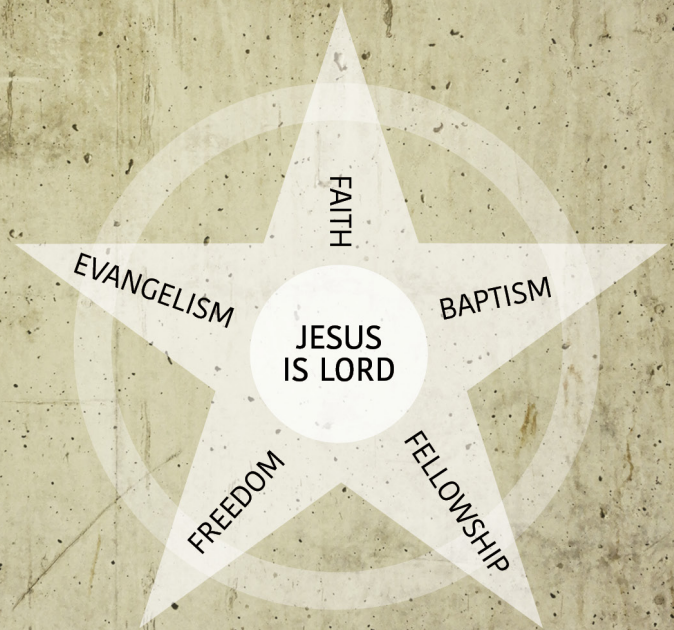


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The Reception History of James Wm. McClendon, Jr. in the United Kingdom

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Abstract

This article seeks to narrate the reception history of James McClendon in the United Kingdom, including a visit he made in 1998. The article explores why McClendon's impact amongst Baptists has been muted.

The background to this article and the articles that follow has been an online group reading of James McClendon's *Systematic Theology*. On May 15, 2020 I tweeted an idea to Curtis Freeman and Steven Harmon¹ of the 'possibility of creating a UK reading group working our way through McClendon's ST.' In the same tweet I noted 'His reception history here [in the UK] has been more muted than it should be.' A copy of McClendon's Systematics had been sitting on my bookshelf for several years, but I had never properly read them. I was aware of how important McClendon was for a number of Baptist theologians active in North America — e.g. Freeman, Harmon, Beth Newman, Barry Harvey, Ryan Andrew Newson, amongst others — whose work I had found stimulating for my own thinking.² Later that same day Curtis Freeman and I had planned the first session for June. Every month since then a group of around 30 mostly from UK and the US have met online to discuss a section or chapter from McClendon's Systematics. We completed the reading of McClendon's

¹ Freeman and Harmon are leading Baptist theologians in the US, teaching at Duke Divinity School and Gardner-Webb University respectively. Freeman was a junior friend of McClendon, collaborating with him (and C. Rosalle Velloso da Silva) on *Baptist Roots: A Reader in Theology of a Christian People* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1999). Freeman also wrote a new introduction for the 2012 Baylor University Press edition of McClendon's *Systematic Theology*.

² In 1997 Freeman, Newman, Harvey, Mikael Broadway, Philip E. Thompson, and McClendon himself authored together 'Re-Envisioning Baptist Identity: A Manifesto for Baptist Communities in North America', *Perspectives on Religious Studies* 24.3 (Fall, 1997), 303-10. This Manifesto was a stimulus for much of Harmon's *Towards Baptist Catholicity* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008).

final volume, *Witness*, in August 2022. As well as an opportunity to engage our minds with McClendon's theology, the monthly group has also created new friendships and connections.³ Those from the UK who have been part of the group include those contributing to this special edition of essays. Most of us were reading McClendon for the first time. The articles will mainly focus on the first volume *Ethics*, of which the revised edition is twenty years old this year.⁴

Who was James McClendon?

James McClendon was an American Baptist theologian, who was born in 1924 and died in 2000. He called himself a 'radical baptist'.⁵ The lower case 'b' was deliberate, because although denominationally he was a Baptist, he argued for a wider baptist tradition, which encompassed the heirs of the radical reformation and what has been called the believer churches. He is often mentioned alongside Stanley Hauerwas and John Howard Yoder⁶ as they shared in a similar project and vision of Christian ethics as well as being friends.⁷ Both Hauerwas and Yoder were influential in McClendon's thinking and McClendon was definitely helpful to Hauerwas.⁸ McClendon authored several

³ Each session began with one person offering a short overview and response to the particular chapter in focus. Special guests have included Stanley Hauerwas, Terrence Tilley, Rosalee Ewell Velloso, Stephen Holmes, Ruth Gouldbourne, Jonathan Tran, Paul Fiddes, and Brad Kallenberg.

