"FOR AS MANY OF YOU AS WERE BAPTISED INTO CHRIST HAVE CLOTHED YOURSELVES WITH CHRIST": BAPTISM, BAPTISTS, AND THE RENEWAL OF THE CHURCH

Michael D. O'Neil
Director of Research, Vose Seminary[1]

INTRODUCTION

There would be little argument, I think, to the assertion that believer's baptism stands as the central ritual and symbol of Baptist church life, and that it serves to protect other critical distinctives such as regenerate church membership. Bill Leonard, author of *The Challenge of Being Baptist: Owning a Scandalous Past and an Uncertain Future*, is concerned, however—and I share his concern—that contemporary modes of church life and practice have had a deleterious effect not merely on baptismal practice, but on what it signifies and conveys, and so on Christian faithfulness more generally with the result that the church's identity and mission into the future is also at least hindered, if not jeopardised.

In this essay, therefore, I take up one of the challenges Bill Leonard has issued in his book. Leonard's title includes what I think is an intentional double-entendre around the word 'challenge': at times it is a challenge *being* a Baptist, on account of a sometimes scandalous past—and even scandalous present; but he also *challenges* his audience to actually *be Baptists* in the face of an uncertain future; to recover boldly, in other words, historical Baptist distinctives. Although he issues several arenas of challenge, I aim specifically to address his twofold challenge that "Baptist churches need to again confront the meaning of regeneration, conversion, and a believer's church" and in so doing to reaffirm believer's baptism as "a radical act of Christian commitment, covenantal relationships, and antiestablishment dissent."[2] Being a Baptist into the future demands, in Leonard's view, this kind of theological re-thinking if we are to remain faithful not simply as Baptists but as Christians. To make my case, however, I have to tell a longer story, and so begin with the matter of baptism in the first centuries of the Christian church.

THE EARLY CHRISTIANS

Already by the early fifth century infant baptism was so widely practised, so widely *assumed* as normal Christian practice, that Augustine, in his disputes with Pelagius, could appeal to the practice as a justification for his doctrine of original sin—we practise infant baptism because we are aware of the inherent stain of

[1] This essay was initially prepared as an address given at the induction of Rev. Stephen Ingram as Chair of the National Council of the Australian Baptist Ministries, May 15, 2018 in Perth, Western Australia. Vose Seminary is an affiliate institution of the Australian College of Theology.
[2] Bill J. Leonard, *The Challenge of Being Baptist: Owning a Scandalous Past and an Uncertain Future* (Waco: Baylor, 2010), 117–18.

sin upon all humanity, and seek the divine remedy whereby that sin might be remitted.[3] Infant baptism had indeed been practised since at least the late second century, although its introduction, arguably, was for pastoral rather than theological reasons.[4] More likely, the church was wrestling with the acceptance of the children of believers into the church, and especially in those not infrequent cases when their children's lives were threatened by illness or accident. Christian parents naturally were concerned for the spiritual welfare of their children and longed for the assurance that their children, too, would be heirs of the eternal kingdom of God. Despite the questions which we might—now in hindsight—ask concerning the emergence of this practice and the welcome of children of Christian parents into the church, what is noteworthy is the significance and centrality of baptism in the minds, theology, and practice of the early Christians.

In the church of the first centuries prior to the accession of Constantine, baptism was the culmination and crown of a long and careful process of conversion. In his 2016 book *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church* Alan Kreider, an Anabaptist theologian and missionary, details this process which often might take as long as three years, or in some cases, even longer.[5] The process began with evangelisation which is of interest in itself, since the documentation we have from the early centuries suggests that after the initial apostolic and sub-apostolic age there were no evangelists per se. The early church wrote no treatises on mission, did not send missionaries, did not conduct evangelistic rallies, meetings or crusades, and did not even allow non-believers to attend their worship services. Yet, suggests Kreider, citing the research of Rodney Stark, the church may have grown as much as forty percent per decade from the end of the first century to the beginning of the fourth, spreading across the extent of the Roman Empire in the west, as well as in all directions beyond the boundaries of the empire.[6] This phenomenal rate of growth almost beggars belief, especially when we consider not only the lack of explicit evangelistic activity on the part of the church, but also recall that becoming a Christian in that context was highly undesirable because illegal, and may well result in loss of social status, persecution, and at times, even martyrdom. Becoming a Christian was not easy. Becoming a Christian was not desirable. And yet the church grew—and grew, and grew.

