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The baptist Imagination of James McClendon

ABSTRACT

James McClendon (1924-2000) left behind him a legacy that was both decidedly 'baptist',[1] and thoroughly imaginative. This essay will explore how these two attributes (baptistness and imagination) came together to create a distinctive perspective for McClendon's theology. To achieve this task we will first explicate McClendon's understanding of 'baptist' and then come to a functional understanding of imagination. Finally we will discuss McClendon's baptist vision as an exemplification of his distinct imagination.

James McClendon 1924-2000

James William McClendon Jr. was born in Shreveport Louisiana in 1924. As a child he was often ill, and confined to home; he was bright, and usually among the top in his class.[2] At quite a young age, McClendon was inwardly persuaded that faith in Jesus was appropriate for him and attended First Baptist Church in Shreveport with his mother. As a teen he was a member of the ROTC despite lacking any military skills. He describes himself as 'tall and shy and studious'.[3] He went to college at the University of Texas, and studied physics with minors in math and english. This degree was interrupted by his time in the Navy where he served as an electronics officer (studying at Harvard and MIT, and serving in the

[1] The use of the word baptist, will be used in two ways as per McClendon's use. A small b baptist conveys a broad category of baptist convictions. A capital B baptist is used for naming explicitly Baptist denominationalism.
[2] James McClendon. 'How My Mind Developed', 1974. McClendon Collection; Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theologial Seminary.
[3] Ibid, 2.

Pacific, after peace was achieved). During the war 'Jim' was compelled to 'gospel ministry' which lead him to seminary (Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Princeton Theological Seminary) and Graduate school (Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary). He served as a pastor in Louisiana and Texas, as well as a short time in Sydney Australia, before moving to an academic career.

McClendon began his teaching in 1954 at Golden Gate Baptist Seminary in San Francisco. Due to some unforeseen circumstances and conflicts, McClendon chose to move on in 1966.[4] He was unable, though, to gain a job from a university or seminary within his denomination. This lead to an historic appointment at the (Jesuit) University of San Francisco, where McClendon was the first non-Catholic professor of theology at a Catholic institution in America. This ended up not being a long term appointment, due to McClendon's active opposition to the Vietnam War. After a nationwide tour of temporary employment in various institutions, McClendon landed in yet another ecumenical role at the (Episcopalian) Church Divinity School which belonged to the Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley. By the time he had finally settled at GTU McClendon had acquired some of the most varied ecumenical teaching experience of any theologian working in America.[5]

Being Baptist, in a world that was not, had a profound impact upon McClendon. The Episcopal claim of being both and neither Catholic and/or Protestant was attractive to his development of his baptist identity.[6] This is how he felt about being baptist, yet he was not the same as the Episcopalians; he had distinct and separate convictions. Surely he thought, he could apply this same logic to his own tradition, and not just concede to being an ecclesial offshoot of the Protestant tree? McClendon told a story of how early American fishermen had a problem with their herring dying in their storage barrels after they were caught, but prior to arrival in the port, causing them to go bad. They discovered that if they put a small, spiny catfish in a barrel of herring it would guarantee their survival. The explanation of this phenomenon was that the catfish was so

[4] This involved some theological debates within the Southern Baptist denomination, and McClendon's involvement in raising funds to send a student to participate in the civil rights movement.
[5] James McClendon. 'The Radical Road One Baptist Took.' *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 74, no. 4 (2000): 507.
[6] Ibid.

unpleasant the herring would simply not have the leisure to die![7] McClendon uses this anecdote to explain both his role as a baptist in these non-baptist institutions and also as a role for the baptist churches amongst the churches ecumenically.

