



MISSION

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CATALYST

Intelligent comment on faith and culture



The Great Wave off Kanagawa, Katsushika Hokusai (1830)

Can we stand against the tide?

Being Baptist in a post-denominational world

BAPTISTS AND EVANGELICALS

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different animals*

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BEING BAPTIST IN A POST-DENOMINATIONAL WORLD



LESS DENOMINATIONAL LOYALTY SHOULD NOT LEAD US TO ABANDON BAPTIST DISTINCTIVES.

So, we supposedly live in a post-denominational world, but what on earth does that actually mean?

It certainly doesn't mean that denominations have ceased to exist, because they haven't – though it might mean that denominations don't demand the loyalties they once did, because they don't.

It can mean we give less importance to denominational distinctives in favour of ecumenical solidarity, and that is true – think of the variety of theology and ecclesiology represented in a typical ecumenical Good Friday march of witness – and this is surely to be welcomed, even if our forebears might turn in their graves!

However, if by 'post-denominational world' we mean that such distinctives no longer matter, that is plain wrong. The Church worldwide needs the insights of others to help us all navigate the challenges of being effective witnesses to Christ in each generation, our own included. So, being Baptist matters. Dare I say, being Baptist matters a lot.

Baptist convictions have, I believe, shaped how we have approached mission over many years, not least my years as General Director which draw to a close this summer. Being Baptist is, at its root, to be evangelical (as I argue later in this

issue on page 6), and by evangelical I mean 'of the gospel, of the good news of Jesus in a broken world'. It embraces the classical dimensions of evangelicalism – conversion, cross, Bible and mission.

Nigel Wright will argue that being a good Baptist requires us to be both conservative and liberal. Ruth Gouldbourne meanwhile demolishes a few myths about the early Baptists as she reflects on our relationship to the Reformation, and Tony Cupit takes a global perspective as he considers elements of Baptist witness that will shape us in the years to come. The largest concentration of Baptists lie in the southern states of the US, and Russell Moore, a leading Southern Baptist voice, comments on how they see Baptist identity.

One thing is clear – Baptists are not a homogeneous unit! Globally, there are many expressions of what it means to be Baptist, a feature that flows from the liberty that lies at the heart of what it means to be a Baptist people.

At the beginning it was the liberty to worship God, and to read and interpret the scriptures without the coercion of the State, and these things help explain why freedom of religion is so vital to Baptists. But would people in our churches know that today? Would today's

congregations know why it is just as important for us to demand the freedom for Muslims and Hindus to follow their faith as it is for us to demand the freedom for Christians to worship freely in places where they are persecuted?

In our secularised nation, court cases occur from time to time about the wearing of crosses, the place of prayer, or the right to follow conscience in the workplace. Some cases are spurious but others are vitally important. Do our congregations know the difference? Do they know how Baptist principles can help them interpret this confusing landscape?

For me, nowhere are Baptist principles more needed than in our understanding of Scripture. Here we confront the root. And as we see a variety of interpretations on Scripture in relation to ethical issues, are we to be reduced to a shouting match about who is right and who is wrong? Instead, could the kind of approach seen at somethingtodeclare.org.uk help us rediscover Baptist principles that will strengthen our unity, respect diversity, and even help the wider Church as they wrestle with the same issues?

So, a post-denominational world? Yes, of course. But at the same time no, certainly not.

David

David Kerrigan
General Director

THE BIBLE SAYS THAT WE ARE ALL FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE. EVERY SINGLE ONE OF US.

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world mission

What distinctive contribution can Baptists bring to...

England, Scotland and Wales?

WALES



Serious denominational decline is a reality in Wales, as is a decline in Christianity itself. In an age of individualism and consumerism, there are two key words which would have to appear in a positively Baptist response, namely: 'local' and 'covenant'.

Baptist churches are essentially local people seeking to be at one with Christ and in discerning his mind for our communities and world today. This is the business of the local church and not to be left to some hierarchical structures. We are empowered by Christ to live out our expression of faith whilst seeking his mind locally.

However, this doesn't mean that we get on and do our own thing irrespective of everybody else. As our local character is tempered by our interdependency within the wider Baptist family, that interdependency should also include the wider Christian family.

One of the distinctive contributions therefore that I believe that Baptists can bring to Wales (particularly within the Welsh language context) is focusing not only on our local context, but on our interdependency – working collaboratively and intentionally with churches of all denominations to ensure a presence and witness throughout Wales that is rooted in Christ and grounded in the locality.

Judith Morris
General Secretary
Baptist Union of Wales

SCOTLAND



Scottish Baptists have a wonderful door of opportunity to assert their God-assigned identity. Baptist churches often formed among dissenters who were looking for a better expression of authentic church. People intent on being disciples of Jesus, pursuing practical expressions of both repentance and faith. We need to pursue ministry in the manner of Jesus, combining social ministries of justice and mercy with supernatural charisms of deliverance and healing ministry. Where there is focus on the presence and purpose of Jesus, we need authentic power in the Holy Spirit to propel us forward with holy integrity.

In Scotland, a creative rooting in Reformed theology, together with an appreciation of continental Anabaptist expressions, converge in better emphasising church as a covenanted community of believers, confident that Jesus (and not just the preacher!) is presiding over and directing the life and work of the church. And with the help of more training in conflict resolution and management, a future where churches are marked by a real commitment to 'watching over' one another, with gracious but meaningful accountability. We don't need to bend over backwards to be 'seeker sensitive' peddlers of politically acceptable religiosity. Scotland needs more communities of Jesus-enabled vision and action. That's what we can bring to the table of our nation.

Jim Purves
Mission and Ministry Advisor
Baptist Union of Scotland

ENGLAND



A study commissioned by Relate a couple of years ago indicated that almost five million people in Britain have no close friends, and evidence from the Campaign to End Loneliness reported that loneliness has an adverse effect on both physical and mental health. With a marked decrease in face-to-face social interaction and a similarly marked increase in the number of single person households, loneliness has been described by some as a modern epidemic.

