

# THE LEVER

THE BI-ANNUAL JOURNAL OF BAPTIST EVANGELICALS TODAY



## [ BEING BAPTIST ]

### THE LEVER

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lever (lee-ver) n. 1. a bar or other device pivoted on a fixed point (the fulcrum) in order to lift something or force something open. 2. a flat projecting handle used in the same way to operate or control machinery etc. – v. to use a lever, to lift or move by this. leverage. n. the action or power of a lever. (Oxford Paperback Dictionary)

The Lever aims to open up healthy and respectful reflection in our denomination on the Bible’s role in our identity and decision making. We want us all to be moved by the fulcrum of the Biblical Gospel – the unmoving centre of the Apostolic witness to Jesus – and to revolve around that centre, and derive our power from that centre. The journal aims to be a biblical, loving, robust lever for such aims.

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## EDITORIAL

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Welcome to the third edition of the Lever. This edition completes our opening ‘trilogy’ on identity. Having looked at aspects of evangelical and protestant identity we now turn our attention to being Baptist.

My article outlines the most recurring themes I’ve located in books written about Baptist identity. We hope this summation can serve as a platform for future articles on more vexing questions of our identity as Baptists and how our distinctives ought to play out in our denomination today. For example, it would be useful to consider how different ideas of congregational autonomy and associationalism impact the legal and doctrinal relationship of individual churches to the denomination. Likewise, it would be helpful to investigate the potential for an idea like liberty of conscience to be misunderstood such that it becomes a launching pad from which unfaithful teachers fire their rockets into the church with impunity. For now, however, there is great value in signalling our agreement with several of the great distinctives of Baptist life and thought.

Michael Chavura reviews Ken Manley’s immense, and immensely helpful, history of Australian Baptists, From Woolloomooloo to Eternity. The need for quality scholarship on the history of our denomination in Australia is a genuine one, as is the need for Baptist leaders to actually read it when it appears! Michael also helpfully points out some of the weaknesses in Dr. Manley’s treatment of controversies involving conservative evangelical concerns.

What would an issue on Baptists be without something on Baptism?! John Piper’s always superb and tenacious exegesis is on display in his sermon on Baptism from Colossians 2: 8-15. We gladly reproduce it here with permission.

Lastly, please don’t ignore the back page. Having distributed our initial editions free of charge we need your financial support to continue. The back page will tell you how you can be a supporter of the ministry.

Enjoy,

Matthew Arkapaw



# WHAT HAVE BAPTISTS SAID ABOUT BAPTIST IDENTITY?

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## INTRODUCTION

A brief foray into Baptist literature will find three notions recurring with reasonable frequency. These commonly held notions within the literature are as follows: 1. That the central feature of Baptist identity is not in fact a particular view of baptism but is instead a particular theology of the church. 2. That this ecclesiology gives rise to the more obvious distinctives of Baptist practise in the areas of baptism, liberty, and congregationalism, which are also vital to consider. 3. That whilst it almost goes without saying, it is nonetheless important to stress the fact that more widely held distinctives of Reformation Christianity are also felt by Baptists to be fundamental characteristics of their identity; that is, that Baptists are in their own eyes Reformation Christians first and foremost, working out their faith in a distinctive way.

## THE ECCLESIOLOGICAL CORE OF BAPTIST IDENTITY.

The desire of several writers to show that the formative characteristic of Baptist identity is not a view of baptism seems clear. Kevan (1984, 122) for example, warns against thinking that Baptists' chief concern is with Baptism when he writes, "The convictions of Baptists are based primarily on the spiritual nature of the church, and the practise of believers' baptism arises only as a corollary of this and in the light of NT teaching." Cook (1947, 17) is equally adamant that Baptism is derivative and depends on the conception of the Church that lies behind it for its meaning. He quotes Whitley approvingly, "the distinctive feature about Baptists is their doctrine of the Church."

What then is suggested as the primary features of a baptistic ecclesiology, especially in contrast to alternative views? They seem to be two. First, the relationship of God to the church and the mediation of His authority to it (the 'crown rights of the Redeemer over the church', as it is often put). Second, the nature of the church in terms of its constituency and locality (the locally 'gathered' church of 'believers', as it is often put). (We Baptists, 1999, 23-24).

