

**BAPTISTS, CATHOLICITY, AND VISIBLE UNITY: A RESPONSE TO STEVEN HARMON**

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In his latest book, Steven Harmon offers what I believe to be a promising way forward for Baptists.<sup>1</sup> The old denominationalism of the past is dead, and Baptists today find that some of the best aspects of their denominational identity—such as cooperation for missional and educational programs—can be undertaken together with many non-Baptists. Furthermore, while few would explicitly deny the importance of Baptist distinctives, the “Seeker-Friendly” movement has caused many, if not most, Baptists to downplay the centrality of doctrines and practices which once functioned as Shibboleths—such as closed communion and closed membership. The future for Baptists will inevitably be more ecumenical (albeit perhaps not by that name), since so many Baptists have relegated many more items to the “non-essentials” category. While in general I think these developments are positive, one need not be a prophet nor the son of a prophet to foresee potential problems with this shift: if doctrine takes a back seat to pragmatism, then Baptist churches will at best be rudderless ships and at worst be easily coopted by un-Baptist and even un-Christian ideologies (yes, I’m thinking of the many Baptists and Evangelicals in the U.S. supporting Donald Trump as but the latest example). How can Baptists retain their newfound “generous orthodoxy” without devolving into a “thin ecumenism” or even a “cultural Christianity”? I believe that Harmon’s *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future* (henceforth *BIEF*) offers a compelling road map.

For those wondering how Harmon situates Baptists within ecumenical dialogue, I would first recommend his earlier book, *Towards Baptist Catholicity* (Paternoster Press, 2006). Therein, Harmon boldly argues that Baptists should embrace “catholicity,” by which he means the universally shared tradition of the church throughout time. To be sure, he must address the many fears raised by the term “catholic” (even with the lower-case ‘c’), and he must carefully explain how an accommodation of tradition (in any form) is not a betrayal of the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*. For the sake of full disclosure, I teach Patristics at a Baptist seminary, and so I am a fan of any attempt to get Baptists interested in the early church. Furthermore, Harmon’s book is so compelling in this task that I assign it every semester for a required course I teach in early Christian studies. Therein, I perennially observe my students’ knee-jerk reactions to Harmon’s agenda, and I then watch how these reactions are masterfully and kindly assuaged by Harmon’s arguments. Once Harmon has convinced his audience of the importance of “the Great Tradition” for Baptist theology, he now logically should move from the x-axis of history and tradition to the y-axis of contemporary practice and ecumenism. How might Baptists be able to engage this ecumenical future in our

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future: Story, Tradition, and the Recovery of Community* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016).

present post-modern and post-denominational condition? Harmon points out a viable path forward in *BIEF*.

Harmon opens with a “Radical Baptist Proposal” (chapter one), which is to ask Baptists to engage in the ecumenical movement—a task which is certainly radical for many if not most Baptists in the pew, and yet a proposal which is also specifically *Baptist*. He proposes that the wider “catholicity” of the church be embraced as a pilgrimage, a “Pilgrim Catholicity.” Next, Harmon asks Baptists to embark on said pilgrimage by interacting with the main items outlined in the World Council of Churches’ statement, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (1982). Harmon’s proposals for these items offer Baptists various ways of “Seizing the Ecumenical Moment” (chapter two). In fact, if Baptists were to do so, they could breathe new life into the ecumenical movement which “is experiencing a season of winter.”<sup>2</sup> Despite the obvious differences between Baptists and other Christian traditions, Harmon builds off of the work of John Donahue and William Hendricks—a Roman Catholic and Baptist, respectively—to show the many ways in which the Baptist path merges with that of the wider Christian tradition, something that can be told as “One Sacred Story” (chapter three). Of course, this shared story may only go so far, since Baptists and Roman Catholics in particular have opposing views of how Scripture and tradition relate. Or do they? In his fourth chapter, entitled “One Contested Tradition,” Harmon attempts to demonstrate how much Scripture and tradition in fact function much the same in Baptist and Roman Catholic theology. This brings Harmon to the point of saying that “Baptists are dissenting catholic Christians,”<sup>3</sup> and so he then points to ways in which the Baptist journey can be both “Radically Biblical, [and] Radically Catholic” (chapter five). This chapter is where Harmon offers some of his main contributions, and so I will return to the content of this chapter in particular below, but suffice it to say that he qualifies and parses “Catholicity” in various ways which provide insightful clarity for Baptists. Next, in his chapter entitled “The End of Denominationalism,” Harmon grabs the bull by the horns and insists that despite the ostensible death of most denominations, such ecclesiastical structures are a good thing and should be harnessed for the purpose of furthering the cause of ecumenism. The primary case study is Harmon’s own denomi-network (as it is often called by its adherents), the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, which he claims should be considered a proper denomination (despite the misgivings this concept harbours for some of the adherents who use neologistic euphemisms instead), so that it can provide an avenue for inter-denominational dialogue—the true end (*telos*) of denominations. Then, in what is his most challenging chapter, Harmon attempts to talk Baptists into “Receiving the Gift of Magisterium.” His argument carefully traces the various kinds of magisteria throughout the many branches of Christianity. In this way, the question is no longer *whether* Baptists will accept a magisterium, but *which* form of the Church’s magisterium will they accept. After this, Harmon offers “The Ecumenical Task of Theology” (chapter eight), which is to say that theologians of all kinds—from the pews to the professors’ desks—should engage in ecumenism as a proper form of theology itself, and not simply a subset of ecclesiology. This would manifest in various ways in which ecumenism takes centre stage in Baptist teaching. In so doing, Baptists will also

