7] Travis H. Trawick, "The Regenerate, Gathered, Baptized Congregation of Christ: A Theology of Church Covenant" (PhD Dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021).

[8] Keith S. Whitfield, ed., *Trinitarian Theology: Theological Models and Doctrinal Application* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2019).

This essay shall focus on the fifth Baptist theme of covenantal freedom vis-à-vis dogmatics, a theme faced by all the churches with some connections, even if perhaps only through inspiration, to the Reformation's fourth strand. I noted in *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* the challenges to covenantal freedom presented by misshapen ideas of authority and religious liberty as well as the divisive anthropology which fueled my own denomination's historic racial hypocrisy.[9] Those challenges have yet to be adequately addressed in doctrine or in practice. Developing the covenantal basis of our dogma may help prompt answers to recurring and often horrifying challenges.

In the following sections, I presume the need for the recovery of covenantal freedom in Baptist life, particularly regarding dogmatic construction. We must address the shape of covenantal dogmatics, the scope of covenantal dogmatics, and the blessing of covenantal dogmatics. These were outlined in the historic covenants adopted by the churches.

The Shape of Covenantal Dogmatics

Two Aspects of Covenantal Dogmatics

The shape of covenantal dogmatics must account for at least two parts in the covenant. John Smyth, the first Baptist theologian and first pastor of the first Baptist church, identified the two parts of the covenant as, "1. respecting God and the faithful. 2. respecting the faithful mutually.… The first part of the covenant respecting God is either from God to the faithful, or from the faithful to God.… The second part of the covenant respecting the faithful mutually conteyneth all the duties of love whatsoever."[10] Paul Fiddes accordingly refers to these two parts as the "vertical" and the "horizontal" dimensions of the covenant.[11] The two parts of the covenant sometimes go by the names of the eternal "covenant of grace" and the earthly "local church covenant." I shall refer to these two related aspects of covenantal dogmatics as covenant theology and covenant ecclesiology.

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[9] Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 195–203.

[10] John Smyth, *Principles and Inferences*, 1:254; cited in Lee, "Baptism and Covenant," 127.

[11] Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), 22.

But what is the bond between these two parts of covenantal dogmatics? Fiddes, following Barrie White, argues Robert Browne the Separatist was the first English Reformer to develop the local church covenant idea, but the eternal covenant was left disconnected. John Smyth, however, was the first to "fuse together" the eternal covenant with ecclesiology through making a covenant in time. Thomas Helwys, the first pastor of the first Baptist church on English soil, clearly united the practice of believers' baptism with the making of the covenant.[12] The shape of the covenant, therefore, requires a connection between the doctrine of the eternal covenant and the doctrine of the local church covenant. This linkage is located internally with personal conversion and externally in water baptism.

The Anabaptists were, historically, the first of the free churches to correlate the highly personal nature of evangelical justification with a vigorously communal understanding of the Christian life. Their key biblical text was 1 Pet 3:21, which Luther translated as *der Bund eines guten Gewissens mit Gott*, "the covenant of a good conscience with God." Modern scholars agree that Peter's ἐπερώτημα, "appeal" or "response," is best understood as "pledge" or "promise," thus affirming Luther's choice of *Bund*, "covenant."[13] Peter Davids says the apostle Peter was referring to "the pledge of oneself to God as a response to questions formally asked at baptism."[14]

Third and Fourth Aspects of Covenantal Dogmatics

The conscience, which personally obligates the human person to the judgment seat of God, is relieved of its crushing burden through justify-

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[12] Fiddes, "Covenant and the Inheritance of Separatism," in *The Fourth Strand of the Reformation*, 78. On the dynamic view of the human conscience in the life and witness of the earliest community of Baptist churches, see Malcolm B. Yarnell III, "We Believe with the Heart and with the Mouth Confess: The Engaged Piety of the Early General Baptists," *Baptist Quarterly*, 44 (2011): 36–58; Yarnell, "Political Theology among the Earliest Baptists: The Foundational Contribution of Leonard Busher, 1614–1616," in *Freedom and the Powers: Perspectives from Baptist History Marking the 400th Anniversary of Thomas Helwys'* The Mystery of Iniquity, ed. Anthony R. Cross and John H. Y. Briggs (Didcot, Oxon: The Baptist Historical Society, 2014), 23–34.

[13] Malcolm B. Yarnell III, "The Covenant Theology of the Early Anabaptists, 1525–1527," in *The Fourth Strand of the Reformation*, 35–37.

[14] Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 145.

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ing faith in the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The transformed state of a cleansed conscience before God is then manifested before humanity in water baptism. The human being receives baptism from the church and pledges herself to God with the church. John Smyth thus concluded, "the true forme of the Church is a covenant betwixt God & the Faithful made in baptisme in which Christ is visibly put on."[15] According to Lee, "Baptism fulfills the role of agreeing to the church covenant for Smyth because he now sees that baptism will demonstrate a person's agreement to the eternal covenant."[16]

If I might supplement the historical consensus, I would add that we need to speak of four parts in the covenant. The first three aspects of covenantal dogmatics are affiliated, as we have just described them, with theology proper, ecclesiology, and soteriology. Covenant theology and covenant ecclesiology are connected through covenant soteriology, for it is salvation to a right relationship with God that determines a person's right to participate in the local church covenant. First, covenant theology considers the works of God in his covenants with humanity. Second, covenant ecclesiology considers the church as the place of God's covenantal relationship with his redeemed community. Third, covenant soteriology considers the transformation of the human conscience by the Spirit's gift of faith through the proclamation of God's Word.

However, the theological, soteriological, and ecclesiological aspects of the covenant require a personal anchor. We must recall the exalted place of Jesus Christ as the sole mediator between the eternal God and rebellious humanity. Therefore, we must be careful to incorporate a necessary fourth component of covenantal dogmatics, the preeminent component of covenant Christology. The cup of the Supper represents "the new covenant in my blood," he said (Luke 22:20). It is in the Christological center of covenantal theology that we may also find requisite resources for addressing the anthropological problems which yet plague the free churches of Jesus Christ. Christ's saving presence in the human conscience is the key to our salvation, for he brings us before the eternal throne through the covenant of grace. Christ's saving presence in the human conscience is the key also to the Christian life, for Christ unites redeemed humanity not only with God but with one another.

Covenantal baptism in the Holy Spirit through faith in the resurrected God-Man forms the believer's internal union with God, while cove-

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[15] Smyth, *The Character of the Beast*, 2:645.
[16] Lee, "Baptism and Covenant," 135.

nantal baptism in water forms the believer's external union with the visible body of Christ on earth. It is through Trinitarian reconciliation with God in Christ by the Holy Spirit that we have reconciliation with one another: "For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father" (Eph 2:18 EVS). With the Trinitarian shape of covenantal dogmatics manifested in four parts—covenant theology, covenant Christology, covenant soteriology, and covenant ecclesiology—we may now suggest how the scope of covenantal dogmatics proceeds aesthetically to encompass the whole of Christian theology.

The Scope of Covenantal Dogmatics

Evangelical systems typically begin either with revelation or with God. Because recent theological discourse, both liberal and conservative, has too often prioritized human conceptions of revelation and interpretation, it seems best now to begin with God. It is God alone who freely reveals himself by his condescension of grace. Arrogant men may never compel the Word to come down or the Spirit to open (Rom 10:6; 2 Pet 1:19–21), no matter how much historical critical method or historical grammatical theory they exercise. (This statement does not constitute a denial of the utility of these methods, but it flatly denies their fundamental independence.) Theologically, the grace of God necessarily precedes the knowledge of humanity, while philosophically, ontology necessarily precedes epistemology. We know God simply because God reveals himself by his Word and in his Spirit.[17]

The God which the covenanted churches have encountered and worship is the triune God. In the General Baptist tradition, John Smyth thus affirmed the Trinitarian shape of the covenant, as did Benjamin Keach in the Particular Baptist tradition. The Sandy Creek tradition codified the ontological Trinity in one of its covenants: "We take the only living and true God to be our God, one God in three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."[18] The most popular covenant in many Southern

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[17] In our forthcoming volume on revelation, David Dockery and I seek in part to demonstrate how Trinity and revelation integrate seamlessly. David S. Dockery and Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *Special Revelation and Scripture* (Brentwood: B&H Academic, forthcoming 2024). In the first volume of my popular-level systematic theology, I put this claim in practice. Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *God*, vol. 1, *Theology for Every Person* (Brentwood: B&H Publishing, forthcoming 2024).

[18] "Covenant of Grassy Creek Baptist Church" (1757), in Deweese, *Baptist Church Covenants*, 202.

Baptist churches begins with a paragraph which unmistakably speaks in Trinitarian terms. In these covenants the Trinity is treated primarily in economic terms, for the Trinity is the God who saves.[19] Theology and economy are integrated within covenantal dogmatics through our holistic Christological soteriology.

Before witnessing that integration in three historically significant local church covenants, we must note how the free churches correlated the Old Covenant with the New Covenant. Preserving the centrality of Jesus Christ, the free churches have continued to refuse Reformed attempts to conflate baptism with circumcision, the church with the state, and the Spirit with the flesh. Rather than parroting the Reformed, English Particular Baptists thus argued circumcision belonged to the covenant of works with Israel while the baptism of believers belongs to the covenant of grace with the church.[20] In choosing this route, they followed the Anabaptists who had already rejected conflating the covenant of grace with Old Testament stipulations. It was the Reformed tradition that created that novel move.[21] Progressive revelation hereby undergirds Baptist dogma—the church follows Israel in time.

The scope of the dogmatics found in our written covenants does not typically follow a systematic format, but the various loci appear, nonetheless. When we turn to the formal confessions which the covenanted churches adopted, the central dogmas become evident. The covenanted churches' confessions consider the traditional systematic loci of God, revelation, creation, providence, humanity, sin, Christ, the Holy Spirit, salvation, ecclesiology, and eschatology. But the confessions, like the covenants, also consider the practical theological matters of Christian worship, Christian mission, and Christian conduct in family, church, and world. The free church dogmatic claim is that both the mental and the moral, through their individual and communal expressions in the lives of the churches and all their members, must necessarily be integrated in covenantal dogmatics.[22] The holistic assimilation of life with theology

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[19] Malcolm B. Yarnell III, "Baptists, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Christian Tradition," in *Baptists and the Christian Tradition: Towards an Evangelical Baptist Catholicity*, ed. Matthew Y. Emerson, Christopher W. Morgan, and R. Lucas Stamps (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020), 65.

[20] Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance*, 324–27.

[21] See my extended note on the priority of Anabaptist covenant theology in Yarnell, "The Covenant Theology of the Early Anabaptists, 1525–1527," 59–62.

[22] Demonstrating this unique Baptist and free church penchant for integrat-

can be seen in the following three important covenants from our free church tradition.