In the midst of this contemporary culture, I cherish that we as Baptists prophetically affirm the beauty and power of authentic community. A community which has Jesus Christ at its heart and is seeking to discover and embody what real kingdom love and life feels like. A community which freely gathers together and chooses to welcome and embrace any and all that come. A community where individuals are becoming more like Jesus at different paces on unique journeys, yet there is also that sense of being a community of followers moving together. A place of belonging, participation and discernment where people can experience the liberty of being known, heard and loved for who they are alongside the call to open themselves to community, so that they can become all that God created them to be.

Lynn Green
General Secretary
Baptist Union of Great Britain

Russell Moore is President of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, the moral and public policy agency of the traditionally conservative and largest Baptist group in the USA.



Q&A

RUSSELL MOORE

AN OUTSPOKEN CRITIC OF DONALD TRUMP AND A SIGNIFICANT FIGURE IN THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION TALKS TO MISSION CATALYST.

What does Baptist identity mean to you?

Baptist identity means a commitment to the Church as the Body of Christ. Baptist identity means that the priesthood that God has created through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit belongs to the people and not to one segment

of the people. And Baptist identity fundamentally, for me, is a message about the kingdom of God. That the kingdom of God is not established by cultures or governments but the power of the gospel, bringing people into the family of God through new birth.

In a local church context, is that about sharing power with the people in the pews in the way that pastors lead?

I believe strongly in congregationalism. That does not mean that we don't have leaders and teachers: of course we do. Scripture gives us those categories of

pastor, elders and deacons. But those teaching offices are held accountable to the people and have the people in mind and in view. I think congregationalism has fallen on hard times in the United States and in some other places across the world

God to salvation, then no government can turn anyone into a Christian. A government can only turn someone into a pretend Christian. And so, part of our witness to the outside world is a free Church and a free State.

within the Church. And the rest of the Body of Christ needs Baptists to point out the necessity of personal regeneration and of the priesthood of all believers and other distinctives. When denominationalism goes away and is replaced by a bland generic blob of unspecified Christianity that is not helpful to any part of the Church.

“ There is a kind of Baptist amnesia where we’ve forgotten what it means to be Baptist ”

because congregationalism is difficult. It is easier to assume power to one person or one small group of persons and not to have the ultimate accountability of the congregation, but I don’t think that reflects the New Testament.

Ultimately accountability of a leadership within the Church belongs to the people, as the Spirit anointed people of God, which is why the New Testament epistles are often not written to leaders, but to churches. We have some epistles that are written to leaders: 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, but many of the epistles are written to the churches themselves and they share in the accountability, for instance for discipline in 1 Corinthians 5 and the governance of the church in 1 Corinthians 6.

Baptist churches have often been champions of religious freedom and religious pluralism in a social sense. Have we strayed too far from that?

I think we have. I think there is a kind of Baptist amnesia in many places where we’ve forgotten the distinctives of what it means to be Baptist. That is especially true in places where Baptists are able to believe that they are in some sort of social or cultural majority. I think that part of our task is to teach Baptists what it means to be Baptists in a new century.

When I was a boy, my church would take us through discipleship programmes that taught us not only how to pray and how to share our faith, but also what it meant to be distinctively Baptist. And so we learned about religious freedom and freedom of conscience. I think that, where that has fallen by the wayside, we have had difficult times.

Baptists from the very beginning have articulated a view of religious freedom, not because we believe in some kind of religious relativism, but precisely because we do not. If the gospel is the power of

Denominationalism is in decline in Europe and the US. This could be seen as a good thing for ecumenical unity. What do you think?

I think denominational isolation is not a good thing. I think there have been places and times where denominations were cut off from one another and didn’t have contact, except in arguing about their various denominational distinctives.

I think our common co-operation across denominations where we can is a good thing. But, the eclipsing of denominations themselves is not a welcome development in my view, for one reason: denominationalism never really goes away. It is simply transferred into other categories. And so there are networks of non-denominational churches, movements and so forth that have all the

What do you see as the future of Baptists worldwide and how do you see the Southern Baptist Convention’s relationship with that?

I think that some of the most vibrant expressions of Baptist life are happening globally. In most ways, Baptists in other parts of the world are going to be a lifeline to Southern Baptists and other Baptists in America. That is precisely because Baptists in other parts of the world have already been facing the sorts of social pressures that are taking some Baptists in America by surprise. Baptists in the United Kingdom have been dealing with issues of secularising society for decades. Baptists in China have been working through issues of religious freedom and state pressure for decades. Baptists in Africa have been confronting the rise of Islam and various other spiritualities and countering religions for decades. That reality Baptists in America need to learn from brothers and sisters around the world who have been in situations for a long time where we find ourselves now.

“ There is a kind of Baptist amnesia where we’ve forgotten what it means to be Baptist ”*

marks of a denomination, they just claim not to have one.

I think that denominations are healthy for a number of reasons. One is because they cause us to articulate what we believe about the nature of the Church, about the boundaries of co-operation that we have with one another – that’s a good thing to do. And also because our distinctive denominational traditions are able to serve the rest of the Body of Christ.

I am grateful for my Anglican brothers and sisters talking about the importance of institutions and tradition and support. I am grateful for my Presbyterian brothers and sisters emphasising the importance of the intellect and the life of the mind

So you would be looking to strengthen those relationships with Baptists worldwide?

Yes, I think we need to strengthen relationships, and one of the questions is going to be how do we do that in a way that works best? One of the things that we have seen over the past several years is that sort of co-operation doesn’t happen fast through institutional bureaucracy, but through genuine co-operation on the basis of shared evangelical conviction. I think we need to explore the best ways to further that.

Interview: Chris Hall

*Yes, we know. Worth repeating, worth remembering.

EVANGELICALS AND BAPTISTS: SHARED DNA, NOT THE SAME ANIMAL

CONTEMPORARY BAPTIST IDENTITY IS AT TIMES AT ODDS WITH EVANGELICAL IDEOLOGY.

Before we can discover whether all Baptists must always be card-carrying evangelicals, we must first define what evangelical means. David Bebbington's 1988 book *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: a history from the 1730s to the 1980s* offers four characteristics of evangelicals from their beginnings in the early 18th century. A 2007 paper by Brian Harris explored Bebbington's work through the lens of postmodernism. I want to take Harris' thinking a step forward and examine its implications for Baptists.