⁴ The first edition was published in 1986. McClendon was able to revise it significantly before he died in 2000, Abingdon publishing it in 2002. Curtis Freeman, in an introduction to the 2012 Baylor edition of McClendon's Systematics, has highlighted the key revisions to the first edition, 'Introduction' in James McClendon, *Systematic Theology Volume 1: Ethics* (Waco, TX: Baylor, 2012), xvi-xx.

⁵ See his biographical reflection, 'The Radical Road One Baptist Took', *Memnonite Quarterly* 74 (2000): 503-10. Reprinted in *The Collected Works of James Wm. McClendon, Jr.*, Volume One edited by Ryan Andrew Newson and Andrew C. Wright (Waco, TX: Baylor, 2014).

⁶ Yoder's legacy is now very troubling as revelations of his sexual abuse have come to light. See for example Isaac Samuel Villegas, 'The Ecclesial Ethics of John Howard Yoder's Abuse', *Modern Theology* 37.1 (January 2021): 191-214.

⁷ See Charles Scriven, 'The Reformation Radicals Ride Again', *Christianity Today*, 5 March 1990, 13-15 which focuses on these three theologians. C.f. D. Stephen Long, 'Protestant Social Ethics' in *The Cambridge Companion to Political Theology* edited by Craig Hovey and Elizabeth Philips (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 98-102.

⁸ See 'Preface', *Ethics*, 7-8. For Hauerwas' reflections on McClendon see *Hannah's Child* (London: SCM, 2010), 245. Hauerwas was a guest presenter for the McClendon reading group session in November 2020. His most substantial engagement with McClendon is

books, notably *Biography as Theology* and *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism*, before writing a three volume Systematic Theology (1986-2002), which was immediately novel in its ordering: *Ethics*, *Doctrine*, and *Witness*. The aim of his Systematic Theology was to write a ‘theology “in light of the baptist vision”’.⁹ This intention to write a baptist theology distinguished him from other systematic theologies written by Baptists which have been largely governed by an evangelicalism rather than anything particularly baptist.¹⁰ It is for this reason that his systematic theology is an astonishing achievement; reading McClendon’s theology is to read a uniquely creative ordering and understanding of the theological task. In 2010 Hauerwas named it in his top five essential books of the last twenty-five years.¹¹ There is something exciting about reading McClendon,¹² because of the way he chooses, or perhaps better, the way he is convicted that theology must be done. *Ethics* includes three chapters of biography,¹³ each an attempt to display the more theoretical chapters. *Doctrine* is driven by a concern for discipleship, what must the church teach in order to make disciples. *Witness* is in some ways a missiology, addressing religion, science, art and philosophy, ending with a chapter on the university. McClendon did not write a typical systematic theology; it dissents from the norms, like many of the baptist voices on which he draws.

‘Reading James McClendon Takes Practice’ in *Wilderness Wanderings* (SCM, 2001 [1997]), 171-87, but he also contributed to and co-edited the festschrift in McClendon’s honour, *Theology with Foundations* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1994). Ryan Andrew Newson makes the case that it would be ‘wrong to conflate McClendon with his friends’, *Inhabiting the World* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 2018), 31.

⁹ McClendon, ‘Preface’, *Ethics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2002), 8.

¹⁰ See, for example, the works of Millard Erickson, James Leo Garrett and even Stanley Grenz. Barry Harvey in one of the McClendon Reading group sessions, quipped that McClendon was ‘trying to create a tradition, not follow one.’

¹¹ The other four books were George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology* and John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*. See: <https://www.christiancentury.org/reviews/2010-09/stanley-hauerwas-5-picks>.

¹² Admittedly there is also something frustrating in that often he invites the reader to wish he had said more. The tightness of each of the three volumes means there are some aspects not fully discussed.

¹³ The three biographies of Sarah and Jonathan Edwards, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Dorothy Day. This followed *Theology as Biography* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1990 [1974]) which had chapters on Dag Hammarskjöld, Martin Luther King, Clarence Jordan and Charles Ives. He had planned for *Doctrine* to also include biographical chapters, but the volume became too large to fit them in. *Witness* includes a chapter on Ludwig Wittgenstein.

McClendon and the United Kingdom

In the Preface to the third volume, *Witness*, McClendon mentions a visit to the United Kingdom.¹⁴ This visit saw him give lectures and talks at the London Mennonite Centre; King's College London; Spurgeon's College; Regent's Park College, Oxford; Bristol Baptist College; Offa House, Coventry and the biblical studies department at the University of Manchester.¹⁵ McClendon thanks Alan Kreider,¹⁶ Mark Thiessen Nation¹⁷ and their helpers and associates. This visit took place in March 1998 and it also included an event at the headquarters of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and the Baptist Missionary Society in Didcot.¹⁸ Two of the helpers and associates who were part of facilitating the visit were Keith Jones¹⁹ and Brian Haymes.²⁰

One purpose of the visit at least from the organisers perspective was to introduce McClendon and his theological project to an English audience. Alan Kreider had brought McClendon's theology to the attention of Brian Haymes and Nigel Wright and others through the Anabaptist Network. In 1996 Haymes gave an introduction to McClendon's thinking to the Anabaptist Theological Study Circle,²¹

¹⁴ This was not his first visit to the UK. In 1962-63 McClendon spent a year at Oxford on sabbatical. See James McClendon, 'A Brief Narrative Account of My Professional Life and Work to the Present' in *The Collected Works of James Wm. McClendon, Jr. Volume One*, 58.