Kreider argues that the church grew by attraction, though not the attractiveness of the church's worship services, or their innovative programmes, or their slick or targeted marketing, or their desirable social profile, or their range of ministries catering to every felt need imaginable. Rather, it was the attractiveness of the lives of those early Christians:

> Outsiders became Christian because, for example, they observed the patient way Christians did business with them. We have observed some pagans who found their own rituals unsatisfactory and were willing to consider alternative approaches that Christians embodied. We have seen outsiders expressing amazement at the confident power of Christian women and wondering at the source of

[3] See Augustine, "On the Merits and Remission of Sins, and on the Baptism of Infants," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers First Series Volume 5 Augustine: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1887; reprint, 1994).
[4] Nigel G. Wright, *Free Church, Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), 81.
[5] Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 133–84.
[6] Ibid., 8.

> their power. We have seen outsiders who heard rumors of the *magnalia* (events of spiritual power) that occurred in Christian gatherings. We have watched as outsiders observed that Christians had distinctive ways of living—burying their poor, refusing to expose unwanted infants, not swearing oaths. Non-Christians scrutinized them; they were aware of the Christians' character and behavior. According to Tertullian, they said, "Look . . . how they love one another . . . and how they are ready to die for each other."[7]

Christians not only were honest business people and neighbours, but lived unusual lives of moral integrity, honouring life and family, and serving the poor and sick, especially in the Christian community, and even beyond the bounds of their community. This was their evangelistic strategy: a visible life of good deeds and not merely words.

But now another question arises: why did the early Christians act the way that they did? The answer has to do with the intentional formation that occurred in the lives of would-be Christians prior to baptism. As Tertullian put it around 200AD, "Christians are made, not born."[8]

What the outsiders observed and appreciated was the result of this formation rather than the formation itself. Once an outsider expressed interest in exploring Christianity they were inducted into 'the catechumenate,' which served as an outer vestibule to the life of the church. The purpose of the catechumenate was to provide would-be Christians with the opportunity to learn the ways of the Christian life. Specifically, it aimed to alter irreversibly the habits of perception and standards of judgment of novices coming out of a pagan life style.[9]

> Sometime in the second century Christians decided to slow the process of conversion down by insisting that their converts *embody* change that reflected the teaching and character of Jesus. They insisted on this in part because of what the Jesus whom they worshiped had said, but also because they discovered that embodied change was essential to Christians' witness. If people talked like Christians but behaved like pagans, pagans would not become Christians, and the church would not remain Christian.[10]

The diagram below shows that the journey toward baptism involved four stages separated by three 'scrutinies.'[11] In the first two scrutinies, it was the sponsor who was questioned and had to advocate for the candidate, while in the third scrutiny, the bishop interviewed the candidate directly. The first scrutiny considered the candidate's relationships and jobs, for it was felt that there were some occupations, and presumably, relations that made it unlikely if not impossible that the candidate would actually be able to

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[7] Ibid., 133. Kreider is citing Tertullian, *Apology* 39.7. See Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson, ed. *Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume 3: Tertullian* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1885; reprint, 1994), 46.
[8] Kreider, *The Patient Ferment*, 134. Kreider is citing Tertullian, *Apology* 18.4. See Roberts & Donaldson, *Tertullian*, 32.
[9] Kreider, *The Patient Ferment*, 139.
[10] Ibid., 176.
[11] The diagram is found in ibid., 148. The contemporary Roman Catholic 'Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults' is a modern adaption of this process for adult converts. See, for example, the Rite portrayed diagrammatically at http://holyfamily.org/rite-of-chrisitian-initation-of-adults-and-children-2/ and the process explained at https://www.rcia.org.au/major-rites-and-periods-of-the-rcia-process/.