The First Anabaptist Covenant

The first known Anabaptist covenant, adopted in Zürich on January 21, 1525 with the recovery of believers' baptism, is described this way,

> They came to one mind in these things, and in the pure fear of God they recognized that a person must learn from the divine Word and preaching a true faith which manifests itself in love, and receive the true Christian baptism on the basis of the recognized and confessed faith, in the union with God of a good conscience, and henceforth serve God in a holy Christian life with all godliness; also, to be steadfast in affliction to the end.[23]

The subsequent Schlietheim Confession, literally *Brüderliche Vereinigung*, "Brotherly Union" or "Brotherly Covenant," focuses on practical Christian life in the redeemed community witnessing to a fallen world.[24] The Anabaptist covenants presumed a common classical theology with other evangelicals but explicitly connected Christian salvation with Christian life, theology with practice. They emphasized "true faith" in opposition to the false faith they detected in unregenerate Romanists and antinomian evangelicals, including some Anabaptists. The affirmation of credal orthodoxy and the emphatic integration of discipleship is particularly notable among these early baptistic evangelicals.[25]

An Early English Separatist Covenant

The Gainsborough Covenant recorded by William Bradford, the first governor of Massachusetts, tells us much about the covenantal dogmatics of the Separatist tradition and of Bradford's erstwhile pastor, John Smyth. Notice their focus upon community, upon obedience to Christ

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ing theology with the Christian life, James Leo Garrett Jr. added chapters on both Stewardship and the Mission of the Church into his *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*, vol. 2, 2nd ed. (North Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL, 2001), 405–28, 527–48.

[23] A. J. F. Ziegelschmid, ed. *Die älteste Chronik der Hutterischen Bruder* (Philadelphia: Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, 1943), 46–49; trans. in John C. Wenger, *Glimpses of Mennonite History and Doctrine* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1949), 24–25.

[24] Michael D. Wilkinson, "Brüderliche Vereinigung: A Brief Look at Unity in the Schleitheim Confession," *SwJT* 56 (2014): 199–214.

[25] Yarnell, "The Covenant Theology of the Early Anabaptists," 51–56.

as Lord, and upon the further light being shed upon God's Word. The assistance of divine grace, formal separation from the world, and heartfelt conversion are also evident. This covenant was adopted about two years before Smyth's church recovered covenantal baptism in Amsterdam.

> So many, therefore, of these proffessors as saw ye evill of these things in thes parts, and whose harts ye Lord had touched wth heavenly zeale for his trueth, they shooke off this yoake of antichristian bondage, and as ye Lords free people, joyned them selves (by a covenant of the Lord) into a church estate, in ye fellowship of ye gospell, to walke in all his wayes, made known, or to be made known unto them, according to their best endeavours, whatsoever it should cost them, the Lord assisting them.[26]

An Influential American Baptist Covenant

The influence of the 19th-century covenant of J. Newton Brown, subsequently reprinted for Southern Baptists by James Marion Frost, the first President of the Baptist Sunday School Board,[27] and broadly promoted by both James Madison Pendleton in his *Baptist Church Manual* and Edward T. Hiscox in his *The Baptist Church Directory*, is difficult to overstate. The popularity of Brown's covenant among Baptists in America remains without peer.[28]

Note how this American Baptist covenant affirms the Trinitarian shape of dogmatics, along with its theological, Christological, soteriological, and ecclesiological parts, in its first paragraph. Demonstrating the same integration of thought and practice as the early covenants from the Anabaptists and the Separatists, the remainder of Newton's covenant confesses at length the need to "walk together" continually with other Christians in practical, responsible, and loving ways.

> Having been led, as we believe, by the Spirit of God to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour; and, on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of

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[26] William Bradford, *History of Plymouth Plantation* (Boston: Wright and Potter, 1898), 13.

[27] J. M. Frost, *Baptist Why and Why Not* (Nashville: Baptist Sunday School Board, 1900).

[28] For the numerous reasons why Brown's covenant was so influential in both its 1833 and 1853 renditions, as well as various revisions, see Deweese, *Baptist Church Covenants*, 61–63, 65–76.

the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, we do now, in the presence of God, angels, and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ.[29]

The Blessing of Covenantal Dogmatics

When dogmatics is pursued in the context of the free churches' deep and abiding respect for both covenant and conscience, various tensions inevitably arise. These tensions, however, are God's providential means for blessing his church. Covenantal dogmatics evince blessings through the dynamic presence of Christ in the tensions over conscience and covenant, over the local church and the wider body of Christ, over liberty of conscience and life in communities, over consciences in various other covenants, and in the expected completion of dogmatics in the eschaton.

The Dynamic Presence of Christ in the Tension

The New Testament doctrine of the covenant is both highly personal and highly communal. First, the covenant that believers have with God in Christ is highly personal: It is "the covenant of a good conscience with God" (1 Pet 3:21). Second, the covenant believers have with God in Christ is also highly communal: "If two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it shall be done for them by my Father in heaven" (Matt 18:19).

From an anthropological perspective, Paul Fiddes says this dual focus results in a set of "tensions" which foster a "dynamic" view of authority. A first tension occurs between the pastoral oversight of the community and the pastoral oversight of the church's officers. The second tension is found between the local congregation and the association of churches. These tensions can only exist in a context of "trust."[30]

Fiddes has suggested something important here, which I would like to make more explicit: It is in the covenantal tensions of our faith that the presence of Christ brings blessings. The origin, transmission, and exercise of various authorities, as seen repeatedly in the history of Christianity must be perceived properly and handled delicately.[31]

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[29] J. Newton Brown, *The Baptist Church Manual* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1853), 23–24; Deweese, *Baptist Church Covenants*, 161–62.

[30] Fiddes, "Covenant and the Inheritance of Separatism," 65–68.

[31] A recent example of it not being handled delicately is when the Executive

John Smyth understood that Christ gives power "to the body of the church" with the covenant.[32] The important powers of communion of members and election of officers are always retained in the church, never transferred. Leo Garrett argues there are lesser powers which can be delegated when a congregation so decides democratically. I have argued that Christ retains all church authority even as the minister instrumentally exercises authority through proclaiming the omnipotent Word. "Simply put, the Word of God is the pastor's entire authority."[33]

The Local Church and the Body of Christ

While Baptists find the direct presence of Christ to the congregation comforting and the authoritative theological source for local church autonomy, they also have understood that there is only one Christ over all his churches and, therefore, there is only one body of Christ. As the Particular Baptists of London early confessed, the power of the churches regarding one another is that of "counsell and help," made present "under Christ their onely head."[34]

The sole headship of Christ over each congregation is clearly maintained in the Baptist covenantal tradition. Christ's Lordship is, moreover, displayed in his threefold office of prophet, priest, and king. This threefold office is "so proper to Christ, as neither in the whole, nor in any part there-of, it can be transferred from him to any other."[35] The unique mediation of Jesus and the inalienable and non-transferable as-

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Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention proposed in 2021 that the Mission and Ministry Statement be amended to read, "The SBC Executive Committee seeks to empower churches to prioritize, elevate, and accelerate .…" Spence Shelton moved that the word "empower" be changed to "serve," for the local churches are the source of the authority in the convention. *Book of Reports of the 2021 Southern Baptist Convention*, 53; *2021 Annual Meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention Daily Bulletin*, Wednesday, 3.

[32] Smyth, *Paralleles, Censures, Observations*, 2:388–89.

[33] Garrett, "The Congregation-Led Church: Congregational Polity," in *Perspectives on Church Government*, 157; Malcolm B. Yarnell III, "Article VI: The Church," in *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000: Critical Issues in America's Largest Protestant Denomination*, ed. Douglas K. Blount and Joseph D. Wooddell (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 60–62.

[34] The associational wording derives from the 1596 Separatist confession and was taken into the 1644 First London Confession. William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1969), 168–69.

[35] Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 159.

pects of his present headship to the covenanted church are inextricably bound to the Baptist and free church conception of communal authority. Christ's authority over the church's dogma remains perfect, entire, and continually active—the Word is alive an energetic (Heb 4:12).

Liberty of Conscience and Life in Community

The unique headship and non-transferable mediation of Jesus Christ is also displayed in Christ's relation to each human person's conscience. Bill Leonard thus reminds us, "Biblical authority is mediated through individual and communal interpretation based on liberty of conscience."[36] God alone is Lord of the conscience, and each and every person remains ultimately accountable to humanity's sole Mediator for their own faith and practice (1 Tim 2:5). The early Baptist confessions make much of liberty of conscience even as they simultaneously retain communal responsibility for one another through voluntary life in covenant.[37]

A continual dialectic of the authority of the conscience before God and the authority in the covenant before God in Christ with one another results in ongoing tensions which can only be lessened through faith in Christ alone and forbearance with one another. When individual Christians honor each person's radical dependence upon Christ for salvation and obedience, the tensions begin to disappear. The presence of Christ to the redeemed conscience through personal faith and the presence of Christ to the redeemed community through covenant belong together.

Christ as Lord of Conscience in Other Covenants

In the tension between conscience and covenant, freedom under Christ and freedom before one another coalesce. There is no real freedom outside the human person's eternal covenantal relation with God. And earthly covenants remain the only way in which human relations can be properly oriented, not only within the church, but also within the family and within human society at large.

The covenanted conscience retains freedom to voluntarily enter appropriate bonds with other humans precisely because Christ alone remains both Lord of conscience and Lord of covenant. There is perfect freedom in communal covenants when consciences find their freedom in continual dependence upon Christ alone and show irreducible respect

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[36] Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2003), 6.

[37] Leonard, *Baptist Ways*, 65–66.

for the sole Lordship of God over every conscience.[38]

Dogma as Eschatologically Complete

A final tension requiring recognition concerns the certain yet incomplete nature of church dogma. Where Scripture speaks clearly to each conscience, covenanted Christians evince a strong sense of certainty. Dogmatic foundationalism in such certain areas does not necessarily offend. Indeed, convictional confessionalism to the absolute exclusion of heresies regarding Trinity, Christ, and gospel are absolutely necessary.[39]

However, covenanted Christians also recognize their own epistemological limitations. The Gainsborough Covenant, therefore, agreed "to walke in all his wayes, made known, or to be made known unto them, according to their best endeavours." In other words, some truths are still in epistemological progress from the temporal human perspective. "Further light" must be cast upon the deep riches of God's Word, even as it remains perfect and eternal.

These various tensions call for faith in the Lord, patience with one another, and openness toward the work of the Holy Spirit within and beyond the covenanted community of faith. While some Christians are uncomfortable with tensions, others recognize that in the tensions themselves there is evidence that the God who is beyond human power, indeed the source of all power, works freely and sovereignly and is present in a personal and dynamic way to the community in covenant with Him. "For where two or more are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Matt 18:20).