¹⁵ James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology Volume 3: Witness* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 8.

¹⁶ Kreider was at that point Director of the Centre for Christianity and Culture, Regent's Park College, Oxford.

¹⁷ Nation was the Director of the London Mennonite Centre. McClendon supervised Nation's PhD on Yoder at Fuller Theological Seminary.

¹⁸ See brief report in *Baptist Times*, March 18, 1998, 2.

¹⁹ Jones at the time was the Deputy General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain.

²⁰ Haymes was then Principal of Bristol Baptist College.

²¹ I have not been able to source a copy of this address, although Ian Randall notes a version he consulted in the papers of Keith Jones.

which began further engagements with his thought that led to the invite and organisation of the 1998 visit.²²

A recording of McClendon's visit to Baptist House, Didcot exists.²³ He was asked to talk about the subject of whether Baptists were evangelicals. This was in a context of the Baptist Union becoming a more consciously evangelical stronghold in the late 1980s and 1990s.²⁴ What McClendon does in his lecture is to first ask whether Baptists are Anglicans. He recognises what we have in common, a shared concern for evangelism and historically for overseas mission. He poses whether Baptists and Anglicans are essentially the same or essentially different, the answer not being as straightforward as some would suggest. In asking are Baptists evangelicals, McClendon says what do we mean by evangelical? The word has had different meanings through history. McClendon argues that in the New Testament, it is a way of speaking of the gospel; in the Reformation, it meant those who were followers of Luther; in the eighteenth century, it was a way of describing the Wesleyan revivals; in the twentieth century in America, it was the new name for those who were fundamentalists. In the present, he contends it is more a sociological label, than a theological one, that is, in his context, evangelicals are those associated with Wheaton College, Billy Graham and the magazine *Christianity Today*. His point is that the word evangelical has been and is used in a variety of ways. So what is meant by the question are Baptists evangelicals? This leads McClendon to ask the more important question, in his view, are Baptists baptist? By baptist he means those who hold to the importance of the Bible, of mission, of liberty, of discipleship, and of community.²⁵ He believes Baptists are 'more or less', but with room for growth. These five features are 'not labels, but targets.' The lecture ends with McClendon making the case for ecumenism. At the beginning of the lecture he gives the analogy of the tree, with all the branches being different traditions and churches of Christianity, stretching higher and further

²² See Ian Randall, 'Baptist-Anabaptist Identity among European Baptists since the 1950s' in *Baptists and the World: Renewing the Vision* edited by John H. Y. Briggs and Anthony R. Cross (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2011), 148.

²³ I am grateful to Julian Gotobed for making it available to me. It's a real joy to actually hear McClendon speaking.

²⁴ See Andy Goodliff, *Renewing a Modern Denomination* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2020), 71-80.

²⁵ See McClendon, *Ethics*, 27-28.

from the trunk. At the end of the lecture he gives a second analogy of a river with side streams joining the main flow.²⁶ This is the river of God. Here Christian unity is about what's coming, it's eschatological; unlike the tree analogy, in which Christian unity only lies in the past. Are Baptists anglican? Are Baptists Evangelical? Are Baptists catholic? These are the questions he says are ones he continues to live with. In *Witness* he describes the terms Christian, catholic, evangelical and baptist as 'contested concepts.'²⁷

McClendon's visit did not result in any real on-going encounter with his work. There were some attempts to get students at Bristol Baptist College reading McClendon by Brian Haymes, Ruth Gouldbourne and Tony Peck during the late 1990s and early 2000s as part of a Baptists Doing Theology module.²⁸ Later in 1998 Keith Jones, arguably the most enamoured by the McClendon project,²⁹ moved from Didcot to Prague to become Rector of the International Baptist Theological Seminary.³⁰ In this new position, with his colleague Parush Parushev, Jones went on to make McClendon a key interlocutor in the seminary's thinking.³¹ When IBTS moved to Amsterdam, it developed links with the Vrije Universiteit, and in 2017 the VU (with support from IBTS and others) established the James Wm. McClendon, Jr. Chair for Baptist and Evangelical Theologies.³²

McClendon in English Baptist Theology

²⁶ The tree and river analogy appear in McClendon, *Witness*, 333-34.

²⁷ McClendon, *Witness*, 243.

²⁸ Email correspondence with Haymes, Gouldbourne and Peck.