<sup>2</sup> Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 21.

<sup>3</sup> Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 112. Throughout the book, Harmon acknowledges the contribution of Curtis W. Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014).

be able to offer other Christian traditions “The Theology of a Pilgrim Church” (chapter nine), which is where Harmon provides specific ways in which Baptists can make contributions to other Christian groups. In his final chapter, Harmon describes “The Baptist Eschatological Vision and the Ecumenical Future,” in which Christian bodies at all levels engage in dialogue and share their gifts with one another.

At this point, I would like to express just how grateful I am to Steve Harmon for his body of work, including this most recent book. I applaud Harmon’s call for Baptists to embrace the Christian tradition of the past as well as the ecumenical breadth of Christian resources in the present. Now, in what remains of this essay I would like to shift to an engagement with Harmon’s book in what I hope is a constructive critical approach. In this book, I find Harmon using the two related concepts “catholic” and “visible unity” in such a way that potentially concedes too much to a non-congregationalist ecclesiology, and so I will briefly address each in turn.

## CATHOLICITY

As for the term “catholic,” I would first note how Harmon has shifted from his older practice of referring to the *Roman* Catholic Church<sup>4</sup> and now simply speaks of the (capital ‘C’) Catholic Church.<sup>5</sup> I realize that Harmon likely uses such nomenclature out of a concern for ecumenical dialogue and for charitable relations with Roman Catholics, who officially understand their communion as transcending Rome and being the one true, visible Catholic Church. I can concede such a posture in general, but it appears to me that such categorization either corresponds to or causes a shift in Harmon’s theological framework (at least as articulated in this book).

In response to Richard Crane, Harmon readily admits that the goal of his call for “Baptist [little ‘c’] catholicity” is ultimately a call for “Baptist [capital ‘C’] Catholicity,” defined as “entry of Baptists into communion with the bishop of Rome.”<sup>6</sup> He stipulates, however, that his thought has further developed on this point, so that his aim is to move “the whole church [both Baptists and Roman Catholics and others] toward the ecumenical future.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, rather than a myopic focus on communion with Rome, he calls for an unrelenting quest to attain “visible unity of the church” (to which I will turn in a moment).<sup>8</sup> Harmon then addresses how Baptists have “deficiencies in catholicity.”<sup>9</sup> Here it is worth pausing to ask: Do not Roman Catholics also have deficiencies in catholicity? While the answer to that question may lay beyond the parameters of a book written by a Baptist for Baptists (which Harmon does address<sup>10</sup>), I find that

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<sup>4</sup> cf. Steven Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity: Essays on Tradition and the Baptist Vision* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2006), 2 and passim.

<sup>5</sup> cf. *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 3 and passim.

<sup>6</sup> Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 9. Something he briefly addressed in his earlier work: *TBC*, 199.