In contrast to systems that seek to mediate the authority of Christ to the local church through ecclesiastical hierarchy (Roman Catholicism), or the machinery of state (Erastian Anglicanism and the Magisterial Reformers of the Continent), Baptists believe Christ's authority is invested directly in the local gathering, of which He is the Head, and in whose midst He is (Cook, 1947, 32-35, 52-55). Clifford's 1911 comment is cited by Payne (1952, 19), "The deepest impulse of Baptist life has been the upholding of the sole and exclusive authority of Jesus Christ against all possible encroachment." Christ governs the church without recourse to the state or centralised ecclesiastical bodies, instead, he does so only with recourse to the presence of His Spirit in each gathering, and His Word read by each gathering. In this Baptists differ even from other congregational non-conformists (such as New England Congregationalists) (Brackney, 1983, 17). This is not to say that the church is governed by the church, but that through these appointed means the governing of the church's life is by Christ, through the local church, as Kevan points out (1984, 123).

Thus, the church is said to rightly exist where such a relationship between God and His

people is seen. It is therefore not institutionally or territorially defined, but conceived of in terms of a 'gathered' church, most clearly seen in local manifestations (Kevan, 1984, 123, Underwood, 1947, 45). It follows that the local gathering is autonomous of the states' influence in its affairs, and competent to order its own life. It is responsible for guarding its own truth and winning its own converts.

Out of such ecclesiology a new notion of legitimate membership in the visible church emerges, one in sharp contradistinction to state-church models. Membership is not by virtue of birth, or one's territorial location, but by virtue of a demonstrable relationship with Christ who is the Head of the Church. The church is a 'believing body' (Cook, 1947, 47). In this context infant baptism is rejected as something clearly implying "an all-inclusive, non-ethical basis of church membership." (Underwood, 1947, 21).

This suggestion of a peculiar ecclesiological core is consonant with even a brief review of early Baptist confessions, creeds, and sermons. For example, John Smyth's 1609 confession (articles 12-14), The London Confession of 1644 (articles 33-36, 48-51), and the Second London Confession of 1677 (articles 24 and 26) (Lumpkin, 1969, 97-102, 144-170, 235-294).

Underwood's use of Troeltsch's division of Christian history into 'Church-type' and 'Sect-type' churches is instructive for summarising the emphases and atmosphere of Baptist identity that flows from its ecclesiology. For Troeltsch, the Church-type exhibits an institutional ecclesiology that invests tradition itself with a certain divine authority,

requires infant baptism as an initiation to bring people under the supernatural influence of the institution, gives the institution a concrete holiness apart from the holiness of its members which in turn allows secular patronage and control without thinking it compromises the purity of the church. Its desire for a stability divorced from its impact on individual souls means satisfaction with a mere average level of spiritual attainment from the masses (high attainment is reserved for an ecclesiastical elite). (Underwood, 1947, 15-16).

The Sect-type, however, begins with the genuineness of the individual believer and the necessity of genuine Christian experience for all who would join a church. No one is born into such Christianity; one enters voluntarily. It is organized apart from the state because members are able to manage themselves by virtue of their being directly under Christ. The ascetic ideal is possible for all, and holiness is not a quality of things but found only in persons through common obedience to Christ. Historically, says Troeltsch, the Church-type looks down on the Sect-type, but it is the Sect-type that reflects the ecclesiology of the primitive church. Such an atmosphere, according to Baptist literature, is rightly and most decisively the air breathed by Baptists. (Underwood, 1947, 17-19).

#### THE CORE AS IT RELATES TO THOSE OBVIOUS BUT SECONDARY AND OUTWARD COROLLARIES OF THE CORE. BELIEVERS' BAPTISM.

From the notion of a gathered or believing church arose a question over the practise of infant baptism and its place as an initiatory

rite into membership of the nation, and the visible church. Such questioning is a logical inference from the assumption of the church as not equated with any political nation, but with gatherings of confessors (Beasley-Murray, 1992, 9). Amongst the early Separatists the Baptists were bold enough to ask if regenerate membership was consistent with the practise of infant baptism, and their conclusion was that it was not (Underwood, 1947, 45). Thus, whilst there were variant views on issues such as mode, precise meaning, and who should administer, there was universal agreement amongst Baptists on the issue of appropriate candidates – they being only those who voluntarily confess repentance and faith (Payne, 1952, 71-74). Retaining the notion that the act has an initiatory role in church membership, and that it is to offer some form of symbolic representation of an inner gospel reality (witnessed to in good conscience), and that church membership is for believers, the practise of believer's baptism is seen as a natural corollary of Baptist ecclesiology, and of a restorationist approach to Scripture (see below) (Cook, 1947, 113, Payne, 1952, 75-85, Coggins, 1991, 61-65).

#### LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE FOR ALL.

The notion that Christ is directly Lord over his church, and not mediating his spiritual oversight through the state (or even the godly magistrate), leads naturally to the conviction that it is not the place of the state to compel any religious belief or to seek to order the life of God's people by forceful, or any other means. So one finds the principle of liberty of conscience for all (not just Christians) as commonly given

in lists of Baptist characteristics (Cook, 1947, 157; Underwood, 1947, 42; Brackney, 1982, 78-80; We Baptists, 1999, 45). It was a costly view to hold in the 17th Century but appears constantly in early confessions (Brackney, 1982, 78-80 cites examples). Indeed, Smyth's statement was the "first claim for full religious liberty ever penned in the English language" (Underwood, 1947, 42). It went thus: "...the magistrate is not by virtue of his office to meddle with religion, or matters of conscience, to force and compel men to this or that form of religion or doctrine: but to leave the Christian religion free to every man's conscience, and to handle only civil transgressions, injuries and wrongs of men against man...for Christ only is the king and lawgiver of the Church and conscience." (cited in Underwood, 1947, 42).

#### DISTINCTIVE CONGREGATIONAL PRACTICES.

Again, the relationship between Christ and the local gathering is related to the stance and practise of the local Baptist congregation in regard to its own governance. On the assumption that Christ's Word and Spirit are sufficiently given to the local church, it is believed that the gathering is competent to govern its own affairs without recourse to higher authorities (Kevan, 1984, 123; We Baptists, 1999, 25). Thus, in principle, it may ordain its own leaders, establish its own confessions, and provide all practical necessities for its own life. Each church is "free, but only within the limits of the New Testament" (Cook, 1947, 20). The priesthood and royalty of all believers by virtue of their faith connection to Christ places the privilege and responsibility of helping the church

“THE RIGHT OF PRIVATE JUDGMENT IN MATTERS OF RELIGION APPEARS TO BE THE RIGHT WHICH EVERY INDIVIDUAL HAS TO THINK AND TO AVOW HIS THOUGHTS ON THOSE SUBJECTS, WITHOUT BEING LIABLE TO ANY CIVIL INCONVENIENCE ON THAT ACCOUNT....BUT OF LATE THE SUBJECT HAS TAKEN ANOTHER TURN, AND MEN HAVE PLEADED NOT ONLY AN EXEMPTION FROM CIVIL PENALTIES ON ACCOUNT OF THEIR RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES, IN WHICH THE VERY ESSENCE OF PERSECUTION CONSISTS,BUT ALSO THAT THEY ARE NOT SUBJECT TO THE CONTROL OF A RELIGIOUS SOCIETYWITH WHICH THEY STAND CONNECTED FOR ANY TENETS WHICH THEY MAY THINK PROPERTO AVOW. THE RIGHT OF PRIVATE JUDGMENT NOW FREQUENTLY ASSUMED, IS A RIGHTIN EVERY INDIVIDUAL WHO MAY BECOME A MEMBER OF A CHRISTIAN CHURCH TO THINKAND AVOW HIS THOUGHTS, BE THEY WHAT THEY MAY, WITHOUT BEING SUBJECT TOEXCLUSION OF ADMONITION, OR THE ILL OPINION OF HIS BRETHREN, ON THATACCOUNT. ANY THING THAT IS CONSISTENT WITH THIS IS THOUGHT TO BECONSISTENT TO SPIRITUAL TYRANNY, AND REPUGNANT TO THAT “LIBERTY WHEREWITHCHRIST HATH MADE US FREE.” BUT THIS APPEARS TO BE HIGHLY EXTRAVAGANT, ANDIS WHAT NO MAN CAN CLAIM AS A RIGHT. THE FOLLOWING CONSIDERATIONS ARESUBMITTED TO THE READER.FIRST, THE SUPPOSED RIGHT OF THE INDIVIDUAL IS CONTRARY TO THE PRINCIPLESON WHICH CHRISTIAN CHURCHES WERE ORIGINALLY FOUNDED....HENCE IT APPEARSTHAT ADMONISHING OR EXCLUDING FROM THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH THOSE WHO HELDPERNICIOUS ERRORS WAS NOT RECKONED TO BE SUBVERSIVE OF THE RIGHT OFPRIVATE JUDGMENT; AND THE CHURCHES BEING EXHORTED TO SUCH DISCIPLINE BYTHE APOSTLES WAS EXERCISING NO DOMINION OVER THEIR FAITH.SECONDLY, NOT ONLY IS THIS SUPPOSED RIGHT OF PRIVATE JUDGMENT INCONSISTENTWITH APOSTOLIC PRACTICE, BUT IT IS ALSO CONTRARY TO REASON AND THE FITNESSOF ALL THINGS....A COMMUNITY MUST ENTIRELY RENOUNCE THE NAME OF ACHRISTIAN CHURCH BEFORE IT CAN ACT UPON THE PRINCIPLE HERE CONTENTED FOR;AND THOSE WHO ENTIRELY REJECT CHRISTIANITY OUGHT, NEVERTHELESS, TO BEADMITTED OR RETAINED IN FELLOWSHIP, IF THEY CHOOSE IT; SEEING THEY HAVEONLY EXERCISED THE RIGHT OF PRIVATE JUDGMENT!TO SAY THAT NO PERSON IS BETTER OR WORSE IN A MORAL VIEW, WHATEVER BE HISPRINCIPLES, IS TO SAY THAT PRINCIPLES THEMSELVES HAVE NO INFLUENCE ON THEHEART AND LIFE; AND THAT AMOUNTS TO THE SAME THING AS THEIR BEING OF NOIMPORTANCE. BUT IF SO, ALL THOSE SCRIPTURES WHICH REPRESENT TRUTH AS AMEANS OF SANCTIFICATION OUGHT TO BE DISCARDED; AND ALL THE LABOURS OF GOODMEN TO DISCOVER TRUTH, AND OF THE APOSTLES TO DISSEMINATE IT--YEA, ANDTHOSE OF THE SON OF GOD HIMSELF, WHO CAME INTO THE WORLD TO BEAR WITNESSTO THE TRUTH--WERE TOTALLY IN VAIN.[FROM “AN INQUIRY INTO THE RIGHT OF PRIVATE JUDGMENT IN MATTERS OFRELIGION,” IN THE COMPLETE WORKS OF ANDREW FULLER, VOL. III, PP. 447-49.]