Conversionism

For a long time, the hallmark of evangelical Christianity has been the understanding of the need to come to faith; that moment when repentance is expressed, faith is ignited and the gift of new life is received. Harris supports Bebbington's historical analysis. From evangelicalism's hymnody through to the evangelical missionary movement, conversion of the individual was the chief goal. The earliest Baptist beliefs concerning the gathered Church express these conversionist convictions.

In today's world, Harris references a more holistic understanding of salvation as embraced by the 1974 Lausanne Covenant

and the 1989 *Lausanne 2 Manila Manifesto*. He notes a greater openness to conversion as a journey towards the cross and 'less certainty' in relation to the plight of the unconverted.

As a Baptist people, we stand firmly in this tradition of calling people to conversion. My own Union's Declaration of Principle states in its second paragraph:

'that Christian Baptism is the immersion in water into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, of those who have professed repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ...'

The challenge to Baptists committed to mission is, I suggest, to find a language that connects with people in a secular world. We must retain a conviction about conversion, but maybe one that emphasises the rectification of our brokenness, rather than the avoidance of the penalty of sin, language largely seen as without meaning in the different moral world of the 21st century.

Activism

Bebbington's second characteristic of evangelicalism is activism. Thomas Chalmers, a 19th century Scot, was not an evangelical in his early life and commented that after the discharge of his duties

'a minister may enjoy five days in the week of uninterrupted leisure!' After his 'conversion' Chalmers was reputed to have visited 11,000 homes in a single year.

The 19th century also saw the expansion of missionary endeavour around the globe. Shaftesbury and Wilberforce are amongst a host of men and women who sought social change as the outworking of the gospel. Such activism is prevalent to this day, but in the West it is often less evangelistic and more pastoral.

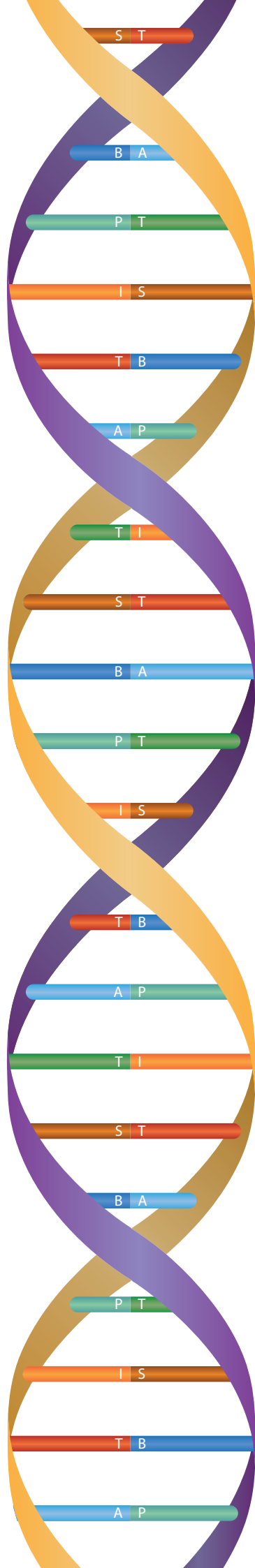
Again, this activism is captured in part of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) Declaration of Principle, reminding us that:

'it is the duty of every disciple to bear personal witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to take part in the evangelisation of the world.'

It is noteworthy that this activism is primarily seen as evangelistic engagement, something of a disconnect from the lived experience of most Christians.

Crucicentrism

In the words of John Wesley, "nothing... is of greater consequence than the doctrine of the atonement". But even to speak of the centrality of the cross demands a further refinement if evangelicalism is to be truly understood, for at its core has



long been a commitment to the particular doctrine of substitutionary atonement. Whilst never universal, this is the doctrine that has been normative within evangelicalism.

Harris affirms strongly the centrality of the cross but asks whether evangelicals need to broaden their understanding of it. He argues that “there is slowly a shift away from a focus on the cross as a substitutionary act of atonement to appease an offended deity, the cross as retributive justice, to an exploration of the cross as a vehicle of restorative justice. Rather than ask if the cross represents a victory over sin, death or the devil, it would seem appropriate for postmodern evangelicals to respond ‘all of the above, and more beside...’”

When I consider today’s Baptists with whom I am reasonably familiar, here in the UK, in Latin America outside of Brazil, in Canada and the northern states of the US, and the Caribbean, I would be tempted to characterise their convictions also as ‘all of the above and more’. Amongst Baptists in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, Brazil and the southern states of the US where, arguably, the characteristics of a Christendom model still pervade, the cross is more often seen through the narrower focus of earlier years.

for a theology conceived as the “reflection on the faith commitment of the faith community”. Grenz seeks to place as much emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in illuminating the text (with outcomes for discipleship) as in inspiring the text (with doctrinal outcomes).

Again, the first paragraph of the BUGB Declaration of Principle is pertinent here:

‘That our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the holy Scriptures, and that each church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer his laws.’

Here we find, not just that ‘the sole and absolute’ authority is in the person of Jesus Christ to which the Scriptures bear witness, but the privilege and responsibility is given to the church, in community, to grapple with the meaning of the text for themselves *under the guidance of the Holy Spirit*.

The UK Evangelical Alliance Statement of Faith, to which many Baptists subscribe, seems at this point to be at odds with this Declaration of Principle:

‘The divine inspiration and supreme authority of the Old and

“ *In sub-Saharan Africa the cross is seen through a narrower focus* ”

Biblicism

There was, early on, broad agreement amongst evangelicals that the Bible is inspired by God, though this was interpreted in various ways. In the 18th century, Bebbington argues, the focus was less on a doctrine of scripture *per se* as a desire that the Bible be seen as something to be trusted, and commended for devotional use. But from the 1820s onwards “there began a body of evangelical opinion that began to focus on inerrancy, verbal inspiration and a literal interpretation of the Bible.”

Brian Harris, writing in 2007, spoke of “a marked shift in the attitude of evangelicals towards the Bible”. Leaning heavily on Baptist theologian Stanley Grenz’s approach at this point, someone he sees as representative of contemporary evangelicalism, Harris quotes Grenz as desiring to move away from seeing theology as using the Bible as a source for doctrinal propositions. Rather he argues

New Testament Scriptures, which are the written Word of God—fully trustworthy for faith and conduct...’