<sup>7</sup> Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 9.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>10</sup> “While Baptists can easily point to aspects of the current faith and practice of the Catholic Church and other Christian communions as grounds for rejecting such a goal [i.e. visible communion], Baptists are not responsible for the reformation of Catholic magisterial teaching of the transformation of that which they find objectionable in other

Harmon inescapably constructs the argument so that he undermines his claim that all communions should move toward catholicity. For example, he speaks of “a mutual sharing of the gifts of [little ‘c’] catholicity and Baptistness.”<sup>11</sup> Here, Harmon has distinguished “Baptistness” from “the gifts of catholicity.” Shouldn’t Baptistness be seen as one of the gifts of catholicity? Or, if not a gift per se, shouldn’t Baptistness be understood as one of the many valid expressions of the one true Church? Surely, Baptistness is more a dialect of Pentecost than of Babel. It should be noted that the rest of Harmon’s statement on this matter is in fact one with great potential which should be considered further by readers as a promising way forward for Baptists in dialogue with Roman Catholics: this mutual sharing should be “... facilitated by a recognition by Baptists and [capital ‘C’] Catholics alike that being Baptist is a distinctive way of being [capital ‘C’] Catholic, in communion with the bishop of Rome, comparable to the manner in which being a Benedictine is currently a distinct way of living together as an ecclesial community that is in communion with Rome.” My only concern with this statement is that identifying Baptist churches as “ecclesial communities” fails to represent free church ecclesiology adequately: Benedictine monasteries are not churches; nor are Baptist churches merely ecclesial communities.<sup>12</sup> To be sure, Harmon goes to great length to affirm his belief in the validity of Baptist ecclesiology—and space permitting, I would have quoted Harmon’s statement in full so that we could all see his unequivocal affirmation of free church ecclesiology and his insistence that Roman Catholics should recognize Baptist churches as true churches.<sup>13</sup> However, my point here is that any Baptist engagement in ecumenical dialogue will have to be a “thick ecumenism” where Baptists hold unapologetically to their convictions.<sup>14</sup> It seems to me that there are moments in this book when Harmon opposes Baptistness to (little ‘c’) catholicity and therefore concedes too much to a Roman Catholic position.<sup>15</sup>

That having been said, Harmon attempts to offset this opposition between Baptistness and catholicity by differentiating “quantitative catholicity,” in which Baptists do participate, from “qualitative catholicity,” which Baptists lack.<sup>16</sup> Quantitative catholicity consists of five items: Trinity, Tradition, Baptism, the Eucharist, and Church Order, all of which Baptists have, but which Baptists should embrace “more fully.”<sup>17</sup> Later, Harmon lists four marks of qualitative catholicity: incarnational Christology, sacramental realism, visible unity, and the ministry of oversight.<sup>18</sup> Harmon, it seems to me, should have offered more on how Baptists do in fact have even this qualitative catholicity. After all, Baptists at least in nascent form have each of these five items and four marks.

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churches. But Baptists can address the insufficiently catholic character of their own communities” (Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 10).

<sup>11</sup> Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 16.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 271, where he again calls Baptist congregations “ecclesial communities.”

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 16–17.

<sup>14</sup> Something Harmon himself welcomes in his *TBC*, 16–17.

<sup>15</sup> E.g. Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 49, where Harmon rejects the goal of “Protestantization of Catholicism” in favour of “re-catholicization of the Protestant traditions.” Note that Protestant is structurally opposed to both “Catholic” and catholic. Should there be a catholicization of Catholicism? (cf. Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 10, cited above in note 8).

<sup>16</sup> Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 29–30.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 30–45 (quote from 45).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

Harmon ended his 2006 book, *Towards Baptist Catholicity*, with a question posed to him by a former student, “Dr. Harmon, what keeps you from becoming Catholic?” In that chapter, Harmon offers a very sophisticated and nuanced answer, and his discussion of the issues involved with such a question is one I very much appreciate.<sup>19</sup> However, whenever I look back over that chapter, I’m still somewhat dissatisfied. Instead of conceding too much to a question that assumes his project inevitably leads towards *Roman Catholicism*, I wish Harmon had simply answered his student’s question in a way that coheres with the previous nine chapters of his book (*TBC*). In those chapters, Harmon repeatedly insisted that the concept (little ‘c’) “catholic” does not mean Roman Catholic. When his student asked, “What keeps you from becoming Catholic?” I wished he had simply answered, “I am catholic.” The catholicity towards which Harmon points us belongs to the whole of Christian tradition and to the worldwide church. This brings me to the second and related concept that I think needs nuancing in Harmon’s latest book, the concept of the visible unity of the church.