²⁹ See Jones' comments in 'Desert Island Books', *Baptist Ministers' Journal* 329 (January 2016): 7.

³⁰ McClendon had visited IBTS (then named the Baptist Theological Seminary) in 1985 when it was located in Rüscklikon, Switzerland, giving the graduation address entitled 'The baptist Vision'. A version of which can be found in *Baptistic Theologies* 6.1 (2014): 23-35. See Randall, 'Baptist-Anabaptist', 147.

³¹ See, for example, Keith Jones, 'Rethinking Baptist Ecclesiology', *Journal for European Baptist Studies* 1.1 (2000): 4-18; Mark Thissen Nation, 'James Wm. McClendon, Jr.: A Particular Baptist Theologian', *Journal for European Baptist Studies* 1.2 (2001): 51-55; Parush R. Parushev, 'Carrying out the Theological Task in a Baptist Way', *Baptistic Theologies* 6.1 (2014): 53-71. Parushev was a student of McClendon's at Fuller. See also IBTS PhDs by Lina Andronovienė, David McMillan and Doug Heidebrecht.

³² This is currently held by the Dutch Baptist Henk Bakker.

A review of Baptist literature from the 1980s onwards finds only a few references to McClendon.³³ I have been able to find only one book review of any of his works in any of UK baptist publications.³⁴ He was largely ignored, and his theology is definitely not a reference point in the work of key English Baptist theologians — Paul Fiddes, Nigel Wright, John Colwell, Brian Haymes or Stephen Holmes.³⁵ This questions the view of Curtis Freeman when he writes that ‘theologians throughout Europe and the United Kingdom recognize the importance of McClendon’s theology for Baptists.’³⁶ For each of the English Baptist theologians mentioned their own theological commitments were already in place by the time they came to read him. The reading of McClendon’s work did not fit with, or see any need for revision to, their projects. Another reason might also be that McClendon largely ignores the English Baptist tradition, which developed independently of the Anabaptists on the European continent. While there are on-going debates over the relationship, if any, between English Baptists and the European Anabaptists, the traditions depart as much as they may also overlap.³⁷ In the first edition to *Ethics* McClendon mentions that some ‘baptist’ thinkers he consulted suggested he ‘should start with Calvin, not Anabaptism,’³⁸ which perhaps would have led him closer to the English tradition. Where McClendon draws on baptist witnesses it is from the Anabaptists, rather than English Baptists, outside of a couple of pages

³³ The earliest mention of McClendon I have found is an article by Paul Weller in 1990: ‘Freedom and Witness in Multi-Religious Society: A Baptist Perspective: Part 1’, *Baptist Quarterly* 33.6 (April 1990): 252-64. He makes several references to McClendon’s article ‘What is a “baptist” Theology?’, *American Baptist Quarterly* (October 1982): 16-39 and borrows the language of ‘baptist vision’, Weller, ‘Freedom’, 255.

³⁴ A review of *Doctrine* by Lloyd Pietersen in *Anabaptism Today* (October 1996), 22-23. Pietersen’s review calls *Doctrine* ‘a theological *tour de force*’ and gives is a warm recommendation.

³⁵ With regards to Holmes, he gives brief attention to McClendon’s *Systematic Theology*, recognizing McClendon’s attempt to work with a ‘distinctively Baptist theological methodology’, Stephen R. Holmes *Baptist Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2012), 86-87.

³⁶ Freeman, ‘Introduction’, xxxi.

³⁷ For some discussion see David Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries* (2nd ed.; Waco, TX: Baylor, 2018 [2010]), 25-41. McClendon mentions Glen Stassen who ‘has repeatedly shown that the claim for Baptist independence from Anabaptists is historically mistaken’, *Ethics* (2002), 21.

³⁸ McClendon, ‘Preface’, *Ethics* (1986), 8.

on John Bunyan in *Ethics*.³⁹ Among British Baptists, Ian Randall has come closest to McClendon's baptist vision, but reflected in terms of English and European stories. Randall gave the title *Communities of Conviction* to his European Baptist history⁴⁰ and in an article on the marks of Baptist identity from a European perspective he finds 'considerable similarity with McClendon's proposals.'⁴¹ There is also a differentiation to be made between English Baptists and their American counterparts; there is overlap, but also again significant differences.⁴² McClendon's baptist project is both Anabaptist and American in its sources. The Baptist vision that McClendon was articulating was one that was aimed at dealing with the deficiencies and debates within the American — largely Southern — Baptist context. Finally, Paul Fiddes has suggested another reason, that in the UK there is not something that might be termed Baptist studies, as a shared project of study.⁴³ While all accredited Baptist ministers are required to complete a module on Baptist History and principles, this is not often part of an academic degree.⁴⁴ Theology is done ecumenically, so in

³⁹ McClendon, *Ethics* (2002), 67-70. McClendon uses Bunyan as a third witness, alongside Aquinas and Luther, of the interiority of morality. Although, McClendon does suggest that 'Bunyan retained or regained something of the ancient Christian objectivity as well' (67), and 'toward a Christian life where vision and hope converge in the disciples' shared way' (69). In the first edition of *Ethics*, Bunyan represents 'the Christian alternative to decisionism', *Ethics* (1986), 59.