McClendon's discovery of John Howard Yoder enabled him to vocalize this move. Yoder's emphasis and knowledge of the Anabaptist movement during the reformation era enabled McClendon to discover that his suspicions of baptists being a unique entity were true. McClendon writes of his 'conversion' through Yoder:

> I had undergone a second conversion, not as at my baptism merely to follow Jesus, but now to follow Jesus understood this way, Jesus interpreted by John Yoder's scornful passion to overcome standard-account thinking, Jesus who (among other things) rejected the Zealot option, who would not do harm even in the best of causes, even in his own. By then, as I have said above, I had become some kind of anti-war Christian... I was converted. I was (though I still have no love for the term itself) an `Anabaptist' Baptist.[8]

Reading this book crystallized some convictions for McClendon about what it is to be baptist. McClendon explains:

> Unspoken but implied, Yoder's Politics of Jesus gave a new relevance to the Anabaptists, those radical Reformers of 16th century Christianity I had been taught to disregard as my own spiritual ancestors. Now the radicals were important, the Politics implied, but not because they defined a trail of blood or a trail of baptistries--rather because these widely varied folk across the centuries had each caught some of the light of the Original Revolution (another Yoder title) and had sought in their day and way to live out the baptist vision anew. The fifteenth century Czech Brethren and the sixteenth century radicals had each done this independently; so had others in other centuries--among them General and Particular Baptists, Brethren, Campbellite Restorationists, South American basic-community Catholics. These had caught the vision, claimed it communally as their own, and lived it out afresh. So might I; so might we.[9]

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[7] James McClendon. 'On Being A Baptist In A Non-Baptist World', 1996. McClendon Collection; Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theologial Seminary.
[8]McClendon. 'The Radical Road One Baptist Took.' 508.
[9] McClendon. 'On Being A Baptist In A Non-Baptist World'.

Out of a conviction that his life's task was to write a theology for this often overlooked theological perspective, McClendon takes an approach that is broadly baptist. Similarly, both 'catholic' and 'protestant' take on broader meanings than their proper noun capitalized variations. The lower cased versions of these words convey an attitude or broad methodological and doctrinal convictions and McClendon contends that baptist should have its place alongside these two other alternatives. He acknowledges the work of others in this tradition, highlighting some commonly accepted distinguishing features of this perspective: (1) Biblicism, (2) Liberty, (3) Discipleship, (4) Community, (5) Mission.[10] What McClendon sought was a vision that united all these elements; a distinct way of seeing, that enabled these to become distinctive ecclesial patterns. Observations and revelations on this baptist phenomenon lead McClendon to develop the baptist vision as a means of identifying the unity that exists within this tradition, and as a recovery of what those early anabaptist reformers had possessed. The way that McClendon approaches theology necessitates both a descriptive and a normative task, both the discovery and transformations of the convictions of the community.[11] This approach to theology evokes creativity and the allowance of the convictions of the community to combine with the current context, and shape the imagination of the community to live and think in faithful ways. With an understanding of McClendon's baptist vision will come a fuller understanding of his baptist-ness, but prior to that, an fuller understanding of imagination is required to see how it is particularly apt to theological method today.

God's view of things is not a perspective we are able to know outright. The acceptance that theology has an innate hermeneutical or interpretive task, has become widely accepted.[12] This has allowed creativity and imagination to begin to be accepted as an inevitable and often beneficial

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[10] For more detail see, James William McClendon. *Systematic Theology: Ethics*. Vol. 1. 3 vols. Revised. (Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 27-30.

[11] McClendon, *Ethics,* 23. McClendon defines theology as 'The discovery, understanding, and transformation of the convictions of a convictional community, including the discovery and critical revision of their relation to one another and to whatever else there is.'

[12] See, David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (London: SCM Press, 1981) 107, and Vanhoozer, Kevin J. *First Theology : God, Scripture & Hermeneutics*. Downers Grove, Ill.; Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press ; Apollos, 2002. McClendon himself affirms this in his definition of theology, where he includes interpretation, and transformation of convictions as part of its task. See *Ethics, 23*.

attribute to theology's task, especially when it comes to being contextually relevant in our pluralistic world. A theory of imagination will prove to be essential in understanding not only how this interpretive aspect functions, but specifically how McClendon's imagination works in his theological method.