Conclusion

Free church theologians recognize the way we approach dogmatics will sometimes be characterized by a different set of priorities than those of other communions. While we certainly hold to the Christocentric Trinitarian shape of dogma maintained by all true Christian churches, we also perceive an eternal covenant theology manifested in a covenant ecclesiology joined together through a highly personal covenant soteriolo-

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[38] Article XVII of the Baptist Faith and Message begins, "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and He has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are contrary to His Word or not contained in it."

[39] Dockery and Yarnell, *Special Revelation and Scripture*, 369, 398–400; Yarnell, *God*, ch. 13.

gy. This encourages us to approach the whole scope of systematic theology with a deep appreciation for progressive revelation in the canon and a profound desire to integrate intellectual doctrine with moral practice.

Ultimately, free church dogmatics are stretched between two poles, a dynamic respect for free consciences on the one side and a real responsibility toward community on the other. The resulting tensions in authority between congregation and officer, between local church and association, and between certainty and incompletion call us to depend upon the real presence of Christ to his covenanted community. Christ promised to be present with the community gathered under his authority, and we trust his presence in his offices will lead every faithful congregation into truth. Christ promised to be present to the covenanted church with his theological and moral dogmatic authority. However, the Lord always retains his divine freedom over every covenant and over every conscience. We would be wise always to listen to the Word in the Spirit, worshiping God and conforming to Christ.[40]

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[40] In a brilliant essay, Rowan Williams demonstrates why the presence of Christ to the community is real yet the actions of the community may never be identified entirely with Christ. Christ is present to his church in a paradoxical way, such that the power of Christ comes to the church with a "fundamental ungraspability." This keeps humanity from pretending to possess divine authority. Rowan Williams, "Between the Cherubim: The Empty Tomb and the Empty Throne," in *On Christian Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 183–96.

Book Reviews

Ulf Bergström. *Aspect, Communicative Appeal, and Temporal Meaning in Biblical Hebrew Verbal Forms*. Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic 16. University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2022. xv + 215 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1646021406. $94.95.

Biblical Hebrew verbs are, for the most part, morphologically transparent. Introflexive and inflection formatives comprise their fusional morphology designating a matrix of roots, stems, conjugations, persons, genders, and numbers. These morphological categories express core semantic and syntactic notions. For instance, the information identified as person, gender, and number licenses the subject as the primary syntactic argument of the sentence. The root conveys the basic action, event, or process. The stem (*binyanim*) corresponds largely to the properties of voice, valency, and/or *Aktionsart*. Yet, the form-meaning mappings of the verb conjugations—*qātal*, *yiqtol*, *wayyiqtol*, *nəqātal*, *qotēl*, etc.—are anything but clear. A cursory survey of scholarship results in a wide disparity of opinions regarding their meanings. Ulf Bergström's *Aspect, Communicative Appeal, and Temporal Meaning in Biblical Hebrew Verbal Forms* investigates conjugation meaning in BH and interacts with research in linguistic typology, historical linguistics, and semiotics.

Verbs encode notions of tense, aspect, and/or mood (TAM). *Tense* "locates focused time relative to a vantage point, which can be either the time of speech or a secondary vantage point before or after the time of speech" (p. 24). Bergström labels the former "absolute tense" and the latter "relative tense." *Aspect* is best understood not in the classical Greek/Latin sense, according to Bergström, but in terms of differing views or stages of an event. Stage-based aspect "can be described as the temporal relation obtaining between the time of the view and the time of the event referred to by the verb" (p. 41). *Mood* or *Modality* is "primarily concerned not with the question of whether something really happens or not but rather with the conditions under which it happens" (p. 50). Most grammarians focus on one of the TAM concepts as predominant for each conjugation. The core semantics of *qātal*, for example, have been suggested to encode past tense, perfective aspect, or realis modality. The *qātal* and *yiqtol* forms are generally described as exhibiting a binary semantic relationship. Respectively, *wayyiqtol* and *nəqātal* function as their consecutive counterparts. Bergström's succinct definitions

of these semantic features and conscientious interactions with differing approaches are invaluable for the newcomer as well as the veteran reconnoitering the battlelines of BH verbal semantics.

The book under review takes on the challenge of presenting a "semantic interpretation … [that] strike[s] a balance between the descriptive and explanatory aspects" of the temporal meanings of the verbal forms (p. 2). Bergström's solution employs a grammaticalization approach in which "the various meanings of the verbal forms [are] the result of an evolution that can be reconstructed" (p. 3). Reconstruction of these diachronic pathways is assessed using two criteria: semantic invariance and cognitive precedence (pp. 8–13). *Semantic invariance* establishes the basic meaning of a linguistic form (or its "primary sense") as the one that can accommodate the most possible contextual situations and lexemes. This criterion is independent of usage frequency. *Cognitive precedence* posits basic meanings that in language use are most amenable to result in ambiguity and semantic reanalysis. It should be noted that these basic or intrinsic meanings are fundamentally semantic (or conventional) rather than pragmatic (or situational) in nature (p. 8).

Bergström outlines the basic TAM characteristics as: nonnarrative past or perfect irrespective of tense for *qātal*, future or progressive irrespective of tense for *yiqtol*-L (i.e., the forms deriving from Proto-West Semitic **yiqtulu*), narrative past or volitive for *yiqtol*-S (including *wayyiqtol*, jussives, and cohortatives, i.e., the forms deriving from **yiqtul-Ø*), and instant future or progressive irrespective of tense for *qotēl* (pp. 13–14). Building from research on verb typology and grammaticalization, Bergström constructs two major diachronic pathways wherein the temporal meanings emerge from aspectual ones. The *qātal* and *wayyiqtol* forms develop from the resultative to the past, and the *qotēl* and *yiqtol* develop from the progressive to the future.

Finally, semiotic theory plays a role in verbal semantics. Linguistic utterances communicate three types of semiotic functions: expression, appeal, and representation. "Expression has to do with what the utterance reveals about the sender, appeal is the effect on the receiver, and representation is the knowledge that is exchanged between them" (p. 158). Bergström designates communicative appeal as triggering "world-oriented action" associated with "some kind of motoric adjustment to and/or manipulation of the physical environment" (p. 160). *Full appeal* signals the need for an immediate reaction from the listener, while *reduced appeal* is associated with more relaxed speech requiring less imminent reactions. Bergström argues that *yiqtol*-L and *yiqtol*-S are marked for reduced appeal, whereas *qotēl* and *qātal* default to full appeal.

Overall, this study is well written and concise. While terseness is ap-

preciated, this characteristic cuts against the enormous breadth of the scholarly conversation on the topic. However, Bergström balances these opposites admirably, crafting a useful *vade mecum*.

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Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, eds. *ESV Expository Commentary: Deuteronomy–Ruth: Volume 2*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2021. 743 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1433546327. $60.00.

Biblical commentaries normally fit into one of three broad categories: devotional, homiletical, or technical. The focus and audience of a commentary determines which category it falls into. Devotional commentaries aim to illuminate the biblical text for lay readers as they seek to hear God's voice in Scripture. Homiletical commentaries seek to assist pastors and teachers in their exposition of the biblical text. Technical commentaries attempt to convey detailed historical, linguistic, and literary elements of the biblical text for scholars and researchers.

Within this framework, the *ESV Expository Commentary* could be reasonably designated homiletical-devotional. The order in this term matters. It is first homiletical and then devotional. The editors clearly state their goal in the preface, "to provide a clear, crisp, and Christ-centered explanation of the biblical text" (p. 11). They clarify this when they outline the parameters for each individual commentary: "exegetically sound, biblically theological, globally aware, broadly reformed, doctrinally conversant, pastorally useful, application minded, efficient in expression" (pp. 11–12). They also identify their intended audience as "serious students of God's Word, both those who seek to teach others and those who pursue study for their own personal growth in godliness" (p. 11).

This review examines the *ESV Expository Commentary*'s coverage of the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, and Ruth. Each treatment is briefly examined and judged according to its alignment with the goals and intended audience as outlined in the preface to the entire commentary series.

August H. Konkel's work on Deuteronomy aligns with many of the editors' goals. He successfully clarifies many of the interpretive mysteries of the legal collection in Deuteronomy 12–26. For example, Deut 14:1–2 forbids the Israelites from cutting themselves or making themselves bald for the dead. Konkel sets this instruction within its historical context. From the perspective of Deuteronomy, the Israelites were about to enter Canaan in which ritual cutting and baldness for the dead

were "intended as sympathetic magic to appease the gods or influence them to show favor" (p. 159). However, Konkel's commentary on this passage also demonstrates a significant weakness: His applications to the contemporary moment are often not that helpful or, as in the case of Deut 14: 1–2, altogether absent.

David Reimer's commentary on Joshua thoroughly accomplishes the goals of the *ESV Expository Commentary*. His deftness in presenting a cogent historical, literary, and theological interpretation of the text makes his commentary the best of the four. He demonstrates keen awareness of all the major issues at play in the interpretation of Joshua and condenses them in an understandable manner for pastors, teachers, and lay people. Readers would be wise to start with his insights on Josh 5:13–15 (the famous commander of the Lord's army episode) as an example of his skillful analysis and application. No commentary is perfect, but faults in this one are difficult to find (my own differences on specific textual interpretations notwithstanding).

Miles V. Van Pelt's commentary on Judges matches many of the criteria for the commentary series set forth by the editors. The greatest strength of his work is his identification of inner-biblical allusions. He constantly and capably connects individual episodes in Judges with other episodes—in this biblical book, elsewhere in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament. For example, he argues that the Deborah and Barak narrative and song in Judges 4–5 intentionally looks backward to the exodus narrative and song in Exodus 14–15 and forward to the final battle between Jesus Christ and the powers of evil in which the Lord utterly defeats his enemies. Van Pelt's work does deserve some minor criticism (e.g., he presents an overly generous reading of the Samson narrative, and his covenant theology is unnecessarily overt). Nevertheless, the positive far outweighs the negative in his commentary.

Mary Willson Hannah's commentary on Ruth satisfies many of the editors' criteria for this commentary series. The brilliance of her work is her close narrative analysis of the story of Ruth. In her careful reading of the text, she uncovers many hidden treasures of this artistic narrative. For example, she exposes both dramatic tension and creative characterization in Ruth 3. In almost every episode of this chapter, the author builds suspense and anticipation. Will Naomi's risky plan work? What will happen when Boaz awakens to Ruth at his feet? Will Boaz accept Ruth's bold marriage proposal? The dramatic tension is relieved when Boaz accepts Ruth's courageous approach. Moreover, each episode portrays Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz as faithful and godly figures. Her analysis of the tension and characterization in Ruth 3 (only very briefly summarized here) exemplifies her insightful analysis throughout the commen-

tary. However, in remarks on the same chapter, she relegates the question of a sexual encounter between Ruth and Boaz to a footnote. Since most interpreters ponder this question, a more detailed discussion would have assisted the intended audience.