'hear the Word.' Actors, for example, who often performed nude or near-nude, or those whose occupations involved killing others, were encouraged or required to seek other employment. The second scrutiny explored the extent to which candidate had actually taken on the life and ethos of the Christian community. If they had done so they advanced then to actual baptismal preparation, including doctrinal instruction ("hearing the gospel"). It is noteworthy, that doctrinal and creedal instruction *followed* the fulsome embodiment of the character and way of Jesus.[12]

1. Evangelism	First Scrutiny: Relationships & Jobs	2. Catechumenate	Second Scrutiny: Habitus & Character	3. Baptismal Preparation	Third Scrutiny: Exorcism	4. Baptism
Encountering Christians, finding a sponsor		Hearing the Word		Hearing the gospel		Singing a new song*
Years or months		Until "character" is formed		Weeks or months		For life

*The phrase "singing a new song" comes not from the *Apostolic Tradition* but from Origen, *Hom. Exod. 5.5.*

In their understanding conversion was not simply an event or experience of divine power. It was more than a feeling, a decision, or change of thinking. Conversion must include a whole-of-life change in which one took up the way of Christ and his kingdom in their life. Conversion in this sense included 'the embodied reformation of the convert' brought about by catechesis, and a bodily ritual—baptism—in which the candidate declares that Jesus is Lord, identifies primarily with the Christian family ("I am a Christian"), and commits himself or herself to living in the Christian way.[13]

The catechumen was to develop a new *habitus*—reflexive bodily behaviour that corresponded to the central dispositions and lifestyle of the community's common life. The Christian *habitus* was a way of life rooted in a host of biblical passages and especially in the teachings of Jesus—that over time and with practice, became embodied and habitual. The catechumens' task was to learn to live this way of life.[14] Becoming a Christian was not merely a decision to 'accept Christ,' nor an acceptance of Christian doctrine.

[12] It is also worth considering that this approach follows a pattern of 'behave—believe—belong' in contrast to the more contemporary 'belong—believe—behave' model followed in many churches today. This is merely to note the distinction; it remains one of the questions Baptists might seriously consider as they take up Leonard's challenge. For a discussion of the matter see Brian S. Harris, "From 'Behave, Believe, Belong' to 'Belong, Believe, Behave'—A Missional Journey for the 21st Century," in *Text & Task: Scripture & Mission*, ed. Michael Parsons (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005).

[13] Kreider, *The Patient Ferment*, 176.

[14] Ibid., 165–66.

Rather, it was to embrace a whole new way of living that dealt with everyday issues such as truthfulness, sexual fidelity, provision and burial. And at the heart of this habitus was worship.[15]

> [Justin Martyr] presents the Christians' lifestyle as a kind of counter-habitus to the lifestyle of the empire's non-Christian inhabitants. Justin sees the Romans' life as a habitus of un-freedom, characterized by addictive practices in four primal areas: sexual ethics, marred by fornication; the occult, trapped by magical arts; wealth and possessions, distorted by competitive acquisitiveness; and violence and xenophobia, filled with hatred and murder toward people of different tribes and customs. … Having been 'persuaded,' Christians have renounced their old habitus and entered an alternative, life-giving habitus in each of the four areas: in sex, continence; in place of magic, dedication to God; in wealth, 'bringing what we have into a common fund and sharing with everyone in need'; in violence and xenophobia, 'living together and praying for our enemies, and trying to persuade those who unjustly hate us. … The teachings of Christ are at the heart of the Christians' counter-habitus, and they must be embodied…[16]

Entry into the Christian family was both precious and costly, and effected by baptism. Those entering the community were to live distinctively, sharing their economic resources and giving generously to aid fellow Christians. They were to become non-violent in their attitudes, words, physical bearing, and actions. Speech, lifestyle and family were topics of special consideration. Catechumens were taught vigorously to avoid idolatry and sexual immorality. They were to learn the master narrative of Scripture and especially the teachings of Jesus—so they could *live* them. They were given role models to emulate and encouraged to foster a culture of truthfulness and peace. They were given practical instruction on the application of all of these things with respect to the common issues of the day. How long would this process last? As long as it took a catechumen's character to be formed.

After the accession of Constantine in the early fourth century and the subsequent imperial patronage of the church, new Christians flooded the churches in such numbers that this process became impracticable. Further, the conjunction of this church-state synthesis and infant baptism in subsequent centuries led to the situation where one indeed became a Christian, contrary to Tertullian, by being born. One's birth into the state was complemented by one's baptism into the (state) church; Christianity was no longer a radical decision for Christ and his kingdom, and a rejection of the kingdom and praxis of this world, but a matter of geography and cultural custom.