⁴⁰ Tony Peck in the 'Foreword' says 'the title of the book owes something to the writings of the late Baptist scholar James William McClendon Jr.', Ian Randall, *Communities of Conviction: Baptist Beginnings in Europe* (Neufeld Verlag, 2009), v.

⁴¹ Ian Randall, 'Tracing Baptist Theological Footprints: A European Perspective', *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 36.2 (2009): 147. Randall writes about McClendon here: <https://blog.ibts.eu/2008/09/02/%e2%80%98mcclelland-and-me/> accessed 4th July 2022.

⁴² American Baptists beginnings look back to Roger Williams, and in the twentieth century were shaped by E. Y. Mullins and the conservative take over of the Southern Baptists in the 1980s onwards. See Thomas S. Kidd and Barry Hankins, *Baptists in America: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). There has been no equivalent takeover of the British Baptist life.

⁴³ Email to the author. Although we should not overlook the series *Studies in Baptist History and Thought* (2000-2018) published by Paternoster and the more recent *Centre for Baptist History and Heritage* series, Oxford (2010-) which have both done much to create a body of work, published in the UK, making major contributions to Baptist studies. Here tribute must be paid to Anthony R. Cross, who did much as an editor to establish both series.

⁴⁴ While the Oxford Centre for Baptist Studies exists at Regent's Park College, Oxford, there is no corresponding masters level course (currently) that can be taken. There are

Baptist Colleges it is, for example, Karl Barth, Jürgen Moltmann, or Colin Gunton you are more likely to encounter than McClendon.⁴⁵ There is also perhaps the point that the English have traditionally not done Systematic Theology,⁴⁶ preferring more ad-hoc studies, for example, see the works of David Ford, Paul Fiddes, or Rowan Williams, and therefore students are likely not required to work their way through the Systematic Theology of the likes of Wolfhart Pannenberg, Robert Jenson or Stanley Grenz, to name three relatively recent examples.⁴⁷

Above I mentioned the overlapping of projects between McClendon, Yoder and Hauerwas. The latter two are much more well-known and some British Baptists have drawn on them, for example: Wright in the case of Yoder,⁴⁸ and Colwell in the case of Hauerwas.⁴⁹ What McClendon might have offered, in terms of a narrative and Anabaptist theology, Wright, Colwell, and others, had already gained from reading Yoder or Hauerwas.⁵⁰

MA level modules on Anabaptist ecclesiology at Bristol Baptist College, but no Baptist equivalent.

⁴⁵ Hopefully in the future, if not already, perhaps also Sarah Coakley, James Cone or Kathryn Tanner.

⁴⁶ See Colin Gunton's article 'An English Systematic Theology?', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 46 (1993): 479-96, which ends by arguing for the possibility of an English Systematic Theology. See also his later, 'A Rose by any other Name? From "Christian Doctrine" to "Systematic Theology"', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 1 (1999): 4-23. Gunton died before he could complete the first volume of such a proposed project, as did his colleague John Webster as well. However, see now the projects of English theologians, Sarah Coakley and Graham Ward, who have both completed the first volume of their planned project. Both these projects, like McClendon's, are unique offerings that do not fit the usual Systematic Theology mode.

⁴⁷ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 Vol (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988-94); Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 2 Vol (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997-99); Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000 [1994]).

⁴⁸ Wright was reading Yoder by *The Radical Kingdom* (Kingsway, 1986), 67-71, and his doctoral work, *Disavowing Constantine* (PhD, 1994, published, Paternoster, 2000) was a comparison of Yoder with Jürgen Moltmann.

⁴⁹ Colwell was reading Hauerwas by the late 1980s and Hauerwas looms large in both *Living the Christian Story* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001), *Promise and Presence* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005) and the shape of *The Rhythm of Doctrine* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007).

