

holds, whilst enabling the Baptist hermeneutic emphasising discernment in the local church to also be upheld. An equally bold and gracious example of sitting with difference.

My one critique of *Gathering Disciples* is a contextual one. NZ Baptists have much to learn from the BUGB however as outsiders of the British and European context a few of the later chapters will likely feel bogged down in contextual detail which is difficult to translate. The exception to this would be the historical story of recent decades in the BUGB in Andy Goodliff's chapter on mission and how the equivalent of their National Leaders impacted the Union's view on mission and evangelism. Given the current space of transition that the Baptist Union of New Zealand is in, this chapter could be a helpful guide for this context.

Beyond the first three chapters, Ellis' hymns become more of a spring-board for further reflection into practice, but the writers never lose sight of the theme they have chosen to focus on from his writing. In this way there is much inspiration that can be taken from the idea of pastors writing hymns for their own congregations and contexts. If the hymns that are reflected upon in this *Festschrift* are any indication of the richness and depth that can come from doing so, it is hard to imagine what is stopping us from undertaking such a task in a New Zealand context.

STEVEN R. HARMON, *BAPTIST IDENTITY AND THE ECUMENICAL FUTURE: STORY, TRADITION, AND THE RECOVERY OF COMMUNITY*. WACO, TX: BAYLOR UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2016. (359 PP.) ISBN 9781602585706

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The content of *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future* (BIEF) directly coheres with the author's self-identification as a "Baptist ecumenical theologian" (p. ix), and is the obvious fruit of Harmon's own ecumenical engagement and writing over the years, already reflected in previous publications such as *Towards Baptist Catholicity* (Paternoster, 2006) and *Ecumenism Means You Too* (Cascade Books, 2010). The volume has sparked much engagement, including an entire recent issue of the *Pacific Journal of Baptist Research* (Nov 2016) which reproduced the responses of four Baptist scholars from a May 2016 panel discussion.

On the one hand, Harmon wants Baptists to engage in the costly work, here and now, towards the "visible unity" of the global Church, instead of being content with "quantitative catholicity" (membership in the universal Church, p. 7) until the future return of Christ. Baptists need to embrace the biblical and qualitatively catholic nature and practices of the churches from

which they are separated, including liturgical patterns. On the other hand, he wants Roman Catholics to engage in the same costly work towards unity, which is not yet realized as long as churches remain separated from one another. Catholics thus need to embrace the dissenting voice of Baptists and others in order to become more qualitatively catholic.

To this end, the structure and content of *BIEF* is as follows: In Part I, Harmon argues that a fundamental component of the radical Baptist Vision is ecclesial renewal. He suggests this renewal should occur at both global, denominational and local levels, and that the current ecclesial “moment” is ripe for such renewal.

Part II shows the various points of convergence and divergence between Baptists and Catholics. The various Baptist confessions and the Catholic creedal formulations can be seen as differing expressions of a shared intent to faithfully summarize the authoritative voice of Scripture. Likewise, both Catholics and Baptists engage in rigorous contestation concerning the message of Scripture. Harmon shows that the contestation inherent to the ongoing Catholic processes of dogmatic formulation is akin to the contesting instincts of Baptists, whom he terms as “dissenting catholic Christians” (p. 112). He suggests that “to be radically biblical is ... to be radically catholic” (p. 131) in the qualitative sense, to the extent that the qualitative pattern of catholic faith and practice is sourced in the Scriptures. In light of this, both the radically Biblicist posture of Baptists and the qualitatively catholic and biblical practices are gifts that must be exchanged in order for “the whole church, Baptists included, to become more fully catholic” (p. 132).

Part III explores how “an interconfessional contestation of faith and order and an interconfessional exchange of gifts” can facilitate progress toward ecclesial “visible unity” (p. 149). For example, Baptists, with their congregations individually and collectively identifying as “churches” rather than a (or ‘the’) ‘Church’, can acknowledge their indebtedness to the churches that preceded them, as well as continue to engage in “receptive ecumenism”, the mutual exchange of gifts between ecclesial traditions. Harmon shows how the “gift of magisterium” can be received via what he terms the practice of a “magisterium of all believers” (p. 177). Such a “Free Church Magisterium” hears and weighs the voice of “all believers”, including non-Baptist voices reflected in ancient creeds, Catholic teaching, multilateral dialogues, other contextual theologies, and more (pp. 180–88).

Finally, Part IV explores the kind of ecumenical theology, theologians, and communities needed to progress toward the ecumenical future. Properly “systematic” theology (and systematic theologians) must be: a) comprehensive in drawing widely from Scripture and tradition, b) coherent in displaying the interdependence of doctrine, and c) constructive such that it draws upon the wisdom and traditions of the whole Church, here and there, then and now. Harmon presents the

pilgrim posture, familiar but not exclusive to Baptists, necessary for the ecumenical quest, and shows how this posture was embodied in the way Smyth (in England) and Williams (in the United States) sought a church that was not yet realised in “the confines of their existing Baptist communities” (p. 227). He then creatively adopts and adapts the “two-narrative Christology” of James Wm. McClendon to show that “because the church knows [its] story’s conclusion, the church participates in the quest for Christian unity in hope, no matter how dismal the present prospects for visible unity may seem” (p. 242). The volume’s final chapter in many ways lays out the postures and practices which such a hope-filled journey demands: gentle “persuasion rather than mandate” (p. 264), admission of divisive sins, humility with respect to one’s own gifts, appreciation of the priesthood of other believers, and healthy awareness of unity as a divine gift.

The strengths of *BIEF* are manifest and many. Its argument is comprehensively sustained, meticulously documented, and ultimately compelling. Harmon succeeds in charting a course to a future that is truly ecumenical. He masterfully shows the various ways in which the Baptist impulse for biblical faithfulness could be strengthened by becoming more qualitatively catholic, and how the qualitative catholicity of Catholics can be strengthened by the dissenting Baptist voice. The challenge of “receptive ecumenism,” and more importantly the humility and patience required to actually engage in it, is thoroughly issued, and by an author who actively walks his own talk. Some readers may be frustrated at the lack of strong critique of the various points at which Baptists are likely never to unite with Catholic understanding (though, note, for example, the critique of magisterial infallibility, p. 174). There is no discussion, for example, of Mariology as such, and only a passing reference to the doctrine of transubstantiation. Perhaps some engagement at these and other points of division could encourage some Baptists to engage more readily with Harmon’s important arguments. Then again, Harmon may have wisely judged that it is better for Baptists to critique themselves, and invite Catholics to do the same. On the whole, *BIEF* is certain to enjoy a long-lasting role in future ecumenical discourse, for Baptists, Catholics and the rest of God’s global people.