To fairly review four commentaries at once is a challenging task. These evaluations do not come close to representing all that should be said about each. In summary, I heartily recommend volume 2 of the *ESV Expository Commentary* to lay people, Bible teachers in the church, and pastors (especially the volumes on Joshua and Judges!).

<div align="right">

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William B. Tooman with Marian Kelsey. *(Re)reading Ruth*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2022. xxiii + 176 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1725262713. $25.00.

William A. Tooman, Senior Lecturer in Old Testament/Hebrew Bible at the University of St. Andrews, and Marian Kelsey, visiting scholar at the University of St. Andrews write *(Re)reading Ruth* to explain the Ruth narrative and to demonstrate its "literary sophistication" (pp. 145, xv–xvi). They insist that Ruth's elegance manifests in poetic features typical of all great literature. Largely bracketing out historical matters (pp. xvii–xxi), they stress how analogies, or "dialogues" (p. xv) between Ruth and other biblical books function exegetically (pp. xv–xvi).

Chapter 1, "Reading Ruth," lays out several "rules" of biblical narrative: its terseness, repetitiveness, proclivity for inner-biblical analogies, and intentional structure (p. 1). The authors demonstrate each rule with clear illustrations from Ruth. Those unfamiliar with repetition and analogy will benefit greatly from their explanations. They stress the intentionality of "almost absurd" levels of repetition (p. 6) and the "omnipresence" of analogy (p. 7). These inform the entire work.

Chapters 2–5 each focus on one chapter, or "act" of Ruth. Scattered among these chapters are various excurses further exploring inner-biblical analogies, literary features, or even historical issues unique to Ruth.

In Chapter 2 (1:1–22), the authors explain ancient covenant making lucidly (pp. 40–41), offer fruitful analyses of analogical texts (pp. 42–44), and examine Ruth's conversion clearly (pp. 45–47). Regarding covenant for instance, they argue that 1:16–18, with its individual vow to adopt another's God, is unique in the entire biblical corpus (p. 44). In a few pages they expose readers to much without overwhelming them.

In Chapter 3 (2:1–23), they demonstrate how various analogies associate Ruth with the great characters of the Pentateuch: Ruth leaves her homeland like Abraham (Gen 12:1–3) and is described like Rebekah and Rachel (Gen 24, 28:1–5). Chapter 3 stresses the exegetical value of analogies, in four excurses. In addition, these analogies display the interconnectedness of the Old Testament by examining how Ruth elegantly converses with Deut 23:4–9 ("No Ammonite or Moabite may enter…," pp. 87–89).

Chapter 4 (3:1–18) marks the zenith of both Ruth's plotline and *(Re)Reading Ruth*. Here, the authors deliver a sensitive and fruitful reading of Ruth's encounter with Boaz, illustrating the profound depth of OT narratives. They buttress their careful analysis by demonstrating how analogical stories can shape a story's purpose and interpretation (p. 90, Excurses 9, 10). Finally, they display the symmetrical structure of Ruth by charting the "mutually informing," shared elements between 2:1–23 and 3:1–18 (pp. 117–19, Excursus 11). Again, they prove there is more to Ruth than meets the eye.

In Chapter 5, the authors skillfully exegete Ruth 4 while isolating more complicated, but exegetically fruitful legal matters in the lengthy excursus at the chapter's end. Just as before, they maneuver through narrative ambiguity to create a coherent reading, in this case, demonstrating Boaz's noble character (pp. 123–26).

To round off this review, I offer four specimens of how *(Re)Reading Ruth* demonstrates a broadly applicable interpretive approach and how the book itself will benefit Christian readers. First, the authors show, perhaps unintentionally, how to extract theological principles from narrative texts. For instance, something as trivial as David's genealogy (4:18–22) proves to be anything but superfluous. Rather, it "intensif[ies] the humility of [David's] roots," since Ruth, David's ancestor, also comes from humble beginnings (p. 130). Even more, juxtaposed with Mara's "self-centeredness," Ruth becomes an exemplar of faithfulness and someone to emulate (pp. 54–55). Again, Chapter 3 charts an analogy between Ruth and Judas from the Gospels (2:14; Mark 14:18–20). Tooman and Kelsey argue this analogy emphasizes Judas' treacherous betrayal of Jesus by comparing him with Ruth, who embodied faithfulness and loyalty to Naomi (pp. 69–70). They thus expand one's theological imagination, showing how biblical narratives become sites for broad, comparative theological reflection.

Second, their principles of biblical narrative—its terseness, repetitiveness, proclivity for inner-biblical analogies, and intentional structure—have long-lasting value. *(Re)Reading Ruth* demonstrates how anyone can use them to interpret OT narratives fruitfully.

Third, the authors resist judging difficult texts as unreadable, arguing a text's strangeness may serve "a function that is important enough for … writers to risk some confusion by including it" (p. 115). They thus suggest Naomi's strange sentence "Who are you, my daughter?" (3:16) intentionally alludes to Boaz's similar words in 3:9–10 and Isaac's in Gen 27:18 (pp. 115–16). They trust the text's intentionality (as seen also in their careful explanation of the *ketiv*/*qere* of 4:5–6 [pp. 122–24]).

Finally, and more generally, they consistently "trust in the writer's purposes." By elucidating the symmetrical structure of the book and its myriad analogies, the Christian reader will come to appreciate the indomitable depth of biblical narrative and will surely never call the book of Ruth simple again (p. 145). Intended for average Bible readers, this incisive work will reward all levels of biblical literacy.

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Eric J. Tully. *Reading the Prophets as Christian Scripture: A Literary, Canonical, and Theological Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022. xv + 409 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0801099731. $30.99.

The second in a series (after Constantine Campbell and Jonathan Pennington's *Reading the New Testament as Christian Scripture*), Eric Tully's *Reading the Prophets* presumably anticipates similar volumes on reading the Law and the Writings. As the subtitle indicates, the series explores Scripture from literary, canonical, and theological perspectives, although Tully devotes considerable attention to history as well. Divided into three parts, the work begins by situating the prophetic books into the Old Testament's theological and historical story. It then covers other background materials, including the role of true prophets, false and ANE prophets, the prophet's message and persuasive strategies, and prophecy from nonwriting prophets to a book's final form (including critical approaches to the prophets). The rest of the volume comprises an overview of each (writing) prophet.

Tully's style is well structured and clear. The material is well laid out, with excellent maps, charts, photos, outlines, and sidebars. The sidebars include literary notes (e.g., Hab 3 as a psalm), figures of speech ("cup" in the OT), theological issues tangent to the text (imprecation in Jeremiah), historical matters ("Mot" as the Canaanite god of death), reception history (Habakkuk at Qumran), and canonical connections (similar wording in the OT and quotes/allusions in the NT). This reviewer found the first parts of the book too short, but they do provide the reader with a starting point, if not enough bibliography, for further thinking. One might

also expect an overview of prophetic theology in the chapter on the prophets' message, while Tully's mostly temporal paradigm presents five phases: past (mostly indictments), warning of judgment (near), repentance and restoration (near), warning of judgment (far), and eschatological (far restoration).

Additionally, the first parts of the book would benefit from further discussion on figurative language, particularly the vocabulary of disaster and restoration. For example, does Jeremiah's description of destruction suggest a cosmic overthrow in our future (Jer 4:23–26)? In the restoration, will the sun produce seven times its light (with a resulting increase in radiation, Isa 30:26)? The book's parameters prevent Tully from discussing these passages, but the questions remain pertinent. Synecdoche and metonymy need treatment as well. Lexically, terms like "earth/land" and "forever" need further comment. A prophet will often use "earth/land" (*'ēreṣ*) to refer only to the land of Israel or just the then known world, but not the entire globe, and "forever" (*'ôlām*) is not always time without end or gaps. Tully does chart a way forward on the "forever" issue, but in my opinion, often locates the fulfillment in our future too quickly. Nevertheless, his observation that earlier events foreshadow later ones seems a good beginning.

Page limits inevitably leave a reader wanting more in the third part, which covers each prophet. In any event, Tully begins each book with a historical and literary orientation, then presents an often-insightful summary of the content, including the past, near, and far temporal phases. Unfortunately, these appear arbitrary at times and give no indication of other interpretations in the literature. For example, he divides Joel 2:28–32 into two time periods: the Church Age (not his term) and the "end of time" (pp. 270–72). It seems though that Peter declares the fulfillment of Joel 2 at Pentecost (Acts 2:16–21), suggesting the use of figures of speech. Thus, where evangelical scholarship is decidedly divided, Tully could have footnoted other interpretations. He does not advocate any one system of eschatological interpretation and, in fact, does not mention them.

Of course, the "snag" for the study of prophecy comes in distinguishing near and far judgment and restoration passages, particularly restoration in the "eschatological future." Tully's discussion on the ambiguity of phrases like "the latter days," near and far "mountains" on the prophetic horizon, and earlier events presaging later events (pp. 102–7), provides a good introduction. However, I believe his conclusion that such vocabulary most often refers to our future (though it sometimes refers to nearer OT fulfillment or to the time of Christ's incarnation and the Church, p. 104), is an overstatement. NT usages of "that day" and

"last hour/day/days/times" speak of events yet future (see Matt 24:36; John 11:24; 2 Thess 1:10; 2 Tim 4:8), but also describe the Church Age (see Acts 2:17; 2 Tim 3:1; Heb 1:2; 1 Pet 1:20; 2 Pet 3:3; 1 John 1:18). Arguably, of the 14 uses of the phrase typically translated "latter days" in the OT, most refer to events that are simply "in the [unspecified] future" and few refer directly to events in our future. The link between Isa 65:17–19 and Rev 21:1–4 (p. 170) also needs clarity. The impression that both speak of the same event seems to run afoul of the context, because Isaiah's new state retains birthing and death (Isa 65:20). Here the importance of exploring figurative restoration language in the prophets emerges. Survey limitations prohibit an author from probing any topic too deeply, but further introductory discussion and an acknowledgement of the difficulties, perhaps in endnotes, would provide greater clarity.

The lack of a complete author index or of a non-sequential Scripture index also renders this book less complete and was, perhaps, an editorial decision. Additionally, the meager index includes some Hebrew words, but omits *éreṣ* (land [even as an English listing]), *ḥésed* (lovingkindness), *kōl* (all), *ʿôlām* (eternal), *qādôš* (holy), and *rîb* (legal dispute) among others. A searchable e-copy might remedy this. However, for a book that includes "literary" in the subtitle, it is strange that David Dorsey's *The Literary Structure of the OT* is never cited.