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to govern itself upon the shoulders of each member – such responsibility includes the establishment of leaders on biblical principles, and so is not necessarily synonymous with humanistic democracy (Kevan, 1984, 123-124). Furthermore, independence in relation to external domination is not usually seen to rule out co-operation, cordial relations, and associations with, other churches (Payne, 1952, 28-30, Cook, 1947, 84). Neither has it resulted in one form of ministry structure being adopted (Brackney, 1982, 133ff.), though the combination of pastor/elder and deacon offices has been most common.

#### CHARACTERISTICS HELD IN COMMON WITH OTHERS BUT WHICH REMAIN ESSENTIAL TO BAPTIST IDENTITY (AND THE JUSTIFICATION OF ITS CORE AND COROLLARIES).

*Sola Scriptura* (with a restorationist impulse).

There is a wide recognition in the literature that Baptists have values central to their character that are also shared by other protestant ‘cousins’. Perhaps pre-eminent among these are the belief in the supreme authority of Scripture and its exclusively normative function in the life and practise of the church (Cook, 1947, 17-19, Brackney, 1982, 63-70, citing several early confessions). For Baptists, the strength of this belief is often manifest in a strongly restorationist impulse, obvious in John Smyth and many more since (Underwood, 1947, 37). Indeed, there is no Hooker principle in Baptist thought that seeks to rationalise the presence of potentially harmful traditions by utilising arguments from silence in one’s hermeneutic; the bald

absence of infant baptism and Erastianism in the Scriptures was taken with great seriousness by the early Baptists.

#### PROTESTANT REFORMATION ORTHODOXY.

Salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, were irreducible components of historical Baptist identity, and Baptist practise was inexplicable without the soteriological convictions of the Reformation (We Baptists, 1999, 21). The 17th century English confessions make this transparently obvious (Lumpkin, 1969, 79-338).

Why make mention of characteristics that are not exclusive to Baptist identity? Firstly, it is helpful to remember that one could argue that none of the characteristics mentioned thus far are exclusive to those going by the name Baptist. Liberty of conscience and believer’s baptism are shared with many groups, the belief in *sola scriptura* is, in principle, shared with many protestants, and congregational convictions are shared with many other separatist descendants. But it needs to be remembered that such characteristics, though held in common between ‘cousins’, can nonetheless be essential and distinctive of one’s identity; they need not be exclusively one’s own in order to be such. Further, it remains likely that that peculiar combination or admixture of characteristics does indeed go toward a unique identity. There seems to be a recognition in the literature that Baptists desire to be seen as a branch in the tree of Reformation orthodoxy, not a tree in their own right, and, indeed, to cherish that belonging; a branch of its own shape, certainly, and with a very distinctive contribution to make, especially in the areas

of ecclesiology and the courage to apply that ecclesiology in its practical corollaries, but a branch nonetheless, nourished by a common evangelical root.