THE EARLY BAPTISTS

Modern Baptists typically trace their origin to a small group of English Separatists who, having fled persecution in their home country, had immigrated to Amsterdam. The decisive event occurred in 1609 when John Smyth baptised himself and other members of the little congregation by effusion. It was the

[15] Ibid., 142.
[16] Ibid., 143–44.

rejection of infant baptism and the adoption of believer's baptism that distinguished the newly-formed Baptists from their Separatist and Puritan roots.[17] An indication of early Baptist baptismal theology and practice can be seen in Thomas Helwys's confession of 1611:

> The church of CHRIST is a company of faithful people (1 Corinthians 1.2; Ephesians 1.1), separated from the world by the word and Spirit of GOD (2 Corinthians 6:17), being knit unto the LORD, and one to another by Baptism (1 Corinthians 12:13), upon their own confession of the faith (Acts 8:37) and sins (Matthew 3:6).[18]

Baptism is a response to the prior work of the divine Word and Spirit by which the believer is separated from the world, and becomes a member of that company of faithful people which is the church. Baptism 'knits' the person to the Lord and the members of the community 'one unto another.' This baptism occurs upon the confession of their own faith and sins. Baptism was, for these early Baptists, the 'constitution' of the church, and a means of resisting the so-called 'false ministry, false worship and false government' of the established church, and so also a repudiation of the power of the state to control or dictate the affairs of the church.[19] The church is viewed as a covenant community, and the churches developed processes for affirming or denying the profession of those who sought membership in the church.[20] These processes were based on a clear understanding of conversion, as detailed in the 1660 Standard Confession of the General Baptists. Conversion involved several steps: one must *assent* to the truth of the gospel, *believe* with all their hearts that forgiveness of sins and eternal life are to be had in Christ, *esteem* Christ as worthy of their constant affections, and subjection to all his commandments, and therefore *resolve* with purpose of heart to so subject themselves to him in all things—and therefore live no longer for themselves, but *commit* themselves to his grace and confidently *depend* on him.[21] While this portrayal of conversion is not as comprehensive as that of the early Christians—it does not appear to require the embodiment of the new life before baptism is administered—it certainly indicates a similar degree of resolve that the believer is expected to live out in the midst of the community.

The impact of the Great Awakenings and revivalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, radically changed Baptist theology and practice with respect to conversion.

> Indeed, from the mid-nineteenth to the late twentieth century, revivals became a major venue for Baptist evangelism and conversion theology. Revivals shortened the process of conversion, fostered 'intense individualization' of religious experiences, extended conversionistic emotionalism, and shaped simple plans of salvation that were easily preached and appropriated. In short, revivalism

[17] See Smyth's polemic against infant baptism in John Smyth, "The Character of the Beast, 1609" in, Joseph Early Jr., ed. *Readings in Baptist History: Four Centuries of Selected Documents* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2008), 1–3.
[18] Thomas Helwys "A Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining in Amsterdam in Holland, 1611" Article 10 in ibid., 9.
[19] See Hughes & Anne Bromheade, "Letter to Sir William Hammerton, 1609" in ibid., 4–6.
[20] Leonard, *The Challenge*, 79.
[21] W. L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Chicago: Judson Press, 1959), 226–27.

created a theology of conversion and a methodology for securing it that shaped Baptist life to the present.[22]

CONVERSION AND BAPTISM

While revivalism had definite benefits for the church—numerous people were brought into the Christian faith and the church—certain deficits also arose, including especially the separation of discipleship and church membership from the idea of salvation.[23] Conversion, according to Leonard, has become propositional, individualised, emotive, and transactional, something to be resisted with the same determination with which Luther resisted the transactional conversion of the indulgence trade in the sixteenth century.[24] We might also add to his list; 'conversion' is understood as a singular event, a decision of the individual, and something complete in and of itself, and guaranteeing salvation in and of itself. Churches and ministers therefore 'aim for decisions' in their services and preaching, creating the right atmosphere and removing all barriers in order to facilitate this all-important 'decision.' In such an environment baptism, too, may become individualised, another instance of the personal expressivism rampant in contemporary culture, and so evacuated of its theological and congregational significance.[25] But baptism is not simply one more 'lifestyle choice' in a series of such choices, or something that one can 'experience' in the present before moving on to other, newer, more enlivening experiences elsewhere.