Nevertheless, I like this book for its appearance, writing style and topics covered. It is a very good starting point for the study of the prophets of Israel. I look forward to future contributions from this author.

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James M. Hamilton Jr. *Typology: Understanding the Bible's Promise-Shaped Patterns: How Old Testament Expectations Are Fulfilled in Christ.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2022. xxiii + 405 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0310534402. $39.99.

In his recent work *Typology*, James Hamilton argues that God's promises shape the way the biblical authors perceive, understand, and write Scripture. From Genesis onward, the authors utilize Moses' writings to build and establish promises into patterns that culminate in Jesus Christ.

To clarify his terminology, Hamilton defines *typology* as "God-ordained, author-intended historical correspondence and escalation in significance between people, events, and institutions across the Bible's redemptive-historical story" (p. 26). He specifies *types* as impressions

that develop into *ectypes*, or patterns, that find fulfillment in the *antitype* of the original type (e.g., Adam and Christ). *Historical correspondence* appears when an author reuses significant terms, quotes, phrases, sentences, or anything that is necessary to establish patterns important to the salvation-history process, or to covenantal language (p. 20). *Escalation in significance* refers to biblical authors seeing significance in the pattern(s), or to their finding it in a way that pertains to future events (p. 23).

Hamilton begins his work by guiding the reader through micro-level indicators of authorial intent, showcasing how Moses' writings influence and shape future authors. He then suggests one reads his final chapter, which focuses on macro-level indicators, before progressing into the body of the book to see how promise-shaped patterns develop from Genesis to Revelation.

Imitating the biblical writers, Hamilton structures his chapters chiastically, as follows:

1. Micro-Level
  2. Adam
    3. Priests
      4. Prophets
        5. Kings
          6. The Righteous Sufferer
        7. Creation
      8. Exodus
    9. Leviticult
  10. Marriage
11. Macro-Level

He then divides these chapters into three categories common to the field of typology: people, events, and institutions. In doing so, he directs the reader to see the natural development of themes, patterns, and types which climax in the anti-type, the Messiah. Each chapter focuses on Moses' use of God's promises which then develop into patterns throughout the Bible. He argues that the authors continue the story that begins in Genesis because the content there is necessary for the rest of Scripture.

What *Typology* accomplishes is far greater than the sum of its parts. Hamilton not only provides a foundational masterpiece for the field of typology. He also teaches believers how to *read* Scripture. Referring to his own work, he acknowledges the task is greater than one book can accomplish but succeeds in providing a concise resource to navigate the rich breadth of Scripture. He enables believers to see how the text builds upon itself, developing seamlessly from author to author, but ultimately

revolves around Christ. While the book concentrates on typology, it also lends itself to developing themes and thoughts congruent to biblical theology.

Throughout the work, Hamilton provides a rich assortment of evidence supporting his case. However, he also engages a plethora of views opposing or contrary to his positions. This is helpful as he shows how many in the field understand these patterns. At the same time, the dense nature of his research may discourage some considering it as an entry point into the subject. One criticism of his work is that his frequent use of chiasms distracts the reader from seeing his arguments clearly. In fact, in some occurrences, his chiasms appear to fit his paradigm better than the biblical authors' writings.

Nevertheless, the reception of Hamilton's work proves the value of his research. One reviewer notes the value of each page and the importance of absorbing the contents slowly. Another highlights how clearly and concisely he presents his material. In sum, typology is a great hermeneutical tool that shows the unity of Scripture. Undoubtedly, many in the church and academy will benefit from his work for years to come.

Although readers may not agree with every instance of a type or pattern, Hamilton's observations truly are evidence of a master at his craft. Not only is this a book about understanding typology; it is also a rich treatment of hermeneutics, a helpful approach for doing biblical theology, and a valuable tool for grasping the grand narrative of Scripture.

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Gilles Dorival. *The Septuagint from Alexandria to Constantinople: Canon, New Testament, Church Fathers, Catenae.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. xv + 219 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0192898098. $85.00

Gilles Dorival's *The Septuagint from Alexandria to Constantinople* is a study of the reception of the Septuagint (LXX) from the formation of the Jewish canon to its use in the Christian catenae. He investigates the reception of the LXX in the New Testament and the church fathers while exploring the significance of the LXX for Jews and Christians since its inception. Readers interested in the LXX will greatly benefit from his work. It is a helpful and interesting introduction to the LXX and its reception.

The book is divided into three main sections. Part 1 investigates the LXX and the issue of canon. Dorival begins this section by defining his

understanding of the canon as "the list of the Biblical books understood as being inspired by God and therefore normative, enumerated according to a given order and in a determined number" (p. 3). This definition understands the canon as "closed" and normative not only in content but number and order.

In Part 2, Dorival investigates how the NT affected the transmission of the LXX. He begins by investigating whether the LXX was the Old Testament of the NT. Then, he considers how the LXX was Christianized. This "Christianization" was achieved, for example, through scribes who retroverted the text of NT quotations back into the LXX (pp. 90–91).

Part 3 is an investigation of how the church fathers used the LXX. Dorival contends that the LXX was the OT of the church fathers until the Vulgate gained wide acceptance, except in the Syriac area. The latter region used the Peshitta which was a translation from the Hebrew text. The Church fathers, however, had access to the Hebrew OT through the Old Greek revisors. Similarly, the Syriac fathers, although they used the Peshitta, had access to the LXX through the Syro-Hexaplar.

In the final section of the book, Dorival explores the reception of the LXX in the biblical catenae. He introduces the biblical catenae (i.e., linked patristic commentaries) in Chapter 7. Then, in Chapter 8, he explains the significance of this literature and its use of the OT. Hexaplaric studies are significant here since scribes collated fragments from this important source.

Dorival's book on the reception of the LXX has many strengths. First, his discussion on the theory of the formation of the OT canon opens interesting new possibilities for further study. For example, he challenges the classic theory that understands a three-part formation to the canon by suggesting a two-stage process that began with the canonization of the Law and the Prophets. According to this theory, some books then shifted from the Prophets to the Writings for either liturgical or literary reasons (pp. 23–26). Second, he provides a helpful book-by-book discussion of how the NT uses the OT. This strategy is helpful since not all NT authors use the OT in the same way. Dorival's book-by-book overview avoids the risk of being too general when investigating this important question.

The book also has a few drawbacks. One is omission of evidence in places. An example is found on page 36 where he bluntly says that "in the first centuries, Christians viewed as Scriptures some writings which had never belonged to the Alexandrian canon" (p. 36). He then cites examples such as 4 Esdras but does not provide any further evidence for his claim. Furthermore, he states that the Talmud cites Ben Sira as

Scripture, but does not refer to the tractates where the Talmud does this (pp. 59–60). The seriousness of some of his conclusions surely requires the provision of such additional evidence.

Another drawback is his equation of a book's reception with its canonical status in at least one instance. He says that "some Jewish circles made use of a larger collection of books than those preserved by the Masoretic Bible" (p. 36). He then lists fragments of Ben Sira discovered at Qumran and Masada as evidence that some Jewish groups had a wider canon than the rabbis. The problem with this line of reasoning is that the reception of a book does not demonstrate a work's canonical status. It would be incorrect for scholars a millennium into the future to conclude that I understood non-biblical literature from Qumran as canonical because I had several copies on my bookshelf. Yet, on page 36, Ben Sira's reception at Qumran and Masada demonstrates that these communities had a wider collection of canonical books in Dorival's mind.

Although Dorival excludes important data at times and draws conclusions that do not necessarily follow in places, his book is a helpful investigation into the LXX's reception in Jewish and Christian circles. He introduces his readers to many helpful and interesting concepts. Overall, those interested in the subject will gain from this useful introduction to the Septuagint's reception.

Anthony Ferguson
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Simon Gathercole. *The Gospel and the Gospels*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022. xxiv + 576 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0802877598. $55.99.

In this volume, Simon Gathercole makes a careful and detailed case that there were discernible features of the canonical Gospels that allowed readers to differentiate them from other Gospel-like texts. His thesis is twofold. He first argues that the four canonical Gospels "share key elements of theological content that mark them out from most of the noncanonical Gospels" (p. 15). He argues further that the reason these four Gospels "are theologically similar to one another is that they—unlike most others—follow a preexisting apostolic 'creed' or preached gospel" (p. 15).

Accordingly, the theological coherence of the four New Testament Gospels was not an arbitrary element of their reception history but rather a foundational feature of their initial composition. "All written Gospels" therefore, "emerged from a situation in which there were al-

ready established, though also developing, norms of what constituted authentic apostolic proclamation" (p. 14). For Gathercole, because this theological standard was operative in the first century, it should directly inform the way the history of early Christianity is understood (cf. pp. 463–502).

Noting the difficulty of comparing every detail of any two works, Gathercole selects the earliest form of the apostolic preaching (the "kerygma") as his comparator for examining these texts (pp. 34–35). Taking 1 Cor 15:3–4 as a starting point, he identifies four essential components of the kerygma (pp. 36–46). The apostolic preaching (1) identified Jesus as the Christ, (2) affirmed Jesus' saving vicarious death, (3) explained Jesus's resurrection on the third day, and (4) viewed each of these elements as a prophetic fulfillment of the Scriptures. He also argues that the kerygma is a justifiable comparator for such a study because this form of the apostolic preaching likely pre-dates Paul's letters, resonates with broader New Testament theology, and was widely affirmed among diverse Christian communities (pp. 47–70). The kerygma is thus uniquely and strategically positioned to serve as a ruler by which to measure the texts of early Christianity.

In the most substantive section of the book, Gathercole systematically evaluates how each Gospel text does or does not address the key features of the kerygma. For Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John, all the elements of the kerygma are present, even with some distinctive features in their presentation (chs. 4–7). He then examines seven of the best known and preserved apocryphal Gospels in early Christianity, the *Gospel of Peter*, Marcion's Gospel, the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Truth*, the *Gospel of Philip*, the *Gospel of Judas*, and the Coptic Gospel of the Egyptians (chs. 8–14). In these chapters, he seeks to evaluate each text on its own terms and identify whether a given aspect of the kerygma is present or absent. After this lengthy targeted analysis of each text, he ends his volume with a concise synthesis of what a comparison and contrast of the various Gospels in early Christianity yields (chs. 15–16).

Gathercole's concluding claim is not that "the canonical Gospels are the only works to include *any* of the four principal elements of the kerygma" (p. 478). Rather, the New Testament Gospels are the only texts that contain *all* the distinct elements that mark apostolic preaching in the earliest churches. For example, some extracanonical Gospels include the death of Jesus but do not ascribe it any saving significance, nor do they include an account of his resurrection (e.g., the *Gospel of Judas*, pp. 438–43). Other texts include a detailed account of the resurrection but seem to deny that the body is raised in this miraculous event (e.g., the *Gospel of Philip*, pp. 410–25).