Imagination

Imagination has a long history- in academic discourse. Its understanding in the cultural and academic world has evolved a great deal in the past century. Theology, with its acceptance of the interpretive aspect of its task, must have an adequate understanding of imagination if it is to harness the potential of its use. In Imagining God: Theology and The Religious Imagination, Garret Green brings together insights into imagination, rationality and recent scientific advancements, and how these relate to help with theology's task. Green takes seriously the role that imagination plays in understanding, and delves into this often overlooked aspect of human thinking.[13]

Green uses philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn to explain the concept of a paradigm, and easily relates Kuhn's language with religious thought. A paradigm is the structure of models and images that form the logic of a scientific theory or method, which is similar to how the imagination functions. Throughout his work Green uses the example of Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit.[14] The image can be seen as a rabbit or a duck, depending on how it is seen, or depending upon the paradigm of the seer. The image either is seen as a duck or as a rabbit, and Green wants to argue that it is imagination that makes seeing both possible. Green proposes that we understand imagination as 'the paradigmatic faculty, the ability of human beings to recognize in accessible exemplars the constitutive organizing patterns of other, less accessible and more complex objects of cognition.'[15] Green works extensively to provide credibility to this view from both

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[13] Green, Garrett. *Imagining God : Theology And The Religious Imagination* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), see especially Chapter 1. Green does not explicitly cite McClendon nor McClendon Green, but there are significant overlapping convictions in their work.

[14] This can be found in, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: Macmillan,1953), 194.

[15] Green, Garrett. *Imagining God* , 66. This is also what McClendon displays with his *Biography as Theology*.

within and outside of the theological realm, but what I want to highlight is how he argues from within the theological tradition.

Green is interested in the development of a Christian imagination that plays a paradigmatic role in the lives of Christians. One point that is important for him to clarify about this type of imagination is the distinction between image and imagine. 'One does not image God,' Green says, which would be a form of idolatry, 'but imagines God.'[16] This is the distinction between constructing some picture of God, and thinking of God according to a paradigm. This is an important insight that must not be forgotten, for idolatry is easily achieved. The temptation to say what God is, instead of saying what God is like, is often a merely a matter of semantics but performs a very different speech act.[17]

Green spends significant time and energy discussing what this paradigmatic imagination may look like according to the Christian faith. Through choosing faithful paradigms to structure the imagination, one can have freedom and authority in living truthfully and realistically.[18] This is not merely a personal reality; indeed, to be truly authentic to the faith it confesses, it must be a communal imagination. Green is convinced that the paradigms that shape people's imagination and their experiences in the world are more apt for revealing uniqueness in a person or a group, rather than the experiences themselves. He says that 'what is given to the believer, and therefore to the theologian, is not a foundational experience but a religious paradigm: a normative model of 'what the world is like,' embodied in a canon of scripture and expressed in the life of a religious community.'[19] Likely, people will experience life in slightly different ways, but what will be the same is the imagination with which they experience it.[20] It is the imagination that is more telling than the experience.

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[16] Ibid, 93.

[17] This is used technically and refers to the concept that words are not vessels of meaning, but perform actions. We use words to direct, explain, declare, etc. and the words are actions. This philosophy is the lineage of J.L. Austin and his followers, of which McClendon is one.

[18] See, Ibid, 119.

[19] Ibid, 133, emphasis his.

[20] This potentially a difficult claim to defend, but what Green is concerned with arguing is that the paradigms (including metaphors, and convictions) that structure the imagination are more important to the conclusions of experience than the explicit experiences themselves. In a way that all experience is predicated upon the imagination that allows it to be understood.