In truth, baptism is fundamental. Baptism represents the death of the self and its rebirth in Christ, a decisive breach with the life that has gone before. Baptism establishes a new identity, a new affiliation, a new mode of living, and a new life orientation, direction, and purpose. Baptism is a human action of submission and dedication, not merely to the invisible God in such a way that there is no real consequence of this act, but also to the community into which one is being baptised. Baptism is a concrete, public, and visible act with concrete, public and visible implications. In being baptised the candidate is publicly declaring their fulsome allegiance to and identification with Christ, submitting to his reign, hoping in his promise, joining him in *his* service of God and of others, becoming conformed to him in his death in the hope of

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[22] Leonard, *The Challenge*, 86.

[23] Scot McKnight suggests that Evangelicals have a gospel which is only a "pale reflection of the gospel of Jesus and the apostles"—a gospel which actually subverts the true gospel and deconstructs the church. See Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 24, 62. Also relevant here is Bonhoeffer's notion of 'cheap grace'—grace we give to ourselves, grace as a *system* or *doctrine* of God's unconditioned and all-forgiving mercy, though with the presumption that no real repentance or discipleship is required from humanity. Bonhoeffer describes cheap grace: "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate." See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1959; repr., 1995), 44–45.

[24] Leonard, *The Challenge*, 94.

[25] Charles Taylor refers to expressivism in the 'age of authenticity' as "the understanding of life which emerges with the Romantic expressivism of the late-eighteenth century, that each one of us has his/her own way of realizing our humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one's own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority." See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2007), 475.

sharing with him in resurrection glory. In being baptised the candidate is named with the threefold name of the one God, and as such is called into the fellowship of this God, into a participation in the divine life and mission, a life of sonship after the pattern of the incarnate Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit and in worshipful obedience to God the Father. In being baptised, the candidate is washed of their old sins and the polluting effects of a pagan life, so that a new way of living begins. They have passed through the waters of new birth as Israel passed through the Red Sea, delivered from the tyranny of their previous lord into the liberty and fruitfulness of the Promised Land. In baptism the believer is plunged by the Spirit into the Body of Christ—a particular local congregation—and so into its life of discipleship, the support of its fellowship, a submission to its spiritual oversight, accountability and discipline, and a participation in its ministry and mission. Baptism is a human work in response to the divine awakening that comes through the gospel. But it is also an act of the church in acknowledging and affirming this divine work. And in this work the Spirit of God is also at work giving grace to the candidate, uniting them with Christ and with his church.[26] Baptism is fundamental, involving the wholesale reshaping of a person's entire existence, identity, life purpose, allegiances, and relationships. Like marriage, it is not to be entered into lightly, but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God.[27]

THE RENEWAL OF THE CHURCH

The church today exists in a time of great change, challenge and opportunity. In our culture immense pressure is being applied to the church and to Christians to withdraw from the public square, to privatise their faith, and to affirm only that which the culture authorises, as though the church had another lord to which it must yield obedience, and another source of revelation to which it must give heed.[28] Yet anecdotal evidence also suggests that as Western culture is becoming more polarised, ordinary people are asking questions about faith; the Spirit is at work.

How ready is the church for these times into which we have been called? A few years before his death John Stott was asked in a seminar, what he saw as the greatest issue confronting the church. While organisers groaned at the impossible question Stott walked to the whiteboard and wrote three words: *Growth without Depth*. His counsel to remedy the situation was that preachers feed their congregations with a strong diet of sound expository preaching. Sound counsel indeed.[29] More recently, Thomas Bergler in his *The Juvenilization*

[26] This exposition of baptism draws on such biblical passages as Colossians 2–3; Romans 6; 1 Corinthians 10; the narrative accounts of the baptism of Jesus in Matthew 3 and Luke 3, and those in Acts. See also the expositions of the meaning of baptism in Wright, *Free Church*, 73–77, and Tracey Mark Stout, *A Fellowship of Baptism: Karl Barth's Ecclesiology in Light of His Understanding of Baptism*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick, 2010), 28–42.
[27] The preamble to the marriage ceremony from the Book of Common Prayer.
[28] The language echoes Thesis 1 of the Barmen Declaration: "Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death. We reject the false doctrine, as though the church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God's revelation." (see: https://www.ekd.de/en/The-Barmen-Declaration-303.htm)
[29] Stott says much the same thing in his *The Contemporary Christian*: "Nothing, it seems to me, is more important for the life and growth, health and depth of the contemporary church than a recovery of serious biblical preaching." John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian: An Urgent Plea for Double Listening* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 208.