Similarly, Gathercole observes that one of the profound differences between canonical and noncanonical texts relates to the way messianic concepts are used alongside Scriptural intertexts. While they include some of the accounts and varying details of Jesus's death and resurrection, none of the noncanonical Gospels directly identify either event as the prophetic fulfillment of Scripture. Accordingly, "this theme constitutes a significant example of the distinctiveness of Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John vis-à-vis the others discussed here" (p. 478).

Taken as a whole, Gathercole's work is a rigorous and refreshing treatment of the distinctiveness of the canonical Gospels. Because his central claims are straightforward and meticulously supported, he has carved out a scholarly space in biblical studies for the assumption that the preaching of the apostles is coherent and organically connected to the texts of the New Testament. For those who recognize the apocryphal Gospels are significant in some way but are unsure how to approach them, Gathercole provides a set of tools that informs both the study of the canonical Gospels and the history of early Christianity.

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Jonathan Bernier. *Rethinking the Dates of the New Testament: Evidence for Early Composition*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022. xvii + 318 pp. ISBN 978-1540961808. $29.99

Jonathan Bernier is director of the Lonergan Research Institute and assistant professor of New Testament at Regis College of the University of Toronto. He authors *Rethinking the Dates of the New Testament: The Evidence for Early Composition* to address the problems of chronology in the study of Christian origins. This work constitutes a comprehensive reevaluation of the composition dates of the 27 books of the NT and four early extracanonical writings, 1 Clement, the Didache, the Epistle of Barnabas, and the Shepherd of Hermas. Bernier posits that the majority of the NT documents should be dated significantly earlier—pre-AD 70—than the contemporary consensus views permit. For several of these books though, the evidence allows only a range, which cannot be narrowed beyond forty years or so.

Bernier organizes the material into five equal parts bracketed by an introduction and conclusion. Each part contains two chapters, though the relationship between the two is inconsistent across the five parts. In some cases, the chapters are separated based on evaluative methodology (Parts 1 and 3), while other parts have chapters that cover different texts

(Parts 2, 4, and 5). Bernier makes a conscious effort to maintain the canonical order of the NT as he works through his analysis but breaks this order at points to better present the arguments. The most prominent break in the order occurs in the first two parts ("The Synoptic Gospels and Acts" and "The Johannine Tradition") where the Gospel of John is shifted from its canonical position and is consolidated with the remainder of the Johannine literature. The other three parts ("The Pauline Corpus," "Hebrews and the Letters of James, Peter, and Jude," and "Early Extracanonical Writings") all follow the expected order.

When challenging a consensus view, the challenger must avoid erecting easy targets that incumbents may use to summarily dismiss the challenge. Bernier crafts his introduction to accomplish just that. He addresses the history of scholarship on the topic of dating, situates *Rethinking the Dates* in relation to its predecessor, John A.T. Robinson's *Redating the New Testament* (1976), and establishes his own question. He then clearly articulates his methodology for developing both hypotheses and answers and defines his intent on the sources of the project. Overall, this introduction does yeoman's labor in setting the stage for the work which follows.

Bernier's clear communication in this opening salvo on the NT dates consensus is commendable and worthy of consideration. Although it is lamentable that he mentions his predecessor, Robinson, only cursorily in discussions on potential early (pre-AD 70) NT dates, this is understandable due to the issues surrounding Robinson's reasoning (e.g., arguments from silence and problems with methodology). Bernier effectively allays these issues, demonstrating that the case for the early dates can be made without the appeal to silence or the other errors that plagued Robinson.

Commentaries on and introductions to the texts of the New Testament frequently deal with the issue of composition date. This is one of the standard features of this kind of literature. Ideally, it would seem, the work Bernier does in *Rethinking the Dates* would be covered in one of the many volumes produced each year. However, the reality surrounding the publication of these works often limits the opportunity to do so in several ways. First, the interests of the commentary typically lie in providing comment on the text, not breaking ground in the realm of introduction. Second, the target audience for the introductory text would not include many who are primed for the extended and nuanced discussion found in a volume like *Rethinking the Dates*. And third, the economy of word count in each of these does not permit much more than a general survey of the contemporary consensus view and a passing nod to others along the way.

This is not the appropriate place to lament the limitations found in

such volumes—nor is that my goal. The limitations inherent in commentaries and introductions do, however, highlight the importance of books such as *Rethinking the Dates* for doing this very work. Bernier's monograph, whether one agrees with the conclusions or not, provides a real opportunity for engagement with the dating topic which is seemingly important enough for many commentaries and NT introduction to include. Further, what Bernier supplies the field is a resource that cannot be easily undermined—as Robinson's *Redating the NT* was in the relevant literature—by appeal to faulty logic or substandard scholarship. There are many widely held assumptions undergirding biblical studies that are long overdue for inspection. Hopefully, Bernier's work will spark interest in the kind of critical analysis needed to ensure the edifice meets code.

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Mark DelCogliano, ed. *The Cambridge Edition of Early Christian Writings: Volume 4: Christ: Chalcedon and Beyond.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. xlii + 666 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1316511145. $140.00.

This volume is the fourth of seven in the *Cambridge Edition of Early Christian Writings* series. To date, editors Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, Ellen Muehlberger, and Bradley K. Storin have produced works on God (vol. 1), Practice (vol. 2), and Christ through the Nestorian controversy (vol. 3). Now, Mark DelCogliano's *Christ: Chalcedon and Beyond* serves as a counterpart to volume 3, containing translations of texts related to the Council of Chalcedon and the controversial years thereafter, ending with selections from the corpus of John of Damascus. Brief but helpful introductions orient the reader to the motivation and contents of the series, and to the organizational schema of the work itself. Thereafter, volume 4 is organized into two parts: "The Council of Chalcedon and its Reception" and "Christological Perspectives After Constantinople II."

Part I begins with excerpts from the proceedings against Eutyches of Constantinople at the Home Synod of Constantinople (448) and ends with selections from the proceedings of Constantinople II (553). This section includes Eutyches's *Letter to Leo of Rome*, the (in)famous Tome of Leo, excerpts from the proceedings of the Council of Chalcedon (451), works from Timothy Aelrus, Emperor Zeno's *Henotikon*, *mêmrê* (verse homilies) from the great poets Narsai and Jacob of Serugh, and a pick from Justinian's *Edict on the Orthodox Faith*.

Part II begins with Justin II's so-called *Second Henotikon* (571) and ends with a section from John of Damascus's *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* (early 8th century). Included in this section are selections from the corpus of Gregory the Great, a pick from Babai the Great's *On the Union*, selections from Sophronius of Jerusalem's letters, Emperor Heraclius's *Ekthesis*, excerpts from the work of Maximus the Confessor, various selections from the proceedings of the Lateran Synod (649) and Constantinople III (680–681), and other works of John of Damascus.

There are many noteworthy features of this volume. For the sake of brevity, this review considers three. First, it makes many important texts available in one place. Moreover, some of these texts are translated into English for the first time here (like some poems of Narsai and Jacob of Serugh), thus expanding the sources available to readers on Chalcedon and its tumultuous wake.

Second, the book contains an assembly of diverse texts seldom read alongside one another. For instance, Leo of Rome, Pseudo-Dionysius, Narsai, and Jacob of Serugh are all featured in the first part. If works of these figures were instead organized according to categories such as "Chalcedonian," "non-Chalcedonian," and "non-Chalcedonian Dyophysite," their texts would mostly be arranged in separate sections. But by organizing these texts into one archive, the volume prompts readers to consider them in dialogue with one another. Additionally, while several Christological perspectives are arranged together, it also features texts written in diverse languages: Greek, Latin, and Syriac.

Third, in addition to making various texts available and accessible, this work presents itself as a valuable resource for instructors to teach the often-fraught post-Chalcedonian Christological disputes. The translations are clear and notes throughout provide helpful information for understanding the texts. Likewise, introductions accompanying each text are well-crafted, informative, and accessible. They enable the reader to contextualize each work within the various theological disputes and perspectives. Suggestions for reading near the end of the volume also assist those who want to dive deeper into post-Chalcedonian literature. Likewise, the "Catalogue of Heretics" at the end of the introduction provides helpful summaries of various early Christian "heretics" that instructors and students may reference.

DelCogliano notes in the introduction that "an anthology on the vast topic of 'Christ' is a fool's errand" (p. xix). Indeed, the editors of this series are clear it is not intended to be a comprehensive collection of early Christian works about Christ. However, it is evident that this volume is carefully and clearly organized. Its selections are judicious and effectively balance "go-to" post-Chalcedonian texts with those less read.

Also, resources for further exploration make up for texts it lacks (since it cannot include everything). For these reasons and more, this work will be of immense value to those who take up and read.

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Rik van Nieuwenhove. *Thomas Aquinas and Contemplation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. 220 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0192895295. $94.00

Thomas Aquinas and Contemplation fills a notable gap in the current literature on the angelic doctor's account of the nature and role of contemplation in the Christian life. The book serves as an in-depth treatment of Thomas Aquinas's view of contemplation in its various forms, with an eye on the connection between contemplation and its role in knowing and savoring the triune God in both this life and the life to come. The book is chock-full of interpretive insight and nuance regarding Aquinas's views of the nature of theology, philosophy, the gifts of the Holy Spirit in relation to contemplation, the beatific vision, the relationship between the active and contemplative lives, as well as how Aquinas the Dominican's views on each of these topics contrast with his Franciscan contemporaries (most notably, Bonaventure). Thus, a review of this length cannot possibly do justice to the richness and attention to textual detail Rik van Nieuwenhove gives to these vital and central areas of Aquinas's thought. Interestingly, Van Nieuwenhove notes that perhaps the widespread neglect of book-length treatments of Aquinas's view of contemplation stems from the hyper-specialization of contemporary scholarship on Aquinas. He points out that Aquinas's fully orbed account of contemplation incorporates a broad array of insights from theology, metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, moral theology, and spirituality.

Following a helpful introductory chapter, the book is divided into three main parts: Epistemological and Metaphysical Foundations (part 1), The Dominican Setting (part 2), and Theology, the Christian Life, and Contemplation (part 3). Van Nieuwenhove weights the various parts of the book rather unevenly, devoting two chapters to part 1, one chapter to part 2, and five chapters to part 3. The book is densely argued, and the arguments draw upon a wide range of Aquinas's writings, including his very early commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, and his *Summa Theologiae*. As Van Nieuwenhove closely

tracks and weighs in on interpretive disputes in Aquinas's corpus, the reader comes away with a deeper understanding of the extant Thomistic scholarship on the nature of contemplation and related themes.