This paradigmatic imagination surely has a lot to do with the form and method theology will take. Green holds that theology is a matter of interpreting the 'manifold aspects of that imaginative unity in order that its logic, the coherence of its elements, may be intellectually comprehended.'[21] Using the imagination in theology, then, is not only beneficial, but necessary, to be faithful in a changing world. McClendon brings this same concept under his term 'baptist vision' allowing the distinctive baptist convictions to lead to a distinctively baptist theology.

Green makes the case that not only is imagination central to human rationality but that it is especially apt in the discussion of theological method. Imagination can be the background of rationality and utilized to new potential.

Mark Johnson is a philosopher and linguist who works within the Anglo-American post-modern tradition.[22] Launching his career with the groundbreaking work Metaphors We Live By alongside George Lakoff, he set out on a trajectory that led to many publications exploring the connections of language, cognitive science, linguistics, imagination, ethics and meaning making. In his The Body In The Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason, Johnson argues for an increased awareness, and appreciation for the role of imagination in our reasoning. He advances three main claims: a) without imagination, nothing in the world could be meaningful. b) without imagination, we could never make sense of our experience. And c) that without imagination, we could never reason toward knowledge of reality.[23] Johnson has a similar approach to understanding imagination as Green does, in that they are both concerned in the ways that imagination structures how we understand and experience our lives. Johnson, however, goes more into the details of how the imagination goes about forming such structures.

Johnson is indebted to Immanuel Kant, whose insight into imagination is the starting point for much of this thinking. Johnson, though, claims that Kant was limited by the dualisms of his system of thought. The metaphysical split between the physical and the mental is an overwhelming force for Kant which Johnson sees as the main limiting factor in his conclusions on imagination.[24] Johnson views himself as moving beyond

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[21] Ibid, 148.
[22] I place McClendon and Green within this tradition as well.
[23] See, Mark Johnson, *The Body In The Mind : The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), ix.
[24] See, Ibid, Chapter 6, Especially 165-172.

Kant's thinking in ways which Kant's method would not allow. In other words, Johnson sees Kant's work on imagination as his greatest contribution to our understanding of meaning and rationality,[25] a conclusion that would have been impossible for Kant to make. Instead of seeing the metaphysical and epistemological dichotomies (within Kant's method) as absolutes, Johnson proposes seeing them as a continuum, with imagination as central in locating oneself on that continuum.[26] Rationality is the product of all of these structures taken together, each part bringing their own constraints and possibilities.

Johnson goes on to list five components of a theory of imagination. These are necessary an understanding of imagination that is comprehensive, they also speak to how the imagination is able to function the way it does:[27]

1) Categorization. A sort of prototype categorization is what Johnson has in mind rather than one that would seek a minimal amount of requisite conditions. The category of 'chair' would have a prototypical chair in mind, and relations to and fro this prototype could be identified as a chair. Novel chairs are taken into account and the prototype is revised due to new encounters.

2) Schemata. Both in terms of the image schema's Johnson proposes and in the sense that it is used in cognitive science, much of which still needs to be explored in more detail.[28] And image schemata would be a visual orientation used to structure thoughts, such as front and back. A rock does not have an actual front and back but we use this schemata to speak of and structure our thinking and language about its orientation. In cognitive science schemata is used to refer to the physical and neural connections within the brain. Images schemata are reinforced neurally through the connections and reinforcement of this way of thinking in a physical way.

3) Metaphorical projections. A metaphor provides a way for thinking that structures and allows projections into the future. Certain metaphors allow for possibilities that other metaphors would not allow. Taking on a novel metaphor and projecting its implication reveals innovations

[25] Ibid, 170.
[26] This is a very important move on Johnson's part and one which could have been made clearer.
[27] See Ibid, 171.
[28] There have been advances in this area since that time some of which are highlighted in Mark Johnson, *The Meaning Of The Body : Aesthetics Of Human Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

creativity. Much of this thinking has been explored by Lakoff and Johnson as well as colleagues of theirs, but more insight is needed into the relationships between domains, as well as the constraints upon metaphoric projections.