#### CONCLUSION AND REMAINING QUESTIONS

The literature surveyed here leaves one with the clear impression that one could not be called Baptist with any historical or theological integrity without at least exhibiting the characteristics outlined above.

The question at hand has been, positively, ‘what constitutes Baptist identity?’ However, it would be useful to look into the reasons given in the literature for leaving out certain emphases of many Baptists as being un-essential, though not contradictory, to Baptist identity. For example, the belief that neither Calvinistic or Arminian systems are essential to being Baptist and that the cluster of Baptist distinctives seems able to rest in the bowl of either system, or the belief that to be pacifistic is not essential, and so on. Another interesting question would be to investigate the extent to which those who share a Baptist ecclesiology and its corollaries should be considered Baptist though they go by other names (such as many Pentecostal churches, the Churches of Christ, and so on). Any detailed consideration of Baptist identity will wrestle with such issues.

In light of our narrow study, however, it suffices to say that a brief survey of Baptist literature reveals an ecclesiological core to Baptist identity, with several outward corollaries such as Believer Baptism, Liberty of Conscience and a certain practise of congregationalism.

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## BOOK REVIEW: FROM WOOLLOOMOOLOO TO 'ETERNITY'

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**F**rom Woolloomooloo to 'Eternity': A History of Australian Baptists, Ken R. Manley. In *Studies in Baptist History and Thought*, Volume 16.1 and 16.2, Milton Keynes, Paternoster Press, 2006. xxviii + 856.

The publication of Ken Manley's 2 volumes by Paternoster continues a revived interest in the history of Australian evangelicalism and in particular the formation and development of Baptists in Australia. Sections of this field of study were mined previously by Michael Petras and Ken Manley. And now Manley returns to reveal a much more panoramic image and that there are still plenty of riches to be found and examined by those with an interest in the origins and growth of Australian Baptist churches.

While Manley acknowledges the contribution of Bollen, Breward and Piggin, he provides a fresh and compelling presentation that sheds much light on a broader canvass of Australian Baptist history than has been seen before. Manley essentially concludes that 'In parts they [the Baptists] remain deeply conservative but in other parts are seriously looking to find an authentic identity within Australian culture....Australian Baptists still look to the future with hope' (p.770).

An introduction and thirteen chapters are presented chronologically and thematically leading the reader through the developments of the decades for Australian Baptists. One of the strengths of this book is Manley's ability to frame the landscape while simultaneously providing information on the wider social, political, cultural and ecclesial context. The author sets a high standard for meticulous scholarship that advances new and persuasive research into Australian Baptist history.

The first four chapters in Volume 1: *Growing an Australian Church (1831-1914)*, provide a historical analysis and overview of Australian Baptist history from 1831 to 1914. Manley gives a summation of the Baptist experience in this period: '1914 did mark the end of an era for the nations of the world. For the small community of Australian Baptists the preceding decades had been marked by significant achievement' (p.193). Concluding the first volume of the book there are chapters on Baptist identity, fellowship, worship, women, leaders, youth and the denomination's relationship to Australian society.

Volume 2: *A National Church in a Global Community (1914-2005)* covers the period 1914 – 2005. Chapters Eight and Nine focus on Baptists and the two World Wars. Manley highlights Cross-Cultural Mission and Renewal in chapters Ten and Eleven. Chapter Eleven elucidates the impact of Conservative Theological Movements. Writing of the period 1967 – 2005 the author makes the generalisation that 'by far the majority of churches remained strongly conservative. The early 1960s were marked by several popular expositions of liberal theology....providing 'a new climate of religious thought' for Baptists (p.690). The author uncovers some of the factors contributing to tensions in Australian Baptist life such as inerrancy and ecumenism. Manley employs descriptors such as 'tendentious' (p. 690), 'agitator' (p. 691), 'threat' (p. 755), 'blackmail' (p. 694), 'carping critics' (p. 701), 'militantly fundamentalist' (p.745) of those Baptists of a more conservative conviction who expressed concerns over what they perceived to be departure at various points from biblical orthodoxy. The author quotes one observer who was convinced that those of more conservative views were engaging

in a 'witch hunt' (p.693). It is asserted by Manley that James Hogg 'deliberately misinterpreted' (p.756), the Sydney College of Divinity Handbook. Clearly, there is a distinction between misinterpretation and deliberate misinterpretation. Some evidence of a deliberate misinterpretation would have been helpful. Given the nature of the cut and thrust of theological debate, all of this of course, is subject to analysis and interpretation. Undoubtedly, the more conservatively aligned would have understood themselves as 'contenders' for the faith rather than engaging in any kind of medieval witch hunt. Although the author does not specifically mention the introduction of John Macquarrie's *Principles of Christian Theology* as the basic textbook for a theological course at the Baptist College of New South Wales in the 1970s, it is difficult to see conservatives completely indifferent to a book that advanced an existential interpretation of the Christian faith to the point where many of its major historical tenets were denied. The surprise is not that conservatives expressed concern over some theological trends within the denomination, rather the surprise would have been if they had not. All of these dilemmas are portrayed vividly and the section devoted to these controversies is one of the most fascinating in the book.