Some will argue that these statements are ultimately compatible. Ultimately, perhaps this is true. But in the ‘here and now’, asserting the Bible as the supreme authority can lend itself to a heavy-handed biblicism. Acknowledging Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Scriptures, as the sole and absolute authority will still allow us to arrive at, and maintain, doctrinal convictions but also offers a more responsive framework with which to assess our mission engagement.

This article is based on a much fuller paper delivered in April 2017 at the Hearts and Minds Theology Day at Regent’s Park College, which you can read in full here: <http://bit.ly/dkbaptist>

Tony Cupit

Former Director of the Baptist World Alliance divisions of Evangelism and Education and Study and Research, hailing from Australia



L I B E R T Y



M I S S I O N



E T H I C S

G L O B A L
B A P T I S T S
T O D A Y

*AROUND THE WORLD, BAPTISTS
HAVE MUCH IN COMMON*

Though the landscape ahead is clouded, there are some Baptist emphases that will remain on our agenda: religious liberty, mission and social ethics. These will offer Baptists great challenges, responsibility and, if we are wise, opportunity.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Baptists are strong advocates for religious liberty, insisting on freedom to worship God without restraint and outside influence. The struggle for religious

liberty, for ourselves and others, has been a defining feature of our identity, born out of persecution and the unique contribution Baptist pioneers brought to the Christian understanding of Scripture. A major contribution of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) has been to champion the cause of religious liberty. Through official visits to countries where Baptists and others are a beleaguered minority, and through a continual flow of correspondence, the BWA has strongly

challenged and on occasions exposed the failure of some states to protect their citizens' beliefs and worship practices.

Baptist believers in many places today are likely to be confronted with increasing persecution. Many countries boast an adherence to religious freedom that often means freedom to worship only within the major religion of that country. Often Baptists in such countries are an ostracized minority.

The recent transition of the

presidential administration in the USA has raised another challenge for Baptists whose identity is linked to the defence of religious freedom. To those who cherish the American heritage of separation of Church and State, the support given by many conservative Christians in the USA to a President whose comments reveal an antipathy to one of the world's major religions, even if it is not our own, is bewildering. Partisan politics can, for some, be more important than the teachings of the gospel!

Yet, global Baptists will carry a heritage of religious liberty through the 21st century. Countless Baptist heroes, known and unknown, fight for and often give up life and liberty because of this basic emphasis.

MISSION

There is a link between mission and religious freedom. Freedom to undertake the resurrected Christ's Great Commission is influenced by world events making mission activity, at least for expatriates, in some places nearly impossible. Even where it is still possible to work as cross-cultural Christian apologists, there are regulations and strictures under which witnesses to the Christian faith must operate.

Baptists are passionate about the mission of God in the world and express this passion through active participation in local and overseas mission. In ecumenical circles, Christian world confessions that will disagree with some Baptist positions generally acknowledge, with appreciation, the missionary nature of Baptist witness. Early Baptist heroes like Lisle, Carey, Judson, Arnold and Oncken served as models to thousands of Baptist missionaries who took the gospel message to countless nations.

My wife and I served as cross-cultural missionaries in Papua New Guinea, and are supportive of those who, in the name of Christ, undertake the challenging and fulfilling calling to be part of God's mission in the world. However, there is today a better understanding of the relationship between mission and Church and the paradigm shift that is taking place in global mission policy. The dynamic witness of national Churches challenges the old pattern of sending and receiving churches. The greatest advance in the work of Christ's kingly reign is coming from the lives and message of indigenous

Christians. I predict that the most effective Christian missionary in the 21st century will be a young woman of colour, poor, relatively uneducated, part of an oppressed people and a dedicated servant of Jesus.

That she will be of colour is understandable as the leadership of the Church in the world moves from Europe and the United States to Africa, Asia and Latin America. This young woman will probably be from an impoverished community. The passion and commitment of many young people in under-developed countries transcends a need for support and security. She will lack educational advantages but will be qualified by gifts and experience. This young woman will be totally committed to her Saviour.

SOCIAL ETHICS

Thirdly, the philosophical and moral principles that represent the collective view of people and cultures, what we may call social ethics, have enormous implications for the Church.

Among the more obvious: disparity

majority believe the First Amendment gives religious groups... "proper protection" to "continue to advocate their beliefs on traditional marriage. Many who deem same-sex marriage to be wrong reach that conclusion based on decent and honorable religious or philosophical premises."

This issue will continue to be addressed by Baptists everywhere and it is likely to be rancorous and divisive. More so than in North America and Western Europe, opposition from Baptist bodies in Africa, Latin America and Asia can be anticipated.

As a second example, Baptists will need to determine and articulate a position on the environment and climate change. It comes down to some extent to our attitude to the relationship between science and religion, which in more recent years seem to have been drawn more closely together. Voices popular with the media will be quoted on social issues in the secular and religious media. Statements by Pope Francis have been eagerly pounced on by the press. A newspaper used the heading,

“ THE 21ST CENTURY MISSIONARY WILL BE A YOUNG WOMAN OF COLOUR, POOR, RELATIVELY UNEDUCATED AND OPPRESSED ”

between rich and poor; racism; the plight of refugees; human trafficking, especially of children; the role of women in society and in the Church; abortion; same-sex marriage; the environment and climate change. Two examples spring to mind.

In a 5-4 decision, the US Supreme Court recently ruled that the 14th Amendment to the US Constitution requires a State to license a marriage between two people of the same sex. While the ruling supports the right of same-sex couples to marry, churches and clergy in the USA will mostly refuse to perform marriage ceremonies that do not conform to their own religious beliefs. They will be emboldened by some statements in the Supreme Court's ruling. Essentially, the

Papal message challenges some all-American values, when referring to the Pope's 24 May, 2015 encyclical on the environment. Indeed, the Pope is challenging a lot more than "American values". When he calls the planet "our common home", he is putting forth a precise moral world-view, a statement about our global, common responsibility to address our planet's vulnerability.

If we Baptists are to be true to the gospel of Jesus Christ and to our heritage, emphasis on religious freedom, mission and social ethics must be paramount.