There are a host of theologically rich themes running throughout the book that will be of particular interest to readers of this journal. However, space limitations require engagement with what is perhaps the driving, innovative theme of this work. One of Van Nieuwenhove's overarching aims is to orient readers to the broad spectrum of ways that Aquinas speaks of contemplation, both in a narrow, speculative sense which includes philosophical and theological contemplation, as well as an inclusive or broad sense as "the consideration of truth" more generally, which he takes to be an integral part of the ordinary Christian life. Aquinas believes that the contemplative calling extends to every Christian, irrespective of philosophical or theological training or aptitude. In this way, Aquinas's notion of contemplation has a rather wide semantic range and is much more inclusive than the notion of contemplation (*theoria*) in terms of the purely speculative and theoretical consideration of philosophical truth put forward by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Drawing on insights from Aquinas's commentary on Lombard's *Sentences* as well as his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Van Nieuwenhove points out that Aquinas distinguishes between *imperfect* and *perfect* contemplation, both of which are genuine sources of happiness in so far as they consist in the fulfillment of our natural intellectual capacities for truth (and ultimately truth about the highest object of the intellect, God). Imperfect contemplation is the contemplation of God through creatures (earthly contemplation), while perfect contemplation is the contemplation of God that awaits us in the beatific vision in the life to come.

Van Nieuwenhove takes a position in contrast to a prevalent twentieth-century interpretation that Aquinas restricts earthly contemplation to philosophical contemplation alone (advanced by Henri de Lubac, Rudi Te Velde, Colleen McCluskey, and others). Rather, Aquinas is of the opinion that imperfect (earthly) contemplation can take either the narrow, speculative form (whether philosophical *or* theological contemplation) or the broad form of the consideration of truth more generally that is part and parcel of the Christian life. Importantly, Aquinas maintains a close, organic connection between contemplation in this life (imperfect) and the next (perfect): Earthly contemplation in all its forms (whether narrow or broad) provides a *foretaste* of the heavenly beatitude and happiness that awaits us in the vision of God in the life to come. For Aquinas, all forms of earthly contemplation *here and now*—whether theological, philosophical, or in the broader ordinary sense—are transposed into an eschatological key as they aid in the fulfillment of the hu-

man *telos* to know and be transformed into the image and likeness of God. Earthly contemplation here and now, including theological contemplation, is itself a formative act that conforms us into the divine likeness; we begin to resemble what we lovingly behold and adore (see Ps 115:8; 2 Cor 3:18).

Aquinas's eschatological and transformative vision of earthly contemplation holds great promise for retrieving an element of the Christian life that has long been forgotten, as well as re-uniting what has been torn asunder in contemporary academic theology and philosophy, namely, the spiritually transformative power of theological and philosophical contemplation.

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David L. Allen and Steve Lemke, eds. *Calvinism: A Biblical and Theological Critique*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2022. 541 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1087739892. $39.99.

Calvinism: A Biblical and Theological Critique is a compilation of essays dealing with various aspects of a Calvinistic worldview. The book is divided into three parts. Part 1 has two main objectives. First, it breaks down the five points of Calvinism and how they are articulated by different types of Calvinists. Second, it provides a critique of their expositions of Scripture and a summary and critique of the theological implications. Part 2 focuses on historical issues, such as when the Calvinistic system originated and how others, within the Baptist and Wesleyan traditions, disagreed with it. The third and final part of the work deals with crucial biblical, theological, and ecclesiological issues within Calvinism. Matters discussed include but are not limited to implications for God's character, Calvinists' interpretation of Romans 9, their understanding of election, and the genuine offer of the gospel.

Within each chapter, the authors seek to do four things. First, they begin by stating key biblical texts and defining terms. Second, they build a reasonable and accurate argument for Calvinism. Third, they provide a critique of how Calvinism fails biblically, logically, or theologically. Last, the authors present a non-Calvinistic interpretation of the biblical data. The book concludes with a chapter dedicated to evangelicals' ability to work together in gospel ministry despite theological differences.

This work has two main strengths. First, the authors seek to argue against Calvinism, while recognizing its many variations. The authors account for the diversity of views within Calvinism by attempting to

accurately convey each argument and provide a comprehensive yet respectful critique of those positions. They include the best current and historical arguments for Calvinism. With that in mind, this compilation is a great resource for those seeking to wrestle through the biblical and theological issues of Calvinism while receiving a valid representation of its key points.

The second strength of this book is the theological and ecclesiological diversity of the contributors. It is not relegated to Baptists only, or one theological camp. Rather, the work demonstrates a good diversity of alternatives to Calvinism within various traditions. Furthermore, this assemblage displays the point of the final chapter, that despite significant theological differences, there can be unity and collaboration for furthering the gospel message. To clarify, the authors are not arguing against Calvinism as a false gospel. Rather, they are inviting Calvinists to join them in ministry.

This book has one main weakness. Several exegetical discussions are too brief. For example, David Allen's chapter on Limited Atonement seeks to deal with seventeen arguments for this doctrine, with biblical expositions. To cover that many arguments, Allen eschews robust exegesis in some cases for (too) short and concise expositions. At best, this will leave some readers wanting more, and at worst will leave others unconvinced.

Calvinism: A Biblical and Theological Critique is an excellent resource for anyone wanting to think deeply about Calvinism and its exegetical grounds and theological implications. This of course includes those who are not about to give up their Calvinistic convictions. It is comprehensive in its scope and provides arguments for Calvinism while revealing its deficiencies. This book helps the reader understand Calvinism and its issues while providing arguments for alternative positions. It will aid academics, pastors, and those who enjoy rich biblical and theological discussions.

Ben Zorn
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David Bentley Hart. *Tradition and Apocalypse: An Essay on the Future of Christian Belief*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022. 208 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0801039386. $24.99.

Rarely do religious authorities view dissent as a godsend. More often, disagreements are quashed for the sake of fidelity to past standards. Dissenters, however, claim new insights. Change is inevitable, they say—

and so says David Bentley Hart. His recent book *Tradition and Apocalypse* is another installment of eloquent fulmination distinguishing much of his written work. In this monograph, he argues with spirited cogency that the church vainly attempts to preserve its past without a bright eye to the unseen future.

Hart compares the unity of tradition to the growth of a tree. A genetic code directs the development of organic life, even amid conditions that seek to divert its course. Like a seed growing toward its final form, tradition follows an encoded design. Tradition is not merely "a series of mechanical antecedents and consequences, taking random shape within a chaos of countervailing cultural, material, political, economic, religious, philosophical, and natural forces" (p. 24). Christian tradition is not bare history. Rather, tradition possesses an organic, living continuity over time—a real rational unity.

For Hart, approaching tradition as bare history imprisons the sacred power of the church's past. What is this power? Hart employs the Aristotelian grammar of (fourfold) causation to explain the nature of tradition, especially in terms of final causality. In this sense, the fully mature tree acts as final cause in relation to the seed, instilling a "guiding rationale" which summons the seed to actualize its full potential (p. 29). The future reality empowers ongoing development. As a result, any valid interpretation of Christian history must give attention to the apocalyptic goal of tradition, and only in this end (*telos*) does tradition realize its full meaning.

Rather than appearing in plain sight, to be grasped with full assurance, the final meaning of tradition remains enigmatic, concealed under its contingent historical expressions. According to Hart, we must "trust in the reality of a vital and essential truth that transcends the forms it animates" (p. 104). Only a certain "hermeneutical piety" can mount up to perceive, tacitly, tradition's invisible substrate (p. 142). Through a historical series of symbolic and provisional forms, the secret presence of the ultimate future prompts tradition's forward development. In other words, the mature tree remains hidden throughout the seedling's growth process. The final form of tradition grounds its continuity across the centuries, discreetly drawing tradition to its full apocalyptic apex.

The weakest chapter in the book, for this reviewer, was also the longest. In Chapter 3, Hart dialogues with two prominent interpreters of tradition, John Henry Newman, and Maurice Blondel. These two theoreticians of tradition enlist Hart in a rigorous but tedious deconstruction of the reigning Roman Catholic paradigm. Those firmly committed to this outlook should find several solemn opportunities for self-criticism though.

On the other hand, the most interesting chapter of the book will probably prove the most incendiary, not merely for Roman Catholics but for most Christian readers: Chapter 7 charts a more practical and provocative course for the author's vision of Christian tradition. For Hart, the gospel perpetually reveals itself to be a fertile mystery containing undiscovered depths. He asserts, "in a sense change is not only the life but the very purpose of tradition as a concrete historical phenomenon" (p. 161). These changes include a new relationship of Christ to secular government. He believes the traditional approach of the imperial church yokes two unequal realms in a "failed and inherently defective fusion" (p. 174). Moreover, he avows that unthinking obedience to any institutional system, especially an ecclesial body traditionally in cahoots with political power and which bases its authority on its own authority, is tantamount to idolatry (p. 175). As an example, the past and present suppression of the doctrine of universal salvation, Hart argues, is one instance where tradition should exhibit its apocalyptic dynamism. It should resist the notion of a completed dogmatic synthesis imposed by church authorities upon a submissive laity.

Hart also bars no holds as to which stripe of Christian merits reproof: Protestant fundamentalists clinging to scriptural inerrancy; Catholic traditionalists maintaining papal infallibility; Orthodox traditionalists embracing patristic fundamentalism—all are deemed fideists claiming absolute certainty. That is an impossible position to hold while "living *in transitu*, moving toward a promised land not yet seen" (p. 179). Yet Hart's critique here may have missed the mark inasmuch as he employs the overused and underdefined term "fundamentalist" to make his point. The argument stands, however, that Christians should never confidently assume fullness of truth lies conveniently at their fingertips.

Aside from Hart's practical suggestions, his vision of tradition's meaning—shrouded but ever present—should challenge readers to appreciate that, although history is mostly written by the victors, no one can claim that title yet. All perceive the mystery of Christ's final revelation from a distance; all see through a "darkened glass" and thus must humbly walk by its light. Those willing to walk this path, especially those with philosophical and church-historical interests, should consider this essay and imagine with Hart the future of Christian belief.

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Luke Timothy Johnson. *The Mind in Another Place: My Life as a Scholar.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022. 268 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0802880116. $27.99.