of American Christianity has charged the church at large with immaturity: "We are all adolescents now."[30] He counsels the church to hold forth a robust vision of spiritual maturity, and to provide the practices and environments conducive to the development of such maturity, with intentional efforts directed towards means of evangelism and discipleship that explicitly repudiate and counteract the characteristic weaknesses and besetting sins of the culture.[31]

I suggest that Baptists are uniquely gifted to encounter and navigate the challenging times in which we live. It has never been particularly respectable to be a Baptist, except perhaps, at times, in the American south. Baptists have often found themselves on the outer, marginalised with respect to the main cultural currents and expectations. Yet Baptists may find within their tradition firm resources to ground their convictions, inform their practice, and stiffen their resolve in the face of hostility. The Baptist vision of the church as a covenant community under the immediate lordship of Christ provides a secure sense of identity and connection as a bulwark against the demands of a culture increasingly hostile to Christian faith, at least in its public pronouncements. In particular, their central practice—believer's baptism—provides an opportunity for Baptists consciously to retrieve the associated practices involved in a process which facilitates the kind of thorough-going conversion aimed at by the early Christians and early Baptists. In my estimation, such retrieval will be crucial if the churches are to navigate the mounting challenges of our time and place with faithfulness and fruitfulness.

The churches of the future may well engage in creative forms of evangelism, ministry and worship; they may well employ the latest leadership technologies and management techniques; and they may well sponsor strategic initiatives aimed at community formation, restoration, healing, and justice. All these and more, hopefully, will belong to the church of the future. But they are not the future of the church. Emil Brunner reminds us that true sanctification and discipleship consists in dwelling in Christ, in *being* more than in *doing*, for what the world needs most, "beyond all else is not action, but new men"—saints; those who live from the love of Christ and in his love, for it is from the new being that there arises ever and again a new action.[32] The formation of saints is slow and patient work calling for a grounded community and saintly mentors, as well as a robust theology of conversion and its associated practices. In such a theology believer's baptism is not merely a step along the way, but the definitive step whereby one's breach with the past is enacted by one's whole-of-life allegiance to a new Lord, a new community, and a new way of being in the world.

Therefore, I commend to all Baptists everywhere, the challenge issued by Bill Leonard: that we rethink our understanding—and therefore our practice—of conversion and baptism, and what it means to be a believer's church; and that we do so in all their theological, ecclesiological, congregational, missional, personal, and practical significance and implications, wrestling with the complexity of the matter, and the many questions of practice which will inevitably arise. The goal is not that we do what the ancients did and

[30] Thomas E. Bergler, *The Juvenilization of American Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 1–18.
[31] Ibid., 226–29.
[32] Emil Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of of the Church, Faith, and the Consummation: Dogmatics Volume 3 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 303.

as they did it; I suggest that this may be an impossible or even undesirable goal.[33] Rather, we aim to retrieve the substance of their vision and practice, adapted as necessary for our own quite different context. The goal is the formation of the communion of saints once more in our own time and place as an embodied witness to the saving life, death, way, and teaching of Jesus, that truly, Christ might be formed in us again. As the apostle has said: "For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Galatians 3:27).

[33] English Baptist John Colwell suggests as much: "Though Alan Kreider and others rue the loss of the lengthy catechumenate that came to characterise the early Church, it might be more coherent with the biblical narrative and with a sacramental theology of baptism to rue its inception. … We do not become disciples in detachment from the Church and the means of grace that constitute its sacramental life; rather we are shaped in the habits and virtues of discipleship precisely through our participation in the Church and its sacramental life. Baptism therefore, properly conceived, should mark the beginning of a life-long 'catechumenate' rather than the conclusion of a preliminary and 'qualifying' catechumenate. Indeed, the very notion of a 'qualifying' catechumenate offends a doctrine of grace." See John E. Colwell, *Promise & Presence: An Exploration of Sacramental Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), 131–32.