4) Metonymy. Similar in many ways to metaphor, Johnson highlights both synecdoche (part-for-whole) and metonymy proper (salient or related attribute-for-whole) as especially important. Metonymy helps with efficiency within the imagination, and allows conceptualization of something by means of its relation to something else. An example would be referring to a person by calling them what they are wearing, e.g. The red hat said… A symbolic metonymy would be a dove referring to the Holy Spirit. Metonymy is crucial to the formation and revision of categories.

5) Narrative structure. The notion of narrative unity is crucial for an adequate account of imagination both due to the complex communal narratives people take part in, and also the phenomenon of using story to remember one's life. People tell the story of themselves in narrative form. Everyone is situated historically which is, by nature the story of the past.

These five requirements for an adequate and thorough understanding of imagination lead to an ability to gauge with accuracy whether a theorist takes seriously the role and potential of the imagination within human rationality. It must be stated that these five considerations that enable the imagination primarily happen automatically, or at least not in an explicit fashion. We organize and pattern our thoughts in this way whether it is made explicit or not. Part of Johnson's project is to make focal that which is tacit, in order to understand how the imagination is able to function the way it does. In Johnson's words, these attempt to give an account of the structure of human experience and cognition.[29] In a very broad sense, imagination structures our experience, which, 'involves everything that makes us human—our bodily, social, linguistic, and intellectual being combined in complex interactions that make up our understanding of our world.'[30] As we will see the baptistness of James McClendon pervades the social, linguistic, and intellectual structures, that form his unique imagination. This is seen most acutely in the vision McClendon proposes as the propulsion for his theological perspective.

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[29] Johnson, *The Body In The Mind,* 171.
[30] Ibid, xvi.

McClendon's baptist Imagination

McClendon proposes a 'baptist vision' as the unifying theological center of a distinct type of theology. McClendon hopes that this vision would describe the center of the life and belief of baptist practitioners. He elaborates that by such a vision,

> I do not mean some end result of theological reflection, remote from the daily life of a rather plain people. Nor do I mean a detachable baptist Ideal—what baptists ought to be (but of course are not). Instead, by a vision I mean the guiding pattern by which a people (or as here, a combination of peoples) shape their thought and practice as that people or that combination; I mean by it the continually emerging theme and tonic structure of their common life. [31]

McClendon seeks this vision to be necessarily connected to the daily lives of its adherents, and that once 'acknowledged for what it is, the vision should serve as the touchstone by which authentic baptist convictions are discovered, described, and transformed, and thus as the organizing principle around which an authentic baptist theology can take shape.'[32]

As the heirs of the Radical Reformation,[33] and distinct from either Catholic or Protestant traditions, the baptist perspective represents a unique strand in the wider Christian tradition. This vision takes on two functions: as a hermeneutic, and as a temporal pattern. The hermeneutical side of the vision, McClendon argues, is the way scripture reads itself, and is expressed as a 'shared awareness of the present Christian community as the primitive community and the eschatological community.'[34] Taking his cue from Peter's use of the prophet Joel in Acts 2, McClendon sees this as the familiar pattern of how scripture is used in the bible. It can be summed in the phrase 'this is that,' a direct quote from Acts 2:16. Peter is using a passage from a former time (Joel 2:28-32) to understand and describe what is currently taking place. McClendon comments that 'we are here in the presence of a regular motif in biblical literature in which language about one set of events and circumstances is applied under guidance to another set of events and circumstances.'[35] This is how the bible should be read, he argues, and the way in which those in the 'baptist' tradition have

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[31] McClendon, *Ethics*, 27.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid, 19.
[34] Ibid, 30.
[35] Ibid, 32.

commonly read Christianity's book. He summarizes the baptist vision in the second volume of his systematics thusly:

> the way the Bible is read by those who (1) accept the plain sense of scripture as dominant sense and recognize their community with the story it tells, and who (2) acknowledge that finding the point of that story leads them to its application, and who also (3) see past and present and future linked by a 'this is that' and 'then is now' vision, a trope of mystical identity binding the story now to the story then and the story then and now to God's future yet to come.