Luke Timothy Johnson hooked me the first time I read him. Intriguingly, he admits to resisting his assigned topic in his essay, "Does a Theology of the Canonical Gospels Make Sense?" in *The Nature of New Testament Theology* (Blackwell, 2006). Projecting it as a question, he asks "whether the topic even makes sense. I hope to show that it might, but my expectations are low, as yours should be as well" (p. 93). I found his wit and humor, creative approach to the topic, and evident care for the place of Scripture in the life of the church instantly attractive. Energized by his writing, I have subsequently discovered that while I don't always agree with him, I can count on his work being well-thought out, delightfully written, and generally conservative. I thus purchased a copy of his book, *The Mind in Another Place: My Life as a Scholar.*

Johnson is the Robert W. Woodruff Professor Emeritus of New Testament and Christian Origins at Candler School of Theology, Emory University. He writes with the intention of giving the uninitiated a look into the life of an academic through the lens of his own life story. The first four chapters are on "becoming a scholar." He discusses his upbringing, childhood, and young adulthood with an eye toward the circumstances that influenced him to become an academic. He discusses his family and spiritual background (a Roman Catholic from a small town in Wisconsin). He also describes his calling to the monastic life and how he eventually left it to marry while he pursued a PhD at Yale.

The next five chapters focus on "being a scholar." They deal with the span of his life in which he served as a professional scholar at Yale, Indiana University, and Emory University. He wrote extensively during this period. His works include a two-volume commentary on Luke-Acts for the Sacra Pagina series (1990–1992), theological topics related to the life of the church (such as *Sharing Possessions* [1992] and *Scripture and Discernment* [1996]), a commentary on James in the Anchor Yale Bible series (1995), and the Anchor Yale Bible volume on 1 and 2 Timothy (2001). He has furthermore published a NT introduction, a book on the Historical Jesus, a recent two-volume work on Paul, and many others. He masterfully weaves a narrative that describes how his academic interests in areas such as literary approaches to the NT, Greco-Roman backgrounds, and religious experience developed and came to fruition, and how they intersected with his personal life.

The final two chapters cover "a scholar's virtues." Here, he reflects on the kind of character and habits that enable a person to be a good

scholar and illustrates them with examples from his own career. These are a must-read for those pursuing biblical scholarship.

This book is enlightening. Even in retirement, Johnson remains a thoughtful person and an excellent writer. His story will especially rivet readers familiar with the world of biblical scholarship. A couple of highlights follow.

First, his description of being a "scholar" is illuminating. The key phrase that he uses throughout the book is the idea of having one's "mind in another place." Scholars are

> deeply and intensely engaged with an issue, question, problem, or conundrum that challenges their mind, and often their emotions and bodies as well—to such an extent that they can be said to have their mind in another place, not just momentarily but for extended periods of time. (p. 2)

He then clarifies what he means by a "scholar" by comparing it with an "intellectual." An intellectual also has his mind in another place, but a scholar is an intellectual who is "focused and productive" (p. 3).

Second, he describes the various changes that have taken place over the course of his career (pp. 7–15 and *passim*). He started teaching at Yale in 1976 and retired from Emory in 2016. The net value of his account is to bridge the gap between the kind of scholarly life one reads about in history books and the kind experienced by contemporary academics.

Finally, he is transparent in describing how his personal and professional lives interacted. One comes to appreciate the way his ecclesial and family background affected his academic interests. Although Johnson is a conservative academic scholar, it is also apparent that his theological views are not as close to evangelical convictions as they sometimes appear.

In any event, one leaves *The Mind in Another Place* with a renewed appreciation for Johnson as an academic who takes his Christianity seriously, who aspired to live it out, and allowed it to diffuse his academic pursuits. Anyone interested in the academic study of Scripture will find his book invaluable.

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Elliot Clark. *Mission Affirmed: Recovering the Missionary Motivation of Paul.* Wheaton: Crossway, 2022. 253 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1433573804. $19.99.

Elliot Clark's book *Mission Affirmed* is an inspiring and helpful corrective to modern approaches to missions in the local church. The author claims the modern missions movement recruits "missionaries with urgency, not toward longevity" (p. 21). He later claims, "We tend to go fast, or we don't go at all. We invest untold material and personnel resources to help others in the short term but do so in ways that often hurt them in the long run" (p. 21). In other words, Clark sees global missions today threatened by the tyranny of the urgent and driven by the vision of "Mission Accomplished." In contrast, he advocates for "Mission Affirmed."

Convinced that modern missions need discernment, wise investment, and plans for better building, Clark believes seeking God's approval instead of man-made results can provide the necessary antidote to the problem. This sets up his thesis and goal "to explore together what faithful gospel ministry looks like when God's approval guides our ambition" (p. 31). To justify his claims, he looks at the missionary vision and methods of the apostle Paul.

Paul embodied a necessary zeal for the lost and utilized appropriate methods for missions that ultimately sought God's approval above all else. Clark believes Paul's vision and methods can be applied today so that "those entrusted with the on-time and secure delivery of the gospel have the possibility for great reward" (p. 217). To unpack his thesis, he summarizes major themes in Paul's work. These include seeking God's approval, suffering with Christ, sending and being sent, seeing the work of the Holy Spirit, speaking the truth sincerely, setting correct boundaries, sacrifice, and service.

Three major themes rise to the forefront, are interweaved throughout the book, and make a helpful contribution to modern missionary trends. First, Clark reshapes the identity of the missionary and the role of the local church in sending missionaries. He argues that just because a Christian has a heart to help and a plane ticket, it does not follow he or she is a missionary. Rather, a missionary is someone with a passion for gospel proclamation who has been tested, affirmed, and sent by the local church. With this definition, not everyone is considered a missionary: all people are not worthy of financial support. The emphasis on the local church is refreshing. The local church should look for those competent in the Scriptures, who demonstrate good character, and submit to the authority of godly leadership.

Second, he confronts current "methods of urgency" in favor of attending to the work of the Holy Spirit. Plans and strategy are not sinful but can be unhelpful if they carry the emphasis. He surmises that if he could ask the apostle Paul what contributed the most to his success in missions, it would be the Spirit, not his plans. Clark then uses this focus to press against so-called "Church Planting Movements" (CPMs). CPMs emphasize practicality, urgency, and results, whereas the Holy Spirit is concerned with character, theology, and appropriate pace. Growth, reproduction, and results should not be the central question in missions, but rather whether a mission was born of the Spirit.

Third, he speaks boldly about the importance of missionary character alongside the vital gospel message. Clark reemphasizes that Paul cared far more deeply about the character of missions than he did the results. And to the extent that "the self-described pattern of the apostle [was] set forward," it becomes the "self-conscious model for all Christian ministry" (p. 135). This involves not only speaking the truth but speaking the truth sincerely. Far too often missionaries are concerned with gaining access, instead of building credibility. However, there is simply no substitute for hours of character work to build trustworthiness as an ambassador of the gospel message. Credibility is essential because "people will trust our message only if they can trust its messenger" (p. 143).

Clark's book is inspiring to missionaries and a helpful corrective to those emphasizing "Mission Accomplished" over "Mission Affirmed." It is written with an eye towards pastoral application at a lay level and is especially valuable for churches seeking to prepare missionaries. (See for example the helpful appendix on "Questions for Churches to Ask a Missionary Candidate.") Readers must go elsewhere to gain a comprehensive look at the apostle Paul's approach to missions, such as Roland Allen's *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* or Eckhard Schnabel's *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies, and Methods.* Nonetheless, *Mission Affirmed* remains a valuable resource for local churches.

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Richard Langer and Joanne J. Jung. *The Call to Follow: Hearing Jesus in a Culture Obsessed with Leadership.* Wheaton: Crossway, 2022. 222 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1433578038. $16.99.

Richard Langer and Joanne Jung, colleagues at Biola University in California, echo the call of the Master in this gem of a book. Growing from conversations in a hallway, it effectively captures basic Christian

spirituality and discipleship. Yet its focus, in a context which has lost a biblical concept of leadership, makes it fresh and penetrating. Embracing a seldom-used word, followership, they assert, "We have no higher aspiration than to follow the author and perfecter of our faith" (p. 18). This has profound implications for leadership: "for those who receive a call to lead … it is subsequent and subordinate to their call to follow" (p. 59).

The authors catch the reader's attention with some striking statistics: As of mid-2021, published books on leadership already exceeded 4,000 *that year* (p. 52), a figure which correlates with 30,000 leadership titles published since 2010 (p. 16). However, contrasting this with the paucity of titles on followership, they lament that following is only given credence if "it is done for sake of making leaders." They reject this categorization, believing "followership is something in its own right … it is worth studying for its own sake" (p. 17). Quite simply, "Finding one's position as a leader is not nearly as important as understanding one's place as a follower within God's kingdom" (p. 44). That is so because of Jesus: "Once your heart is won to Christ, it is lost to all else" (p. 67). Consequently, we long "to hear the words, 'well done, thou good and faithful servant' (Matt. 25:21 KJV) not 'well done thou good and faithful leader'" (p. 76).

Langer and Jung convincingly establish the imperative of followership, but it cannot be passive. It carries weighty responsibilities. In their dynamite-laden Chapter 4 ("A Crisis of Followership"), they point to serious deficiencies in society and the church. They remind the (American) reader that "our government was doomed to fail if the citizens were not virtuous" (p. 80). Reflecting on recent political events, they quote the founding fathers to demonstrate that "bad leadership was to be expected if the citizenry (followership) was not exhibiting moral virtue in their public dealings and political expectations" (p. 82). And America today is basically immoral (p. 80).

Turning to the Scriptures (e.g., 1 Sam 8), Langer and Jung demonstrate that God judges people by giving them the leaders they deserve (p. 84). However, in a context of recently disgraced high-profile Christians, the authors' guidelines for follower accountability in the church are especially valuable. In sum, "We need followers with the wisdom to identify good leaders and the courage to reject or remove bad leaders" (p. 88). Putting this into practice, followers should do six things: speak up when they see something untoward (pp. 89–90); insist on following an organization's bylaws (since suspending the rules easily encourages leadership abuse, pp. 92–94); anchor themselves in (biblical) theology to "hold fast to the biblical mission and hold leaders or elected officials accountable

to it" (p. 97); face hard truths (especially when they are unwelcome, pp. 98–101); cultivate a sense of disenchantment with worldly success (pp. 102–03); and develop and follow a good moral conscience (pp. 104–5).

Considering the authors' words on conscience, I have a small point of critique. They describe conscience as that which gives us the "sense of how we, as persons, stand before God: guilty or not guilty" (p. 104). While true, one wonders how this might apply in honor-shame oriented societies where communal values typically overshadow individual concerns (and guilt is downplayed). Langer and Jung rightly observe that an organization's "unity of purpose does not assure unanimity of conscience. And it should be noted that this is a good thing not a bad thing" (p. 104). They relate this in a clearly Western context, where following God rather than man is all too rare. However, it would have helped if the authors had added a chapter in which they applied the demands of faithful followership to the challenges of a communal honor-shame society. I say this from a desire to see their invaluable principles more widely applied. It in no way detracts from their excellent book.

So, I highly recommend *The Call to Follow* and its wake-up call to the leadership obsessed. The bottom line is simple: "If you want to be a faithful follower, just be a faithful follower and let the celebrity chips fall where they may" (p. 123).

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