

# SHALL (CAN) WE GATHER AT THE RIVER?: A RESPONSE TO LEMKE'S NINE MARKS OF BAPTIST IDENTITY

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## PERSONAL POINTS OF APPRECIATION

First, I appreciate Dr. Lemke's concern for Baptist identity. Legendary Yale church historian Kenneth Scott Latourette claimed: "I am a Baptist by heritage, by inertia, and by conviction."<sup>1</sup> I am a Baptist by heritage only in the sense that a young Christian Baptist lady, now my wife of nearly thirty years explained the gospel to me. I remain a Baptist partially by inertia. I received three educational degrees from Baptist schools; the majority of my close friends are Baptists; and even though I try to be a catalyst for change, I live my life in a Baptist comfort zone. Yet, I remain a Baptist because of personal conviction. I see a close correlation between the New Testament and Baptist teachings. Being a Christian entails convictions and a commitment to distinctive Christian principles. Likewise, being a Christian Baptist ought to involve convictions and a commitment to distinctive Christian Baptist principles. In the midst of our Baptist self-identity crisis, I hope we can rediscover the joy of being Christian Baptists by conviction.

Second, I appreciate Dr. Lemke's emphasis upon the importance of baptism.<sup>2</sup> Like Dr. Lemke, I affirm that New Testament baptism entails the right subject (believer), right mode (immersion) and right meaning (union with Christ through immersion as a symbol of death and resurrection). Further, I concur with Dr. Lemke that some Baptists disregard or ignore the distinctive of believer's baptism. Unlike Dr. Lemke, I do not understand Calvinistic Baptists within the Southern Baptist Convention as the source of this threat to baptistic theology and practice of the ordinance. Rather, I perceive churches in which biblical authority is an issue as threatening this distinctive. A generation of leaders within the Southern Baptist Convention lack knowledge of the concept of "alien immersion." Yet, in Baptist history, Baptist associations disfellowshiped churches that recognized "alien baptism." Perhaps the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry could undertake a research project related to the practice of "alien immersion."

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<sup>1</sup>William Powell Tuck, *Our Baptist Tradition* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 1993), 2.

<sup>2</sup>Unfortunately, a press release New Orleans Baptist Seminary sent to the editor of the *Florida Baptist Witness* seemed to suggest I supported Lemke's call to elevate baptism to a first-level theological concern. I will express my misgivings related to Lemke's theological triage later in my response.

Third, I appreciate Dr. Lemke's recognition of Calvinist Baptists as a "valid expression of the Christian faith." Caustic, emotional, vitriolic language, from both sides, has accompanied the resurgence of Calvinism with the Southern Baptist Convention. In his sesquicentennial history, Jesse Fletcher commented that the theological issue of God's sovereignty and human free will comprises the oldest fault line in Baptist life.<sup>3</sup> A unique heritage shaped Baptists. Baptists possess a theological heritage in both Arminianism (General Baptists) and Calvinism (Particular Baptists). The fault line will continue to exist after the present generation passes from the scene. Both sides scurrilously label those with whom they differ as heretics, an attitude that neither honors Christ nor builds up the kingdom.

Fourth, I appreciate Dr. Lemke's recognition of the importance of Calvinistic theology in Baptist heritage. Twenty-six years ago, Dr. Walter Shurden's seminal essay delineated the Baptist traditions comprising the Southern Baptist synthesis: Charleston, Sandy Creek, Georgia, and Tennessee.<sup>4</sup> Yet, Dr. Shurden failed to highlight the theological tradition common to all four traditions. A form of Calvinistic theology provided the theological underpinning of all four of these traditions. Richard Furman modeled evangelistic Calvinism in Charleston. The Sandy Creek Association, representative of a larger Separate Baptist theology, affirmed the imputation of Adam's sin, effectual calling, and unconditional election.<sup>5</sup> Evangelical Calvinist Jesse Mercer and Calvinist apologist P. H. Mell exercised dominant influence in Georgia.<sup>6</sup> R. B. C. Howell, James M. Pendleton and J.