BOTH EVANGELICAL AND LIBERAL

The two essential sides of

BAPTIST IDENTITY

CONTEMPORARY BAPTIST IDENTITY IS AT TIMES AT ODDS WITH EVANGELICAL IDEOLOGY.

In 1990 in his book *The Nonconformists*, the historian James Munson made the following statement: “The decline of English Nonconformity as a major part of English culture in the 20th century may well be seen as being as profound a change in English history as the suppression of the monasteries under Henry VIII.” These words are probably, and sadly, true. Yet discussions about Baptist identity could serve as a joyful re-discovery of what we have to offer in the contemporary world. My claim is that our Baptist, Free Church identity should consist in the mutual co-existence and mutual inter-penetration of both the evangelical and the liberal, that is of firm belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and of gospel freedom, the freedom that is in Christ. And the text appropriate to this is Galatians 5: 1: “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.”

I use the word ‘liberal’ not to endorse

Liberal Protestantism but to indicate a generosity of spirit and an attitude of open-mindedness and free enquiry, while bearing in mind the words of Lesslie Newbigin, “It’s good to have an open-mind, but not open at both ends at the same time.” Above all I use it to emphasise the value and reality of freedom in Jesus Christ and the implications of such freedom for our personal life, our church commitments and our social existence.

The first half of the claim is this: Baptists are an evangelical people. They are not Catholics but Protestants. They are not Unitarians but celebrate belief in one God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They hold firmly to those watchwords of the Reformation: Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone and the glory of God alone. These are gospel themes. Evangelical faith has intellectual force and conviction; and it is experiential,

it embraces a realised communion with God, by grace, through faith in Christ. To this we testify when we are baptised. Being convinced about these things in experience, we become able to convince others also.

And so attention turns to that second emphasis that interpenetrates and co-exists with the evangelical: the liberal dimension. To serve Christ is perfect freedom, restoration to a responsible, discerning, wise quality of life in which we bring light to the world. It is indeed for freedom that Christ has set us free. Yet these words from Paul are followed by a clear warning: “Do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” The first Baptists, and indeed the first Protestant believers, took this seriously and for them it took a particular shape. That shape was the medieval system of the Roman Catholic Church and its derivative, the Church of England. The doctrine of the liberty of conscience was not concerned first with the political order, although it had implications for it. It was a protest against the exclusive right claimed by the medieval Church to determine how



Nigel Wright speaks at BMS' **Catalyst Live** event

God is to be worshipped, a right backed by the coercive power of the state. The Church claimed a monopoly, to be the only legitimate religious power where it held sway. It was also a monarchy, the Pope being at the apex of a hierarchy mediating power through bishops and priests to the people. Against this totalitarian backdrop we can understand the nature of the freedom to which those early Baptists, and other Protestants, laid claim.

Their insistence was that when it came to choosing between obedience to the call of God and obedience to the State or to a monopolistic religious power there was no contest. They would obey God and take the consequences. The freedom of the local congregation is a further expression both of the freedom of conscience and of the liberal emphasis that is a constituent part of Baptist identity. Just as individuals are free to worship God according to conscience without compulsion from external powers and without fear of sanction for so doing, so churches gathered around Christ and his Word, are free to interpret and apply that Word for themselves.

But in doing so, and this is the hugely important point, they act in accordance with the evangelical emphases of the priority of Christ, Scripture, grace and faith. Although free from external compulsion, they are not free from the internal constraint of the truth as it is in Jesus because it is precisely from that truth

“ We have already implied that those powers, both religious and secular, should stay within their limits ”

that they derive their freedom in the first place.

To say it again: in Baptist identity, the evangelical and the liberal interpenetrate and co-inhere. They belong together and are two sides of one coin.

For the Christian, freedom is not the liberty to be what I want to be in defiance of others. It is not the freedom to create my own laws and morality, to be unencumbered by moral demands and obligations. It is a freedom to be a creature of God living for the purpose for which we have been created.

There are clearly implications of this Christian understanding for the secular realm. To assert the freedom of conscience as being bound to God before it is to any earthly power, we have already implied that those powers both religious and secular should stay within their limits. It is not part of their business to trespass on the most intimate and personal of all dimensions. Neither is it their calling to compel conformity of belief or practice in matters spiritual and religious, but rather to maintain their proper limits, to preserve

the freedom of citizens to search for God and to make their own choices. True religion requires the willing and convinced participation of its followers. The freedom to be a Christian implies the freedom not to be a Christian. Only if this possibility exists can we be assured that those who choose to be Christians do so not out of fear of penalty or discrimination but out of authentic faith.

Perhaps this is the point at which the liberal dimension that belongs to Baptist identity comes most clearly into focus. To safeguard our own freedom, to maintain the integrity of truth, the civic freedom we desire for ourselves should be granted also to others, even when we believe them to be wrong.

It was just over 400 years ago that in 1616 the Baptist pioneer Thomas Helwys published his great, gospel-based plea for religious freedom, *The Mystery of Iniquity*, the first of its kind in the English language, and paid the price for it with his life. The Christian identity he represents is still worth living for.

WHAT DOES 'BAPTIST' LOOK LIKE?

OUTSIDE THE GLOBALISED METROPOLITAN CENTRES, WHAT ARE BAPTIST CHURCHES LIKE AROUND THE WORLD?



Nigeria
Duro Ayanrinola
*General Secretary,
All Africa Baptist
Fellowship*

If you visited a rural Baptist church in my area of Nigeria, away from the cities, you would see that the building reflects the economic status of people in the community – usually built with cheap, locally sourced materials. Worship experience involves vibrant singing, clapping, dancing, and sharing testimonies of God's goodness. Musical instruments are usually locally made. People sit according to gender – once you enter, you will know where to sit.

The most important aspect of the worship is preaching and a sermon lasts between 30 and 45 minutes. The church recognises the office of the pastor, who is usually a man, as the spiritual head of the church, and may also have deacons and deaconesses, or elders as helpers. Services are led by the pastor and deacons or deaconesses, elders, or designated members of the church.