⁵⁰ This might also be true of Brian Haymes, who refers to Yoder and Hauerwas in his essay 'Baptism as a Political Act' in *Reflections on the Water* edited by Paul S. Fiddes (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1996). In a brief contribution to *Coming Home: Stories of*

McClendon is mentioned occasionally by Nigel Wright, but not in any significant way.⁵¹ In *Free Church, Free State*, in describing what he calls the Baptist genetic code, Wright goes first to Stanley Grenz,⁵² before offering his own summary. Grenz gets several other references,⁵³ as does Miroslav Volf's book *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*.⁵⁴ It is these two thinkers that became more helpful (or closer) to Wright's Baptist vision, despite Wright's shared interest with McClendon in Anabaptist witness.⁵⁵ What Wright does borrow from McClendon is the language of 'baptist' representing those groups of church which share a family resemblance with Baptists.⁵⁶

Paul Fiddes first got a copy of *Ethics* in 1988 from Stan Nelson, who was visiting Regent's Park College, Oxford, at the time.⁵⁷ Fiddes draws on McClendon as a third witness in a chapter on Baptist identity. The other witnesses are Schleiermacher and Barth, and so McClendon is included as someone outside the 'German' tradition and also as a Baptist. Where Schleiermacher is a witness for experience, Barth a witness for confession, McClendon is a witness for narrative and how 'Baptists understand themselves as living immediately in the scriptural story and in the story of the day of judgment.'⁵⁸ Fiddes agrees with McClendon that any denominational theology needs to pay attention to a rich variety of stories, past and present, of its community in describing who they are. Fiddes also mentions McClendon preference for 'baptist' over 'Baptist' as a way of describing Baptist identity by starting with a universal characteristic. Fiddes though does not follow

Anabaptists in Britain and Ireland (Pandora, 1999), 64, Haymes mentions reading Yoder and Hauerwas, but not McClendon. Paul Fiddes has interacted with Hauerwas in 'Versions of Ecclesiology: Stanley Hauerwas and Nicholas Healy', *Ecclesiology* 12.3 (2016): 331-53.

⁵¹ See *Disavowing Constantine*, 33-34; *New Baptists, New Agenda* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), 53; *Free Church, Free State* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), xxviii, n.21.

⁵² *Free Church*, 40-42.

⁵³ *Free Church*, xviii, 125, 137n.34, 202n.7.

⁵⁴ *Free Church*, xxiv, 21n.26, 22n.75, 44-45, 116-17, 202n1, 202n.5 264-65.

⁵⁵ On Wright's interest in Anabaptism see *The Radical Kingdom, Challenge to Change; Free Church*; and 'Spirituality as Discipleship: The Anabaptist Heritage' in *Under the Rule of Christ* edited by Paul S. Fiddes (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2008).

⁵⁶ *New Baptists*, 53; *Free Church*, xxii-xxiii.

⁵⁷ Email from Paul Fiddes.

⁵⁸ Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003), 10-11.

Wright and prefers starting with the local. A more recent mention of McClendon by Fiddes is in a discussion of saints in one of his chapters in *Baptists and the Communion of Saints*.⁵⁹

John Colwell only makes one mention of McClendon in a footnote in *Living the Christian Story*. In the footnote Colwell claims that McClendon is an example of a ‘tendency to match an idealized Christology with an idealized ecclesiology.’⁶⁰ This comes in a discussion of pacifism in which Colwell argues that the case made by the likes of Richard Hays, Stanley Hauerwas and McClendon succumbs to docetism. For Colwell, the rule of pacifism, ‘idealizes the humanity of Jesus by failing to take sufficient account of the fallenness of the context in which his humanity of was actualized’ which leads to a ‘corresponding ecclesiological docetism.’⁶¹ This is what Colwell sees in McClendon’s description of the Matthean community; it is, says Colwell, too idealized to ‘support his pacifist agenda.’⁶² This is not a criticism of the whole of McClendon’s theology and it is the one time Colwell makes any reference to McClendon and is only mentioned as an example of a wider problem that he perceives in Hauerwas, Hays and others. In an email to me, Colwell writes that he was intrigued by the structuring of McClendon’s systematics, but did not think McClendon manages to succeed overall. The first volume being ‘most impressive both in style and content.’⁶³ Colwell is not convinced by McClendon’s attempt to write a baptist theology, instead, Colwell has said of himself that his ‘aim has always been to engage in catholic theology’ as a Baptist.⁶⁴ This is perhaps not an entirely fair criticism of McClendon, whose baptist theology always had a catholic and ecumenical perspective in view.⁶⁵ McClendon’s project was in part a

⁵⁹ Fiddes, *Baptists and the Communion of Saints* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012), 146-48 referencing the argument McClendon makes in *Biography as Theology*.

⁶⁰ Colwell, *Living the Christian Story*, 127n.33.

⁶¹ Colwell, *Living*, 126-27.

⁶² Colwell, *Living*, 127n.33.

⁶³ Email to the author dated 7 November 2020.

⁶⁴ John E. Colwell, ‘The Word of His Grace: What’s so Distinctive About Scripture?’ in *The “Plainly Revealed” Word of God? Baptist Hermeneutics in Theory and Practice* edited by Helen Dare and Simon Woodman (Macon, GA: Mercer, 2011), 191. Elsewhere Colwell writes, ‘without any compromise of my Baptist and Reformed convictions I became “catholic,”’ *The Rhythm of Doctrine* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), 6.