The temporal aspect of the vision is labeled 'then is now'. This emphasizes the time aspect of applying logics from other (scriptural) times to the current time. One implication of this 'then is now' aspect is the foreshortening of time; this vision not only applies to the past, but also to the prophetic future[36]. McClendon's emphasis on narrative becomes vital at this point. He contends that what holds the various points in a story together is 'the linking of its parts into one narrative.'[37] Parush Parushev engaged with McClendon's baptist vision in his address at the Baptist Symposium, celebrating 400 years as European Baptists. He writes of this temporal aspect of McClendon's vision that a given community's task in uniting its narrative must look to the past as well as to the future. 'While looking backwards, it is not intended that the community should become retrograde, dissenting or sectarian. It is rather looking 'forward to the roots".[38] The baptist vision sees 'the story of Israel, of Jesus, of the church, is intimately related to the narrative we ourselves live.'[39] Parushev continues, 'Similarly, looking forward is not a speculative futuristic exercise. It is an acute alertness that the story of the Kingdom of God proclaimed and lived out by the prophets, by Jesus and by his disciples, is still the story that shapes our lives today. Yet we choose to take different paths to lead us to the Kingdom.'[40] Therefore, one vital function of this vision is a way of 'constructing our experience by way of Scripture.'[41]

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[36] McClendon *Doctrine,* 92.

[37] James McClendon, and James M. Smith. *Convictions : Defusing Religious Relativism*. Rev. ed. (Valley Forge Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1994), 176.

[38] Parush Parushev, 'Doing Theology In A Baptist Way' (paper presented at the Jubileum Symposium ajar Baptisme, 1609-2009, Vrije Universiteit, 16 April 2009), 7.

[39] McClendon, *Ethics*, 36.

[40] Parushev, 'Doing Theology In A Baptist Way' 7.

[41] McClendon, *Ethics*, 36.

McClendon's desire is to use this vision consistently and fully, saying that 'by this vision disciples live by the faithfulness of Christ who was and is and is to come, the first and the last.'[42] It is for McClendon the faithful way of understanding time in relation to the story of Christ.

Curtis Freeman has explained the difference that McClendon's proposal achieves:

> From the perspective of standard-account Christians, the baptist vision seems to get everything backwards: Christian life before Christian faith, ethics before doctrine, convictions before reasons. This backwardness, however, is not merely a difference for the sake of difference. It reflects the reversal of perspective in 'the view from below' where baptists first learned to see things. McClendon reminds us that our radical foremothers and forefathers rarely acquired a majority consciousness that presumed to speak for everyone, due in no small measure to the fact that their heritage was rooted in soil watered by the blood of those who dared to differ.[43]

McClendon's vision enables his theology to be in posture and method distinctively baptist. It does this mainly because what it is describing is the structures of a baptist imagination.

This baptist vision he proposes can be seen throughout the Christian tradition. Indeed he uses examples from outside his Baptist tradition, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Lutheran) and Dorothy Day (Catholic) to display it in their living. Nevertheless, it is this baptist vision and its implications that McClendon claims are 'a necessary and sufficient organizing principle for a (baptist) theology.'[44]

If we take the imagination to be of central importance to the structure and formation of experience, and the baptist vision as a distinct way of construing experience based on a particular way of reading the Bible, then the Baptist vision, with an appreciation of the imagination, can be understood in a deeper way. In the language of Green, McClendon proposes a uniquely baptistic paradigm to structure the imagination. A distinctly baptist imagination will lead to a distinctly baptist experience of