In chapters Twelve and Thirteen, the concluding chapters of Volume 2, Manley addresses issues such as ordination and accreditation, women in ministry, developments in theological education and the variety of challenges and opportunities for Australian Baptists. The question is raised '...where are Australian Baptists heading? It has been a long journey from Woolloomooloo to "Eternity"'. In parts they remain deeply conservative but in other

parts are seriously looking to find an authentic identity within Australian culture. Who can say what the future will bring?' (p.770) Whatever the future holds for Baptists they can certainly move into the future with a solid and substantial knowledge of their past provided by the research and writing of Ken Manley.

Documentation is extensive though not cumbersome. The reviewer's personal preference is footnotes rather than endnotes and in this volume footnotes are provided. The index is comprehensive and the two volumes are impressively thorough. The bibliography is wide ranging and will prove to be a gold mine to those wishing to pursue further Baptist

*The surprise is not that conservatives expressed concern over some theological trends within the denomination, rather the surprise would have been if they had not. All of these dilemmas are portrayed vividly and the section devoted to these controversies is one of the most fascinating in the book.*

historical studies. There are typographical errors on p. 770, 'Albert Stace' (sic) should be 'Arthur Stace'; p.633, 'Tim and Kate Boase' (sic) should be 'Bose'; p. 734, 'Jim Gibbon' (sic) should be 'Jim Gibson'.

Ken Manley's work is exhaustive, detailed and generally persuasive. Just as B.R. White's *The English Separatist Tradition* sparked a generation of interest into the world of Baptists in seventeenth century English Baptist history, this reviewer hopes Manley's volume will do the same for Australian Baptist history. Baptists in Australia defined and defended their identity in a climate of political and religious change, all against the backdrop of 'a minority denomination in Australia, often little known and not always understood' (p.7). A revival of interest in the study of Australian Baptist history should only prove to help modern day Baptists in a relatively young and developing nation. While being analytical and critical, Ken Manley has done all students of Baptist history and theology a great service with his work.

*Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Proposal*, David Dockery, Nashville, B & H Publishing Group, 2008. xvii + 238.

This review of David Dockery's book on Southern Baptists may appear to be somewhat misplaced, juxtaposed to Ken Manley's book on Australian Baptists. Truth is, that the two books can work with each other in tandem although initially that may not appear to be the case.

Manley provides us with an abundance of the external history of Australian Baptists and is certainly not wanting in the area of analysis. Dockery's volume is much less of

an external history of Southern Baptists than it is a close examination of their theological and historical roots. The heart of the book essentially deals with Baptist identity. It would be a mistake to balk at the fact that he focuses on the American scenario. How many of our pastors and congregations have been influenced by Don Carson, Millard Erickson, Rick Warren, Bill Hybels etc? The American orientation should not be a deterrent.

This book is an appeal for cooperation, unity and spiritual renewal amongst Southern Baptists, an appeal which is transferable to our own Australian Baptist context. There is no shortage of issues which can easily sidetrack Baptists from advancing the gospel, evangelism and theological understanding. Dockery's exhortation is to centre on Baptist heritage and renew our commitment to truth, doctrinal fidelity and the Christ centred message of the gospel. His book is warmly commended for an understanding of Baptist historical and theological heritage. It can speak eloquently to Australian Baptists.

Both Manley and Dockery are 'must read' books for Australian Baptist leaders who are serious minded about understanding the history and theological identity of the people known as Baptists.

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# EXPOSITION: BURIED AND RAISED IN BAPTISM THROUGH FAITH

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## COLOSSIANS 2:8-15

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. 9 For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, 10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; 11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; 12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13 And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

## DOES CHRISTIAN BAPTISM PARALLEL OLD TESTAMENT CIRCUMCISION?

This is the second in a four-part series on Christian baptism. Let me tell you a bit about how I am choosing the texts to preach from. I discovered in my seminary and graduate school days that my old ways of defending believer's baptism were not compelling. I used to spend time pointing out that all the baptisms described in the New Testament are baptisms of believers and

that all the commands to be baptized are given to believers. I used to point out that infant baptism is simply not mentioned in the Bible and that it is questionable to build a crucial church practice on a theological inference, without explicit Biblical teaching when all the examples go in the opposite direction.