India
Tapas Mondal
*Secretary, Bengali
Baptist Union*

One of our village churches in the Sundarbans in the Bay of Bengal was built 150 years ago from bamboo, mud and straw. Today, the renovated modern church building holds 90 to 100 members every Sunday. The worship service is conducted in Bengali

and lasts about one and a half hours, including the singing of hymns and choruses, prayer, giving testimony and also a sermon lasting between 30 and 40 minutes. The pastor leads second Sunday Communion services, thanksgiving services, child dedications, baptisms and weddings. Other Sundays, the elders, deacons, youth and women lead services as per prepared roster. Music is played on Indian instruments – harmonium, drums (the local *dhol* and *khol*) and *kartals* (local clapping instruments used in folk music) are played.

Women play an active role in the church by preaching and leading Sunday services and sometimes family thanksgiving services.



**Trinidad and
Tobago**
Anslem Warwick
*General Secretary,
Baptist Union of
Trinidad and Tobago*

If you visited a rural Baptist church in my area, away from the city, you would see a small concrete rectangular structure, renovated occasionally to add better bathroom facilities, perhaps with a small bell tower at the front. Bells are still used to alert the rural community to deaths, service times and weddings. The ordained pastors will all be male, but you will encounter a few unordained female pastors.

Worship experience will be mixed, starting with contemporary choruses with vigorous clapping and dancing, followed by hymns, responsive reading and reading

of Scripture, followed by an offering and a message based on the Scripture, which usually lasts about an hour. An altar call may be made, as well as prayers for salvation, for the sick and others. Services are conducted in English and led by women, men and youth from various ministries – often deacons or pastors. All churches have deacons both male and female. Elders are so named on the basis of age, an older deacon may be called an elder.

Most churches will have a tambourine, a keyboard and a drum set, but some do not use musical instruments. Men, women, young and old all worship together, however in some churches women are not allowed to preach or to go up on the pulpit area. Women must cover their heads.



Denmark
Lone Møller-Hansen
*Secretary General,
Baptist Union of
Denmark*

In rural Denmark the Baptist church is often the church of the town, because the Lutheran State-church is situated outside the town. The Baptist pastor could be male or female, but many churches have no pastor, either because they can't afford it or because no educated pastor is available. The worship service takes place on a Sunday morning and lasts for little more than an hour. There is a mix of hymns and songs of praise, and the sermon – if any – would last less than half an hour. Services sometimes involve people sharing a word or a testimony instead of the sermon.

In many Baptist churches in Denmark there will be many nationalities, as the world has come to our country. But often the only common language will be Danish.

The leadership of the church would be both men and women, very often more women than men.

A SHORT DECLARATION of the mystery of iniquity.

Jer. 51. 6.

Flee out of the midst of Babell, and deliver every man his soule, be not destroyed in his iniquity, for this is the time of the lords vengeance, he will render vnto hit a recompense.

Hosea 10. 12.

Soov to your selues in right counses, reape after the measure of mercie, breake vp your fallow ground, for it is time to seeke the lord, till he come & raine righteousness vpon you.



Ann^o 1612.

Rev Emma Walsh

College Librarian at Regent's Park College, Oxford

ADVOCACY DEFINES US

BAPTIST HISTORY HAS A
GOLDEN THREAD OF ADVOCACY
FOR THE VOICELESS RUNNING
THROUGH IT AND DEFINING
OUR DENOMINATION.

From the very beginning of Baptist life, advocacy has stood as a key part of our identity.

Thomas Helwys' Declaration of the *Mystery of Iniquity* in 1612 is not only the foundation document of our denomination, it is also the first plea for religious liberty in the English language. But what makes it so significant is that Helwys was pleading for religious liberty for all, not just himself or Baptists.

When Helwys sent his plea for religious liberty to King James I, he was asking that all people have the freedom to follow their conscience in matters of faith, he argues:

"For men's religion to God is between God and themselves. The king shall not answer for it. Neither may the king be judge between God and man. Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews, or whatsoever, it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure. This is made evident to our lord the king by the scriptures."

James I did not appreciate the personally signed copy that was sent to him or the sentiment outlined in the works pages. As a result, Thomas Helwys was imprisoned and died in prison a couple of years later.

Helwys' document is significant because it shows that at the very core of Baptist identity is not only a desire for justice for ourselves but also justice for others.

The desire to see justice for all is a beautiful thread that weaves its way through Baptist history. Whether it was William Carey advocating on behalf of widows who risked being burnt alive as part of the suttee ritual, William Knibb speaking out on behalf of slaves in Jamaica or Dr Ellen Farrer providing not only lifesaving surgery in open air theatres in India for those that had no other way of accessing care but advocating on behalf of women both in India and at home in England. It was through the work

of female missionary doctors abroad that female doctors in England were increasingly recognised and respected.

But the advocacy work was not only undertaken abroad, it was also happening in the UK with Baptists often significantly contributing to the social reform that was happening at home. People such as John Howard campaigned for prison reform in the 1700s or John Clifford engaged in passive resistance to the Boer War and denominational education reform in the early 1900s.

Baptists have continued to be outspoken throughout the centuries, always advocating on behalf of those with little or no voice and seeking justice and freedom for all.

Whether it was Thomas Helwys in 1612, or people speaking and working on behalf of refugees today, advocacy is a core part of our identity as Baptists.

THREE THINGS WE GET WRONG ABOUT THE REFORMATION

SOME CHERISHED RECEIVED WISDOM ABOUT BAPTISTS, CHALLENGED BY HISTORY.

During this 500th anniversary year, the so-called Strangers Churches in London (that is, churches based on language groups which mostly trace their presence in London to religious refugees at the time of the 16th century upheavals) have planned a series of events telling something of the story of the Reformation and of its continuing liveness in their life and practice today.

The idea was one event or exhibition a month. But there are not twelve Strangers Churches. And so the organisers approached us. After all, Baptists are children of the Reformation too. And this of course is where we begin to come up against some rather complex historical facts. Facts that challenge three assumptions we often make about what it means (and has meant) to be Baptist. In the year when we are remembering the 500th anniversary of those events we call the Reformation, it is no bad thing to remember that our relationship to that movement is not simple and linear; it holds before us the truth that our relationship to nothing in our past is simple and linear.