## VISIBLE UNITY

In his opening chapter, Harmon calls us to a “quest for visible unity” and in the same sentence refers to “the churches from which [the Baptists] are separated.”<sup>20</sup> However, I could not help but asking at this initial statement a question that I never found addressed in the book. It should be asked for the sake of precision: In what way are Baptists “separated” from these other churches? Harmon’s statement seems to assume a top-down ecclesiology.

In chapter six Harmon defines a denomination—even a Baptist one—as “an entity between the (visible) local church and the (invisible) universal church.”<sup>21</sup> I do not necessarily disagree with this definition, until it is applied in such a way that Baptists are separated from other churches (meaning other denominations). From a free church perspective Baptist congregations are no more separated from congregations of other denominations than they are from each other. The distinction is simply that we do associate and cooperate with other Baptists.<sup>22</sup> That having been said, it must also be recognized that no

<sup>19</sup> Admittedly, Harmon is faced with a Gordian knot, for Rome is central to any consideration of these matters, as I myself have argued (with Matt R. Jenson, *The Doctrine of the Church: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 82–90.

<sup>20</sup> Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 18; cf. p. 271, “. . . Baptists remain separated ecclesial communities . . .”

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 144. Harmon also criticizes making Baptist identity “an end in itself” since that would short-circuit the pilgrimage toward “full visible unity of the universal church.” I would concur with Harmon, but I would not want to equate Baptists’ convictions about free church ecclesiology with making Baptist identity an end in itself. Also, Harmon is correct when he says (Ibid., 147) that Baptists can “grant a substantial degree of ecclesiality” to various forms of denominational bodies (cf. *ibid.*, 148 for further elaboration). However, these ecclesial/denominational bodies would not, in free church thinking, function in any way as higher than and over local churches.

<sup>22</sup> Harmon offers a more promising suggestion when (Ibid., 145) he suggests that the “associational principle” should nuance the Baptist notion of an autonomous congregation so that we instead think of “interdependent congregationalism.” I have elsewhere argued that the autonomy of the local congregation is not so much a doctrine we defend, but a sin we confess; see Wilhite, “A Congregational Dream: A Sermon on the Baptist Distinctive of the Autonomy of the Local Congregation,” in *Distinctly Baptist: Proclaiming Identity in a New Generation*, ed. B. C. Brewer (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2010), 110–122.

Baptist church associates with all other Baptist churches and virtually all Baptist churches cooperate in various ways with non-Baptist churches. The notion of separated churches is simply foreign to free church ecclesiology. The question is not about separateness or visible togetherness or unity, but about affiliation and cooperation.

Later, Harmon says Baptists “belong to the whole church, even if points of their dissent preclude for the time being their full visible unity with large segments of the whole church.”<sup>23</sup> But again, I question what this statement assumes about visible unity: Are Baptists excluded? At least some Baptists, such as those who practise open membership and open communion, implicitly include non-Baptists in the catholic church. The lack of visible unity is not the fault of Baptists or free church ecclesiology or even their dissent, but it is a problem when defined from a top-down ecclesiology that places those outside of a hierarchy of bishops or not belonging to a certain denomination as less in visible unity than those within said hierarchy or corporation. It seems to me that no church is in visible union within such a framework, and so this high church ecclesiology in effect makes visible unity either reduced to one’s denomination or a reality only in the eschaton—something it claims to preclude (see below).

Harmon’s paradigm, to be sure, fits nicely with his call for “receptive ecumenism”—which I should note is another one of the strong points of the book.<sup>24</sup> On the one hand, Harmon’s proposals work when thinking in terms of “denominations,” and so there is much we can learn from his book. On the other hand, his proposals become much more problematic when thinking about “churches.” I am thinking here specifically in regard to dialogue between *the* Roman Catholic Church and Baptist churches. Historically, Baptists have denied the Roman Catholic Church to be the true church,<sup>25</sup> and theologically, the Roman Catholic Church still does not consider Baptist churches to be true churches.<sup>26</sup>

At one point, Harmon defines the “goal of visible unity” as “the socially embodied realization of the *notae ecclesiae*.”<sup>27</sup> Here again, I can’t help but question just how visible these marks of the church really are in practice. I have argued at length elsewhere that the visibility of the church universal is in fact defined as only quasi-visible (a matter of becoming visible, until the full eschatological visibility), and this is so even in the theological declarations of high church Mainline Protestants, Eastern Orthodox teachers, and Roman Catholics.<sup>28</sup> The visible unity of the church is not a problem particular to Baptists and other congregationalists. It is an as yet unrealized element for all Christian traditions—which Harmon knows, but which is not always clear from the way Harmon frames the problem.