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[42] McClendon, *Doctrine,* 92, emphasis his.
[43] Curtis W. Freeman, 'A Theology for Brethren, Radical Believers, and Other Baptists.' *Brethren Life and Thought* 51, no. 1–2 (Wint-Spr 2006): 107.
[44] McClendon, *Ethics*, 33.

the faith, and the theology which informs it.[45] McClendon's vision reaches all the criteria of Johnson's understanding of comprehensive imagination. The vision includes aspects of categorization, schemata, metaphoric projections, metonymy, and narrative structure. Some of these are quite explicit to the vision, namely the narrative structure, and the metaphoric projections. The entire logic of 'this is that' and 'then is now' is only possible by way of metaphoric projection, and narrative unity. The other three are less focal but still present. It would be possible, and of some interest, to demonstrate how each of these categories is fulfilled in McClendon's vision, but it would not be adequate to the emphases of narrative and metaphor in the formation of experience. In the remainder of this article we will develop these two notions briefly, in order to highlight the imagination that enables and propels McClendon's unique baptist theology.

Firstly, McClendon's approach to metaphor enables much of this vision. As stated, the 'this is that' and 'then is now' aspect of the vision is an expression of a method of metaphoric projection. The logic and rational from a given situation in the text (that, then) is projected onto a situation here and now (this, now). In the more technical language of Johnson, the source domain (scripture, that, then) is mapped onto the target domain (here, this, now). Johnson and Lakoff affirm this approach, saying that all humans operate in this way: 'We draw inferences, set goals, make commitments, and execute plans, all on the basis of how we in part structure our experience, consciously and unconsciously, by means of metaphor.'[46] McClendon's vision may not promote specific metaphors, but rather, it sets up a method to view the 'great story' as taking on this role in forming the rationality of the Church.

McClendon does, however, advocate for the use of specific metaphors or images within lives and communities as a way of participation within this vision. Early in his work on biography, McClendon employed 'images', a concept which he was very influenced by Austin Farrer's A Glass of Vision, as metaphors which bear the content of faith itself.[47] Later in his

[45] As stated above this is what McClendon saw was lacking in theology. A poverty of this baptist theology was one of the main motivations for undertaking the trilogy which took the final two decades of his life to complete.
[46] Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 158.
[47] See, Austin Farrer, *The Glass of Vision*. Westminster [London: Dacre Press, 1948, and McClendon, James William. *Biography As Theology : How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology*. (Eugene: Trinity Press International, 1990), 70-79.

work, McClendon takes a similar approach with his systematic theology, drawing upon pictures to project the logic and shape of his eschatology. 'Word pictures' and 'picture thinking' is what much of the New Testament evokes, McClendon claims. Drawing upon Wittgenstein, McClendon presents an approach to pictures that allows them not only to be descriptive, but formative. Different understandings and experiences of a variety of things are shaped by the 'picture' of how the world goes. Wittgenstein explains that once a picture is grasped, it is enough to change how the world is for that person. Wittgenstein's famous duck-rabbit is, again, used to illustrate this point. The line drawing can be seen as a duck or a rabbit.[48] Through this illustration, it is proven that there is immense possibility for difference in seeing one given image. McClendon notices that the pictures from the New Testament concerning the last judgement etc shape how we experience and think about them. Making important connections between these images, previous knowledge and how they relate to our current living is key in unlocking the potential of these pictures. 'It is making these connections (or failing to make them) that distinguishes biblical faith in the last judgement from mere fantasies that have no recognizable life consequences.'[49] Johnson, in his book on morality, (which for McClendon is inseparable from theology) writes that 'no account of morality can be adequate that fails to examine the extent to which our conceptualization, reasoning, and language about morality involve metaphor (and other imaginative devices)'.[50] It is my contention, then, that Johnson would endorse McClendon's approach to theology, rationality and ethics.