But I discovered that those who baptize infants ("paedobaptists") were not swayed by these observations, because they pointed out that, of course, we only see believer's baptism in the New Testament since we are dealing in all these settings with first generation evangelism, not with second generation child-rearing. Everybody agrees that the only adults that should be baptized are believing adults. The issue is, what happens when these baptized Christian adults have children?

So they pointed out that all my statistics are irrelevant and the question boils down to one of theological inference. Specifically, does Christian baptism parallel Old Testament circumcision as the sign of those who join the covenant people of God, and if so, should not the children of Christians receive baptism the way the sons of Israel received circumcision?

For example, the Heidelberg Catechism was written in 1562 as an expression of the Reformed faith. It is said by some to have the intimacy of Martin Luther and the fire of John Calvin : three great Reformers in the 16th century. At the end of the section on baptism, question #74 asks, "Are infants also to be baptized?" The answer goes like this:

Yes; for since they, as well as their parents, belong to the covenant and people of God, and both redemption from sin and the Holy

Ghost, who works faith, are through the blood of Christ promised to them no less than to their parents, they are also by Baptism, as a sign of the covenant, to be ingrafted into the Christian Church, and distinguished from the children of unbelievers, as was done in the Old testament by Circumcision, in place of which in the New Testament Baptism is appointed.

Now this has been the standard understanding of baptism among Presbyterians and Congregationalists and Methodists and many others for hundreds of years. Lutherans and Catholics defend the practice of infant baptism differently, putting more emphasis than these other churches have on the actual regenerating effect of the act.

## ARE NEW TRUTHS REVEALED IN THE NEW COVENANT?

So one of the most crucial questions you must face as you ponder the New Testament command to be baptized is whether you think this parallel with circumcision settles the matter. That is, is it the will of God revealed in the New Testament that Baptism and circumcision correspond so closely that what circumcision signified, baptism signifies? Or are there new truths about the creation and nature of the people of God in the New Covenant that point toward a discontinuity as well as continuity between circumcision and baptism?

Well, in my struggles with this issue over the years, especially the years in graduate school when I was studying mainly with paedobaptists, three or four texts, more than any others, kept me from embracing the argument from circumcision. One is Colossians 2:11-12. Another is 1 Peter 3:21. Another is Romans

9:8. And another is Galatians 3:26-27. I will take the Colossians text today and build on the others in the weeks to come.

But first let's make sure we don't miss the forest for the trees. This text (Colossians 2:10-15) is a virtual rain forest of strong gospel timber. Get a bird's eye view of it with me. It's all about what God has done for us (in history, objectively through Christ), and what he has done in us so that we will indeed inherit what he purchased

## WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR US

Take first the objective, historical, external work of God in verses 14-15. In essence, what these two verses tell us is that our two greatest enemies were defeated in the death of Christ. Nothing more powerful than the death of Christ has ever happened.

The first enemy defeated was the "certificate of debt" that was filed against us in the courtroom of heaven. In other words, because of our sin and rebellion, the laws of God had become a deadly witness against us and we were in such deep debt to God that there was no way out. Verse 14 says that Christ canceled that whole debt by paying it all on the cross. "[He] canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." So the great enemy of our sin and guilt and debt, Christ defeated. That happened in history, objectively, outside us.

The second enemy defeated was the host of evil spiritual beings : the devil and his forces. Verse 15: "When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them

through Him." It's true that we must still "wrestle with principalities and powers" (Ephesians 6:12), but if we wrestle in the power of Christ and his shed blood, they are as good as defeated, because the blow he struck was lethal. Revelation 12:11 says that believers "overcame [the devil] because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even to death." We must fight. But the battle belongs to the Lord and the decisive blow has been struck at Calvary. Satan cannot destroy us.

## WHAT GOD HAS DONE IN US

Now besides these two great objective, external, historical triumphs over our worst enemies (the debt of sin before God and the devil's hosts on earth), this forest also describes what God does in us : not just for us and outside of us but in us so that we benefit from what was done outside of us.

He uses two pictures: one is circumcision and the other is resurrection. Verse 13 focuses mainly on our resurrection:

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions.

