

EDITORIAL

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It is a privilege to be asked to write this brief editorial that seeks to highlight that this edition of the journal honours the contribution of Professor Paul Fiddes to Baptist life and theology. Three articles serve to engage with important areas of Professor Fiddes' theology. Frank Rees offers a response to Fiddes' (relatively) early work on atonement, *Past Event and Present Salvation*. Chris Tilling puts Fiddes' work on the doctrine of the Trinity into conversation with the recent work of Wesley Hill on (the apostle) *Paul and the Trinity*. Finally, Andrew Picard picks up Fiddes' work on covenant in the context of Baptists in Aotearoa New Zealand.

If you visit Regent's Park College in Oxford at the moment you will find down one corridor a set of photographs taken of the college faculty and students from the early 1970s up to the present day. Apart from noticing the growth in the size of the student body in the last forty years, the other thing you will see in every photo, save one, is Paul Fiddes.¹ Here is an opportunity to see Paul age before your eyes (!), as through the years he has moved from being a Research Fellow, a Tutor, the Principal to his current role as Research Professor. It is a visual reminder that Paul has been at the heart of the life of Regent's Park College from 1972. And yet, as this edition of the *Pacific Journal of Baptist Research* demonstrates, Paul's impact as a theologian has gone wider than just Regent's Park College and even the University of Oxford, which awarded him the title Professor of Systematic Theology in 2002. Paul's impact can be seen in the life of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the European Baptist Federation, the Baptist World Alliance, and beyond.

Let me indicate in some more detail the debt we owe Paul. When Leonard Champion (Principal of Bristol Baptist College at the time) argued that there was an 'urgent task' to offer a clearer, more coherent and more widely accepted theology amongst British Baptists, it was Paul, with some friends, who took up the challenge.² Through the 1980s and 1990s Paul and his friends gave themselves to the task of doing theology in a Baptist way.³ This produced a number of short works which began to offer a Baptist theology centred around the concept of covenant, which had implications for ministry, associating, mission, and baptism.⁴ The culmination of this was Paul's vision for Baptist life and theology, which was published as

¹ Paul is missing from the 1976 photo due to the fact that he spent this year at the University of Tübingen, studying alongside Jürgen Moltmann and Eberhard Jüngel.

² See Leonard Champion, "Evangelical Calvinism and the Structures of Baptist Church Life," *Baptist Quarterly* 28 (1980): 196-208.

³ There was a gap of nine years between Paul publishing *Freedom and Limit: A Dialogue between Literature and Christian Doctrine* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991) in 1991 and *The Promised End: Eschatology in Theology and Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) and *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000), both in 2000. This gap can perhaps be best explained by Paul's appointment as Principal in 1989 and then his heavy involvement in, and dedication to, the life of the Baptist Union and the theological division of the European Baptist Federation.

⁴ Including *A Call to Mind: Baptist Essays Towards a Theology of Commitment* (London: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1981); *Bound To Love: The Covenant Basis of Baptist Life and Mission* (London: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1985);

Tracks and Traces in 2003. Sean Winter, in his *Baptist Quarterly* review, described it as “the most important piece of Baptist ecumenical scholarship in several decades” and a “work of deep theology.”⁵

In terms of the Baptist World Alliance, Paul’s contribution can be seen in his chairing of conversations with the Anglican Communion (2000-2005) and the Roman Catholic Church (2006-2010). Paul has always understood that being a Baptist theologian means also being a catholic and ecumenical theologian, and he has sought, through the practice of receptive ecumenism (even before it was given that name), to build common ground or (to borrow the language of the BUGB and Church of England report, which he also chaired from the Baptist side) *push at the boundaries of unity*. Paul has tirelessly tried to find a way to bring Baptists and other Christians closer in terms of baptism, arguing for a common process of initiation.⁶ While much of this ecumenical work may appear outside the everyday life and mission of local Baptist churches, internationally it has put Baptists on the ecumenical map as a people with theological depth. Paul’s work has also given confidence to those of us who are distinctively Baptist and yet also see ourselves, in the words of Curtis Freeman, “contesting catholicity”, not from outside, but within.

In addition to these ecumenical conversations, Paul was the main writer of the BWA response to the Islamic letter to the Christian Church, *A Common Word*.⁷ This has developed more recently into an ongoing interest and dialogue with Islamic theology, seen most particularly in the Love in Religion project he has helped set up in the University of Oxford and based at Regent’s.⁸

Outside of these more specific Baptist contributions, Paul is held in high regard internationally as a theologian who has provided the academy and the church with work on the atonement, the Trinity, eschatology, ecclesiology, and the communion of saints. He has done this in conversation with literature, film, even the music of Madonna, and also law, medicine, and philosophy. This high regard was demonstrated by a festschrift *Within the Love of God: Essays on the Doctrine of God in Honour of Paul S. Fiddes*,⁹ presented to Paul in November 2014, with contributors including Jürgen Moltmann, John Webster, Frances Young, Paul Helm, David Burrell and Keith Ward.¹⁰

In a recent Facebook conversation, Paul was described as “one of our most distinguished Baptist theologians in the world.” This generated the response from another Baptist theologian of some note: “what do you mean ‘one of?’” This reflects the view so many of us share of Paul. He has championed theological thinking to a Baptist constituency which has too often tended to be suspicious of theology and enamoured

Reflections on the Water: Understanding God and the World through the Baptism of Believers (Oxford: Regent’s Park College, 1996); *Something to Declare: A Study of the Declaration of Principle of the Baptist Union of Great Britain* (Oxford: Whitley, 1996); and *Doing Theology in a Baptist Way* (Oxford: Whitley, 2000).

⁵ Sean Winter, “Review of *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology*,” *Baptist Quarterly* 41 (2006): 339.

⁶ Admittedly Paul has had limited success with British Baptists on this subject. He was bitterly disappointed that the report, “Pushing at Boundaries of Unity” was largely dismissed by the Baptist Union Council in 2006, especially when it chose merely to ‘receive’ the report, rather than ‘welcome’ it.

⁷ See <http://www.acommonword.com/ACommonWord-Baptist-World-Alliance-Response.pdf>.

⁸ See <https://loveinreligion.org/about/>.

⁹ Anthony Clarke and Andrew Moore (eds.), *Within the Love of God: Essays on the Doctrine of God in Honour of Paul S. Fiddes* (Oxford: OUP, 2014).

¹⁰ At the same time Paul was also honoured with a second festschrift: Anthony Clarke (ed.), *For the Sake of the Church: Essays in Honour of Paul S. Fiddes* (Oxford: Regent’s Park College, 2014), to which a number of Baptist friends and colleagues contributed.

with a pragmatic spirit. Paul has issued the church a call to the mind *and* also a call to the world.¹¹ In all this Paul has been a great example, and, more importantly, a great encourager to many of us. His witness has not only been in what he has written, but in the way that he has done theology: with humility, with generosity and with a passion for God, into whose life, Paul has sought to remind us, we are continually being drawn.

¹¹ This is most clearly displayed in his 2005 Bampton Lectures published as *Seeing the World and Knowing God: Hebrew Wisdom and Christian Doctrine in a Late-Modern Context* (Oxford: OUP, 2013).