The final aspect of McClendon's theology that unites his whole baptist vision and allows his imagination to flourish into a unique and provocative theological corpus is his understanding of narrative. As one of the central categories for Johnson's requisites for imagination, narrative unites all of the others in a context of story. Johnson mentions explicitly the complex communal narratives we are born into, as well as the way that we narrate or construe our lives to fit in a narrative structure.[51] McClendon has been working with these observations in the theological world since the 1960's. McClendon proposes that 'the moral theologian's task will be to discover from the participant's standpoint how the story goes, what it means for

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[48] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* 194.
[49] McClendon, *Doctrine,* 77.
[50] Mark Johnson. *Moral Imagination : Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 61-62.
[51] Johnson, *The Body In The Mind,* 172.

one's child (or one's life) to be a gift from God, who the neighbor is, how one is taught the skills to overcome self-deception.'[52] Observations of this type led McClendon to develop a method of biography as theology, which involves telling theological accounts of compelling lives, lived in a way which enables their communities to see their theology not in an abstract doctrinal way, but in an embodied way. This method can been seen throughout his work, and implies that the wider narrative, and particular narratives, are united. This unifying narrative approach to theology climaxes in the two narratives model of Christology which aims to set aside the more traditional metaphysical questions which skew this teaching. McClendon avers that all (Christian) narratives find their climax in the story of Christ.

McClendon's narrative approach has gained wide respect among theologians. Amos Yong claims that McClendon is the most ambitious theologian working with narrative.[53] In their book Why Narrative?, Hauerwas and Jones, point to McClendon's importance in the development of narrative theology, but it is relegated to a footnote, as they could not decide which piece to include.[54] And this distant inclusion of McClendon within narrative theology, has seemed to be the norm in treatment of McClendon's work. The all-encompassing nature of McClendon's narrative project allows for his theology to be imaginatively united and extended to all parts of life. It is through the narrative that McClendon's theology can be called systematic. The story of Scripture is read and understood so it includes its readers in its plot, inviting them to become characters in the same story. This is the power of McClendon's 'baptist vision'. I will conclude with how McClendon finishes his Ethics:

> My story is inadequate, taken alone, and is hungry for a wider story to complete it… My story must be linked with the story of a people…Our story is inadequate as well: The story of each and all is itself hungry for a greater story that overcomes our persistent self-deceit, redeems our common life, and provides a way for us to be a people among all earth's peoplehood, their own stories, their own lives...truth entails

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[52] James McClendon. 'Three Strands of Christian Ethics.' *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 6, no. 1 (1978), 72.

[53] Yong, Amos. 'The 'Baptist Vision' of James William McClendon, Jr.: A Wesleyan-Pentecostal Response.' *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 37, no. 2 (Fall 2002), 39.

[54] Hauerwas, Stanley, and L. Gregory Jones. *Why Narrative? : Reading in Narrative Theology*. (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1997), 4.

> character, [and] must find that truth in a community that is of necessity story-shaped, and to show that Christian morality involves us, necessarily involves us, in the story of God.[55]

McClendon's imagination, which is best discovered through his baptist vision, reveals a compelling theological perspective. It is decidedly baptist, with baptist posture, method, and convictions guiding and shaping it. It allows his theological corpus to be a fresh and unique call from this important ecclesial perspective, both to baptists, and to the wider Church. More could be said on these points and much has, but McClendon's legacy is still only being realized, and is starting to sprout fresh buds. Perhaps an imagination like his takes time to translate. His friend Stanley Hauerwas put it well in a letter to McClendon: 'You were so far ahead of the rest of us and the fact will certainly be duly noted in the long run.'[56] Perhaps we have not arrived at the long run yet, but McClendon's imagination reveals a theological perspective that is insightful and compelling, encouraging theologians to imagine once again.

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[55] McClendon, *Ethics,* 351.
[56] Stanley Hauerwas, June 12, 1991. McClendon Collection; Archives and Special Collections, David Allan Hubbard Library, Fuller Theological Seminary.