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<sup>23</sup> Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 112.

<sup>24</sup> See especially *ibid.*, 149, for the relevance to this immediate point. Otherwise, his discussion of “receptive ecumenism” is one of his greatest contributions in this book (see *ibid.*, 160 and 262–72).

<sup>25</sup> See *ibid.*, 243.

<sup>26</sup> see *Lumen Gentium*.

<sup>27</sup> Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 51.

<sup>28</sup> With Matt R. Jenson, *The Doctrine of the Church: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), esp. 74–75 (where we also distinguish qualitative and quantitative catholicity, only with different definitions), 79–81 (on the non-visible aspect of the *notae ecclesiae*), 90–95 (on the Protestant definitions of “true” church), and 101 (on contextual and missional understandings of visibility).

So then, what would I suggest as an alternative? Harmon reports how he was asked at one dialogue, “What might it mean for the Baptists to speak with one voice in these talks?”<sup>29</sup> I wish Harmon would have answered this question with a question, “What might it mean for Roman Catholics to speak with one voice?” (many Roman Catholics will tell you that they do not). Likewise, what might it mean for Eastern Orthodox Christians to speak with one voice? (the recent failed attempt at a pan-Orthodox council indicates that they do not).<sup>30</sup> Similarly, what might it mean for those committed to the Magisterial Reformers to speak with one voice? (they do not do so, which seems to have driven some, like Rienhard Hütter, out of Protestantism altogether).<sup>31</sup> To be clear, I do not raise these points with any sense of satisfaction or triumphalism. This state of things for any tradition is saddening to all who care about the church’s unity. My point is simply to clarify what should be expected of Baptists. It is true that there is a lack of unanimity among Baptist voices, but Baptists can hardly be blamed for failing to attain a standard found in no other Christian communion. Moreover, Baptist theology has always celebrated such as polyphonic expressions as more harmonic than discordant.<sup>32</sup> Even if we must admit that pride and sin often result in dissonance, we should again note that this is not a problem particular to Baptists or Congregationalists: it is a problem for *the* Church which is filled with individuals who are *simul justus et peccator*.

Elsewhere in this book, Harmon stipulates that ecumenism should not resort “to the reduction of catholicity to something primarily invisible and deferred to its visible realization until the eschaton.”<sup>33</sup> While I agree in principle, I think that in order to be faithful to our free church ecclesiology, we must ask: What other type of visibility is there? Communion with Rome is not the defining mechanism of visible union, according to Eastern Orthodoxy, and the apostolic succession of the episcopacy has not established visible unity with the various Oriental Orthodox churches.<sup>34</sup> Harmon, in fact, in his last chapter admits that Baptists and other Protestants have historically understood the *notae ecclesiae* as eschatological.<sup>35</sup> He nevertheless insists that such a stance does not preclude working toward said marks in the here and now (just as the quest for holiness should be an ongoing journey in the life of a believer, even if it will not be realized fully until the next life). Here is where Harmon offers a more promising approach. The notion of visible unity is eschatological, and to say so does not cause a detour on the *pilgrimage* toward said unity. A lack of what John Wesley called a “catholic spirit” is not due to the proper theological delineation about visible unity as an

<sup>29</sup> Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 15.

<sup>30</sup> See the statement by the Patriarchate of Antioch explaining its decision not to attend the Pan-Orthodox council in Crete (available on its website: <http://www.antiochpatriarchate.org/en/page/1436/> – last retrieved June 6, 2016).

<sup>31</sup> In *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice*, trans. Doug Stott (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), Hütter called for Protestants to reclaim one “public” voice. The impossibility of such a call seems to have contributed to his conversion to Roman Catholicism in 2004.

<sup>32</sup> It is noteworthy that “harmony” is a primary metaphor used by Ignatius of Antioch to describe the churches which he is striving to bring into unity through his letters (e.g. *Ign. Phil.* 1.2; cf. *1 Clem.* passim). For Harmon’s use of Ignatius, see *TBC*, 91–100, 204–205; and Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 10, 29–30, 42, 116–31.