Baptists have their origins in the Reformation

Yes, of course we are a product of Reformation theology. But our origins are not in the 16th century and the immediate religious ferment of that

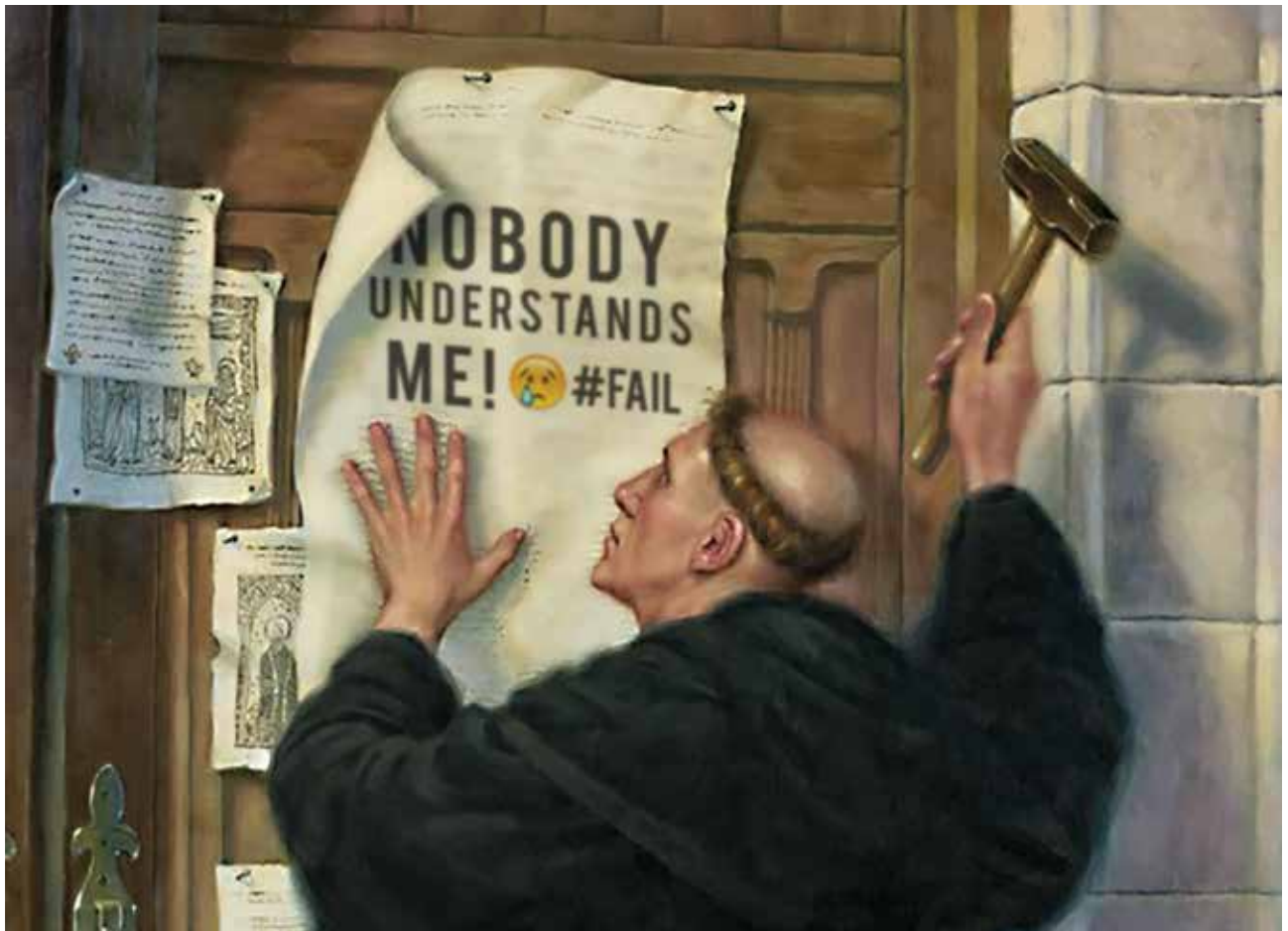
period. Within England (where of course, the Reformation was a very different animal from the Continental movement, shaped as much by politics, and subject to all sorts of stops and starts, changes and renewals as the political wind changed), there were those who moved beyond the position taken by the Church of England. They did this partly under the influence of Continental theology, and partly through the changes that come when people start reading Scripture in their own language and without the mediation of certain kinds of authority and training. And among them, there eventually came to be those who rejected not only the episcopal structure of the Church of England and the parish structure of a national Church, but also a theology of infant baptism, and who developed a theology of believers' baptism. It is worth remembering that, in this generation, the theology of baptism was a consequence of the theology of the Church and its relationship to the state, and not, as we so often assert, developed as a direct result of reading the Bible. And in Holland in 1612, and in the 1640s among some who did not travel, there developed what we can identify as Baptist congregations, communities with which we are in direct relationship.

And yes, of course, these congregations developed as a result of what happened in the Reformation. The move towards reading Scripture in one's own language, the rejection of a papal and episcopal structure to the Church, and the emphasis on the local community of believers were

rooted in the challenges Luther offered to the status quo. As was the conviction that a life of faithful obedience and accountability (a very significant mark of early Baptist congregations) was a calling on everybody, and not simply those who took religious vows and the recognition, as a consequence of that, that baptism was for believers, and should not be offered to those who could not in good conscience and with some understanding ask for it themselves. All of these beliefs are influenced by Luther and in the theologies that Zwingli and later Calvin worked out as coherent developments of the new positions that were being explored.

But there were those in the 16th century, as part of this movement on the Continent (specifically in Zurich and some other parts) who also developed theologies of local congregational responsibility, the need for meaningful discipleship and the practice of believers' baptism – the Anabaptists. The relationship between Anabaptists and the Baptist movement which is our history is still deeply contested, and there is not really room to deal with it here. But simply noticing the existence of the complex evidence and interpretation is a good reminder that it is not straightforward to say that "Baptists are children of the Reformation."

But it's good to recognise our roots in the Reformation, and in particular, the Reformation commitment to *sola scriptura*: Scripture Alone.



Martin Luther nails it

Baptists take their practices straight from Scripture

It is not uncommon to hear us say “our convictions about baptism are drawn from the New Testament, and more closely in line with that than other traditions”. But our very understanding of baptism is not as straightforward as we might like to portray it. However much we might like to think so, our practice is not that of the New Testament – firstly because there is not a single practice, but also because what we can see is a practice of immediate baptism, followed by a time of discipling and catechesis.