⁶⁵ See Steven Harmon, ‘Engaging James Wm. McClendon, Jr.’s Ecumenical Theology’, *Perspectives in Religious Studies* (2019): 249-66.

call for baptists (and those who were not baptists) to take their own tradition seriously. Likewise, it might be said that Colwell's own theological contributions have been a call to Baptists (and other free church evangelicals) to take Aquinas, and also Calvin and Barth, more seriously.⁶⁶ A comparison of McClendon and Colwell might be an interesting small project.

It is perhaps Ruth Gouldbourne who has found McClendon most helpful to her articulation of Baptist identity. Gouldbourne in several places draws on McClendon's concept of convictions and practices.⁶⁷ In discussing the Lord's Supper, she begins with McClendon and how 'our practices demonstrate our convictions.'⁶⁸ Similarly in a chapter on ministry, she says 'we want to start with McClendon's category of "remembering signs" in examining the role of ministry.'⁶⁹ An article on liturgy and transformation also starts with McClendon: 'underpinning this approach is a commitment to the description of theology and its task that is articulated by James Wm. McClendon Jr.'⁷⁰ Finally, a chapter on the communion of saints draws on McClendon's hermeneutic that 'this is that,'⁷¹ to argue for the relationship between believers across time, and death, because of the same relationship shared with Christ by virtue of the Spirit. Even where McClendon is not directly mentioned, his baptist vision can be discerned implicitly in the argument. Gouldbourne has not produced a book-length treatment of Baptist theology that might make explicit the full debt McClendon's work has offered to her own thinking, but she is perhaps the most prominent example of a British Baptist,⁷² who has been shaped by

⁶⁶ All three theologians feature heavily in *Living the Christian Story, Promise and Presence*, and in *Rhythm of Doctrine*.

⁶⁷ In addition to those I mention, see also her third IBTS Hughey Lecture given in 1998.

⁶⁸ Brian Haymes, Ruth Gouldbourne and Anthony R. Cross, *On Being the Church* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), 123. I am making the informed judgment that Gouldbourne wrote the chapters on the Lord's Supper and ministry in this volume.

⁶⁹ Haymes et al, *On Being the Church* (2008), 158.

⁷⁰ Ruth Gouldbourne, 'Liturgical Identity Carriers for Ecclesial Transformation', *American Baptist Quarterly* (2012): 380.

⁷¹ Ruth Gouldbourne, '“We are Gathered with the Millions”: Celebrating the Communion of Saints' in *Gathering Disciples* edited by Myra Blyth and Andy Goodliff (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017), 175-76.

⁷² Gouldbourne is Scottish by birth and upbringing, but her ministry of over 30 years has been in England. On Gouldbourne, see Beth Allison-Glenney and Andy Goodliff, 'Appreciating Ruth Gouldbourne', *Journal of Baptist Theology in Context* 4 (October 2021).

reading McClendon. In an email she wrote “‘this is that’ deeply shapes my reading of Scripture and leading of worship, and the notion of a convictional community, and the importance of conviction being that which shapes what one actually does, rather than any official statement seems to me so self-evident that I guess it has also gone very deep.”⁷³ She also said he is ‘one of the writers I go back to again and again.’ Gouldbourne’s interest in McClendon was something she passed onto Christopher Ellis,⁷⁴ who also draws on McClendon concept of a ‘convictional community’⁷⁵ in *Gathering*, his study of Baptist worship. The values identified in Baptist worship, says Ellis, are part of the convictions that ‘constitute the faith and spirituality of the Baptist community.’⁷⁶ McClendon provides a conceptual framework to support and justify Ellis’ claims.⁷⁷ This is a good example of McClendon’s work put to practice, however, while he is used, there is no embrace by Ellis of his broader baptist vision.

McClendon and British Theology

I should mention here that McClendon’s theology has not generated much engagement amongst other (non-baptist) British theologians either. This is probably to do with some of the same reasons already mention earlier. David Fergusson references McClendon in a discussion of ecclesial ethics that focuses mostly on Hauerwas.⁷⁸ Christopher Rowland describes in passing ‘McClendon’s remarkable Systematic Theology,’⁷⁹ but does not elaborate further. Harriet Harris

⁷³ Email to the author, dated 10 November 2020.

⁷⁴ Ellis mentions Gouldbourne as someone who ‘listened and questioned as I was formulating the arguments which shaped this book’, *Gathering: A Theology and Spirituality of Worship in Free Church Tradition* (London: SCM, 2004), viii. In an email to the author, Ellis writes that he ‘only really engaged with his writings in conversations with Ruth after my arrival in Bristol in 2000’, dated 13 November 2020.

⁷⁵ Ellis, *Gathering*, 230-31, 235, 268n.5, 297.n18.

⁷⁶ Ellis, *Gathering*, 231.