<sup>33</sup> Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 28.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 166, where Dennis Martin is cited to ask about how Protestant/Evangelical retrieval of tradition can avoid “private” and individual interpretations—as opposed to a tradition that has a magisterium. I again would have liked to hear more about how the same problem inevitably occurs in every tradition, even those with a magisterium. At least we Baptists are honest about it.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

eschatological goal, but it is due to an improper application of an ecclesiology that should be eschatologically oriented.<sup>36</sup>

Along these lines, Harmon cites Paul Fiddes' suggestion that Baptists think in terms of "a constant *becoming* visible of the whole catholic church."<sup>37</sup> I agree with Fiddes and Harmon that such a concept is more helpful, especially for Baptists. I simply wonder if we are not still somehow hindered by the notion of visible unity. Perhaps it is the wrong category. It too often assumes an institutional model of the Body of Christ to the exclusion of any Spiritual ecclesiology. The Eucharistic body—to return to Fiddes' point—*becomes* the visible sign of Christ's body and so manifests Christ's presence. Isn't "manifestation" a better category than visibility?<sup>38</sup> (After all, even Thomas Aquinas denies that Christ is "visibly" present in the Eucharist).<sup>39</sup> Perhaps one of the gifts we Baptists can offer to the ecumenical dialogue is to correct this notion of visibility with the notion of manifestation.<sup>40</sup> Or, if "visible unity" is already too entrenched in the discourse of ecumenism, then perhaps we can at least call for its redefinition and reorientation along more promising lines. After all, Jesus prayed (in John 17:21) that the Father would make his disciples "one." How are they to be "one"? Visibly? Jesus' answer is that they are to be one as he and the Father are one: John 17:21 reads, "that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us . . ." Are the Father and the Son visibly one in John 17? I do not see how they could be. This is no prayer for *visible* unity, instead it is a kind of spiritual unity. To be sure, Harmon is right: this oneness should become manifest.<sup>41</sup> After all, the purpose of this oneness is, as Jesus prayed, ". . . so that the world may know . . ." This oneness, therefore, is already a reality—albeit not visibly, and simultaneously Christ's disciples are called to be disciples in such a way that their oneness becomes manifested to the world (cf. John 13:35).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, let me repeat my aim with these critiques. I hope to have engaged Harmon's truly constructive and promising proposals in such a way as to nuance and refine exactly how Baptists can contribute to a

<sup>36</sup> *The Catholic Spirit* (Sermon #39 in Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991], 300–309).

<sup>37</sup> Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 161–62.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (WCC Faith and Order Paper #198; 2005), para. 32: "Visible and tangible signs of the new life of communion are expressed in receiving and sharing the faith of the apostles; breaking and sharing the Eucharistic bread; praying with and for one another and for the needs of the world; serving one another in love; participating in each other's joys and sorrows; giving material aid; proclaiming and witnessing to the good news in mission and working together for justice and peace." Also, cf. Vatican II's *Sacrosanctum Concilium* §7: "Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of His minister, 'the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross', but especially under the Eucharistic species. By His power He is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptizes it is really Christ Himself who baptizes. He is present in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church. He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings, for He promised: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' (Matt 18:20)"

<sup>39</sup> *Summa Theologica* part 3.Q76.art.7; nor sensibly/empirically in any way (cf. part 3.Q75.art.5).

<sup>40</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, with Matt R. Jenson, *The Doctrine of the Church* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), referenced above.

<sup>41</sup> Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 213.



pilgrim ecumenism. Within such a brief space, I have inevitably failed to represent Harmon's views adequately, for which I must beg his forgiveness.

To be sure, if I were speaking with Baptists who resisted Jesus' ecumenical call for the church to be one, then I would be arguing in the same vein as Harmon, insisting that a receptive ecumenism is part and parcel to being Christian, and therefore he is to be thanked for his contribution. But just between us "theological educators," who Harmon says bear the responsibility to move this conversation forward,<sup>42</sup> I am simply trying to ask how we can do so with theological precision and ecclesiological faithfulness. What I want is to find a synthesis where we can embrace both the ecumenical pilgrimage and the congregationalists' gifts. In my mind, that is one of the many areas where we can applaud Harmon: he has helped us see the need to champion both a Baptist identity and the ecumenical future.

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<sup>42</sup> Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 191–212 (chapter 8, "The Ecumenical Task of Theology") and 264–65.