I know that in some instances, we may find ourselves doing that, but our normal assumption is that there will be conversion, there will be instruction, there will be examination and then there will be baptism. And I am not at all disputing this as a correct procedure (it is actually very close to that which we see in the Church of the 2nd to 4th centuries), I am simply reminding us that it is not “the New Testament practice”. (Look – another misconception blown away; we are deeply formed by post-biblical Early Church tradition...)

“It is not straightforward to say we are children of the Reformation”

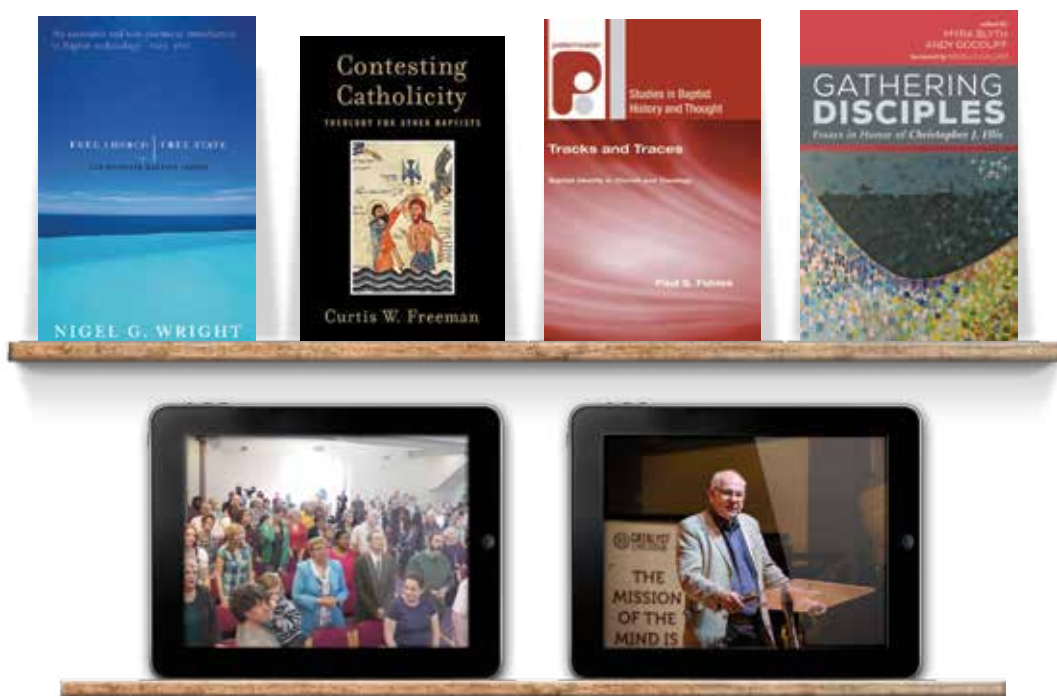
Baptists have always been missional

Similarly, our convictions about mission are deeply rooted and highly significant in our identity, and I am convinced something we need to hold dear and continue to explore and develop. But we regularly say, “Baptists have always been a mission-minded people” – and no, we haven’t. Among our earliest identities – and controversies – is the debate (shaped by Reformation theology) about whether “offering” the invitation to salvation is appropriate, or whether that will undermine God’s sovereign will. This debate was there in the very beginning of BMS World Mission, and the very title of Carey’s book *An enquiry into the use of means to convert the heathen* is itself

witness to that debate.

My point here is simply that our story is not simple or monolinear and our relationship to the events of the Reformation make that very clear. In our generation, as we reflect on how to be Baptists in our place and time, facing the questions that challenge us, this is a gift. There is no “one answer” in our past, there is no simple straightforward place to stand and say “this is being Baptist”. There are conflicting stories, different emphases, always controversy and, regularly, arguments. This, perhaps, is what it means to be Baptist, and to take our Reformation heritage seriously.

Being Baptist



EVANGELICALS AND BAPTISTS Siblings or neighbours?

David Kerrigan

In the full version of the piece featured on page six of this issue, BMS' General Director lays out similarities and differences.

Download it at bit.ly/dkbaptist

RUSSELL MOORE'S BLOG

Russell Moore

One of the Southern Baptist Convention's most progressive voices presents articles, videos and podcasts at russellmoore.com

BEING BAPTIST

Baptist Union of Great Britain

Over 400 years of Baptist history in Britain and a glimpse of life in Baptist churches today. Watch it at bit.ly/2poYaNH

FREE CHURCH, FREE STATE The Positive Baptist Vision

Nigel Wright

One of the essential texts for British Baptists, this book comes highly recommended and was written by a contributor to this issue of *Catalyst*.

TRACKS AND TRACES Baptist Identity in Church and Theology

Paul Fiddes

An excellent insight into Baptist history and the contemporary position of the denomination.

GATHERING DISCIPLES Essays in Honor of Christopher J. Ellis

Myra Blyth and Andy Goodliff (Editors)

UK Baptists reflect on worship and church life within the framework of influential Baptist thinker Chris Ellis' theology.

THE COURAGE TO BE BAPTIST

Various

Baptist theology in the context of same-sex relationships is addressed on this challenging site, with input from two *Catalyst* contributors. Visit somethingtodeclare.org.uk to find out more.

BAPTIST THEOLOGY (Doing Theology)

Stephen Holmes

Baptist distinctives considered by a former *Catalyst* and *Catalyst Live* contributor.

CONSERVATIVE AND LIBERAL Video

Nigel Wright

The full version of the page 10 article is available to watch or listen to at bit.ly/2pFRH1G

CONTESTING CATHOLICITY Theology for Other Baptists

Curtis W Freeman

Fully participating in the historic Church while holding onto our origins as a spiritual protest movement: this tome brings history and theology together in an exhaustive study.

AN URGENT NEED A Common Theological Identity for Baptists

Neville Callam

The General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance shares helpful reflections on page 16 of *Baptist World*, volume 64-2. You can read the whole magazine at bit.ly/2pCwbuu

A SHORT DECLARATION On the Mystery of Iniquity

Thomas Helwys

A foundational text, still worth reading.

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