⁷⁷ For some connections between McClendon and Ellis, see Robert Ellis, “‘Help us to Search for Truth’: Baptists and Doing Theology’ in *Gathering Disciples* edited by Myra Blyth and Andy Goodliff (Eugene: OR, Pickwick, 2017), 1-24.

⁷⁸ David Fergusson, *Community, Liberalism and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 48-79.

⁷⁹ Christopher Rowland, “‘The first will be last, and the last first’: practical theology and equality’ in *Public Theology for the 21st Century* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 335. Elsewhere he has written of gaining ‘wisdom and insight from Jim McClendon ... whose original approach to systematic theology I applaud and from whose insight, wisdom, and

reviewed *Doctrine* in the *Scottish Journal of Theology*.⁸⁰ Oliver O'Donovan makes a brief critique of McClendon, along with Barth, in the Prologue to the second edition of *Resurrection and Moral Order*.⁸¹ One positive, but again brief, use of McClendon and his notion of convictions can be found in Pete Ward's *Liquid Ecclesiology*.⁸² This is about the extent of references to McClendon in British theology and ethics.

Reading McClendon Today

The set of articles in this volume recognises that a new generation are discovering McClendon. It is too early to say whether this will generate significant engagement with McClendon's theological contribution. Joshua Searle, a Tutor at Spurgeon's College and Lina Toth, Tutor at the Scottish Baptist College (both former students of IBTS) are two people within the Baptist Colleges who have found McClendon helpful to their own work.⁸³ This may see more students at Spurgeon's and at the Scottish College encountering McClendon's baptist vision. It is certainly the case that an increase of people reading and thinking with McClendon will most likely happen through his becoming part of required reading in the Colleges.

It is the hope that what it is offered in the following reflections will encourage others to see McClendon as a worthwhile theological mind to read for Baptists considering what it means to live as the church today (*Ethics*), what it is the church must teach (*Doctrine*), and how the church might *Witness*. Any reading of McClendon in the UK today

encouragement I have derived great benefit', Christopher Rowland, 'Anabaptism and radical Christianity', *Menonite Quarterly Review* 74.4 (October 2000).

⁸⁰ Harriet Harris, 'Review: James McClendon, *Systematic Theology Vol. 2: Doctrine*', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51.1 (February 1998), 126-29.

⁸¹ Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order* (2nd Ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), xvi.

⁸² Pete Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 27-29, 53-54.

⁸³ See for example, Joshua Searle, 'The Ecumenical Imperative and the Kingdom of God', *Journal for European Baptist Studies* 14 (2013): 5-23; Lina Andronovienė (now Toth), *Transforming the Struggles of Tamars* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014). Both Joshua and Lina were part of the online McClendon reading group referred to at the beginning. See also now Tim Welch (Bristol Baptist College) recent article on McClendon as a practical theologian in *Attending the Margins: Essays in Honour of Stephen Finamore* edited by Helen Paynter and Peter Hatton (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2022), 337-65.

cannot simply re-appropriate his work, because the context and concerns among Baptists in the UK are different to those that he was addressing in the US. Moreover the entire project is now over twenty years old and theology has moved on.⁸⁴ One helpful and important development of McClendon can be found in Ryan Andrew Newson's *Inhabiting the World: Identity, Politics, and Theology in Radical Baptist Perspective*. Newson begins with McClendon's Baptist vision but seeks to extend it and revise it for the present: '[McClendon's] work provides a series of signposts that are worth following *in via*.'⁸⁵ Paul Fiddes' point that we do not have something called Baptist studies is something perhaps that also needs to be remedied.⁸⁶ This is not to suggest that Baptists should separate themselves and only read the work of Baptists, this would go against McClendon's attempt to offer a Baptist theology in conversation with Protestant and Catholic theology. It is to suggest that there might be value in giving more attention to theological work that takes its b/Baptist heritage and context seriously. This would mean reading McClendon, but McClendon in conversation and dialogue with the English Baptist tradition, and a wider b/Baptist tradition, and one in dialogue with other communion of churches, for example, the conversations between the Baptist World Alliance and the Anglican Communion, and those with the Roman Catholics.⁸⁷ This might have the advantage of forming ministers and shaping churches that are more conscious of their identity as Baptists.

Note on Contributor

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⁸⁴ As Robert Jenson remarks at the beginning of his own Systematic Theology that 'it is the fate of all dogmatic systems to be dismembered' and used in the constructions of other systems, Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology Vol 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 18.

⁸⁵ Ryan Andrew Newson, *Inhabiting the World: Identity, Politics, and Theology in Radical Baptist Perspective* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 2018), 26.

⁸⁶ Here we might note the renaming of the Centre for Baptist History and Heritage at Regent's Park College in 2019 as the Oxford Centre for Baptist Studies.

⁸⁷ On the latter see the work of Steven Harmon, for example, *Baptists, Catholics and the Whole Church* (New York: New City Press, 2021).