So you see what he does in us: we were spiritually dead, and he made us alive. This is the miracle of the new birth. You were saved because God spoke a life-giving, resurrecting word into your heart (2 Corinthians 4:6).

The other picture of what God does in us is the picture of circumcision. Verse 11:

In Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the

removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.

Now this is harder to understand because the ideas are more foreign to us. Paul compares the saving work of God in us with the practice of circumcision. He says it's like that, only this is a circumcision made "without hands" : it's a spiritual thing he is talking about, not a physical one. And he says that what is being cut away is not the male foreskin, but the "body of the flesh." In Paul's language that's probably a reference to sin-dominated, ego-dominated use of the body. What is cut away in this spiritual circumcision "without hands" is the old unbelieving, blind, rebellious self and its use of the body for sin. And that way, Paul is saying, God makes a person his very own.

So we have seen two pictures of what God does for us, objectively, historically, outside ourselves to save us: he defeats the enemy of sin and the enemy of Satan. And we have seen two pictures of what God does in us to make us part of that salvation: he raises us from the dead spiritually and he circumcises our hearts and strips away the old rebellious self and makes us new.

## BAPTISM AND CIRCUMCISION

Now, in that forest of glorious good news, here's the question about the tree of baptism: is water baptism the Christian counterpart to Old Testament circumcision? Is the continuity such that, just as circumcision was given to the children of God's covenant people then, baptism should now be given to the children of God's covenant people?

The key verses are verses 11-12. Notice the linking of the two ideas of circumcision and baptism:

. . .in Him [Christ] you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

It's clear there's a link here between baptism and circumcision. But it isn't, I think, what many infant baptizers think it is. Notice what sort of circumcision is spoken of in verse 11: it is precisely a circumcision "without hands." That means Paul is talking about a spiritual counterpart of the Old Testament physical ritual. Then baptism is linked in verse 12 to that spiritual counterpart to the Old Testament circumcision. This is extremely important. Try to get it.

What is the New Testament counterpart or parallel to the Old Testament rite of circumcision? Answer: it is not the New Testament rite of baptism; it is the New Testament spiritual event of the circumcision of Christ cutting away "the [old sinful] body of the flesh." then, baptism is brought in as the external expression of that spiritual reality. That is precisely what the link between verses 11 and 12 says. Christ does a circumcision without hands : that is the New Testament, spiritual fulfillment of Old Testament circumcision. Then verse 12 draws the parallel between that spiritual fulfillment and the external rite of baptism.

Notice what verse 11 stresses about the new work of Christ in circumcising: it is a circumcision "without hands." But water baptism is emphatically a ritual done "with hands." If we simply say that this New

Testament ordinance of baptism done with hands corresponds to the Old Testament ritual of circumcision done with hands, then we miss the most important truth: something new is happening in the creation of people of God called the church of Christ. They are being created by a "circumcision without hands" by God. They are being raised from the dead by God. And baptism is a sign of that, not a repetition of the Old Testament sign. There is a new sign of the covenant because the covenant people are being constituted in a new way : by spiritual birth, not physical birth.

#### "THROUGH FAITH"

And one of the clearest evidences for this is the little phrase "through faith" in verse 12. Watch this carefully. This is what held me back from paedobaptism through years of struggle, until I saw more and more reasons not to join up. Verse 12 links the New Testament spiritual circumcision "without hands" in verse 11 with baptism, and then links baptism with faith:

Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

If baptism were merely a parallel of the Old Testament rite of circumcision it would not have to happen "through faith" since infants did not take on circumcision "through faith." The reason the New Testament ordinance of baptism must be "through faith" is that it represents not the Old Testament external ritual, but the New Testament, internal, spiritual experience of circumcision "without hands."

Those two words : "through faith" : in verse 12 are the decisive, defining explanation of how we were buried with Christ in baptism and how we were raised with him in baptism: it was "through faith." And this is not something infants experience. Faith is a conscious experience of the heart yielding to the work of God. Infants are not capable of this, and therefore infants are not fit subjects of baptism, which is "through faith."

So I urge those of you who have not yet come to faith in Christ to consider the rainforest of good news in these verses: that Christ died and rose again to cancel our debt with God and to triumph over Satan; and that he raises spiritually dead people from the grave and circumcises sinful hearts : he does all this through faith. He brings us to trust him, by showing us how true and beautiful he is. Look to him and believe.

And then he bids us to express that faith in baptism. If you want to prepare for this step of obedience, you can come up after the service, or you can check it off on the worship folder leaf, or you can come to the baptismal preparation class starting next Sunday for two weeks.

May the Lord draw many of you to the enjoyment of this full obedience "through faith."

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