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<sup>3</sup>Jesse C. Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Sesquicentennial History* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994), 372.

<sup>4</sup>Walter B. Shurden, "The Southern Baptist Synthesis: Is It Cracking?" *Baptist History and Heritage* 16 (April 1981): 2-11.

<sup>5</sup>Principles of Faith of the Sandy Creek Association, Articles II and III. The confession is found in William Lumpkin, ed., *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, Revised Edition. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1969), 358. The church covenants of Grassy Creek Baptist Church (1757) and Kiokee Baptist Church (1771) affirm Calvinistic soteriology. Shubal Stearnes brother-in-law Daniel Marshall served as pastor of both churches. Both covenants are included in John A. Broadus, *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms*, edited by Timothy and Denise George, in *Library of Baptist Classics* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996), 201-07.

<sup>6</sup>For Mercer's theology see Anthony L. Chute, *A Piety above the Common Standard: Jesse Mercer and Evangelistic Calvinism* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004). P. H. Mell served as moderator or clerk of the local association thirty-six times and as moderator or president of the Georgia Baptist convention thirty-two times. In addition, he served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention seventeen years, more than any other individual did. For a brief biographical sketch of P. H. Mell see Emir and Ergun Caner, *The Sacred Trust: Sketches of the Southern Baptist Convention Presidents* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2003): 13-17. Individuals associated with the Founder's Movement have republished his apologetic for predestination. Patrick Hues Mell, *A Southern Baptist Looks at Predestination*, eds Robert Paul Martin and C. Ben Mitchell (no publication data).

R. Graves espoused a softer Amyraldian Calvinism in the Tennessee tradition.<sup>7</sup> Although the heritage of Southern Baptists is Calvinistic theology, the Bible alone functions as our authority. We listen wisely to our heritage, but our heritage does not function as authoritative.

Fifth, I appreciate Dr. Lemke's attempt at architectonics of Baptist Calvinists. Many Calvinisms exists in the Southern Baptist Convention and any attempt to differentiate and classify will not be satisfying to the Calvinists themselves. Fluidity hinders rigid typology. Later, I will express concerns about the typology of Together for the Gospel Calvinists. Northern evangelical Calvinists comprise one small group within the SBC Calvinist family not delineated by Dr. Lemke. Several faculty members at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, including Bruce Ware, Thomas Schrenier, Greg Allison, and Steve Wellum, came to their positions of service from northern evangelical Calvinism rather than from within the Southern Baptist Convention.

#### AREAS OF FURTHER DISCUSSION

First, the broader and antecedently prior question “What explains the loss of Baptist identity?” needs further discussion. Neither a single answer nor simplistic answers provide a proper response to this important question. The causal factors of the loss of Baptist identify are multiplex including cultural factors, generational factors, neglect of doctrinal teaching, and influences from other denominations. I personally believe that experience-driven charismatic influences outweigh Presbyterian influences as a factor in the loss of Baptist identity. One must evaluate Dr. Lemke’s focused answer in the light of this broader question. In one sense, he argues that some form or forms of Baptist Calvinism accounts for the Baptist identity crisis. On the other hand, he explicitly claims that Calvinism in the SBC is a *tertium quid*—neither properly Calvinists nor truly Baptist since some varieties of Calvinism modifies Baptist identity at numerous points.

Second, I hope Dr. Lemke explains the meaning of this statement, “Irenic Calvinists are Calvinistic in their doctrine, especially regarding some aspects of Calvinistic soteriology, but they do not share a Calvinistic missiology.” What is a Calvinistic missiology? With whom do Irenic Calvinists not share this Calvinist missiology? Is it appropriate to unite Calvinistic theology and Calvinistic missiology? What is the wedge that divides Calvinistic theology and Calvinistic missiology? Historically, Particular Baptists, such as William Carey, Adoniram Judson, and Luther Rice, birthed the modern missions movement. Is the phrase

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<sup>7</sup>R. B. C. Howell, James Pendleton, and J. R. Graves denied the doctrine of active reprobation, defined election in a manner consistent with human responsibility, and affirmed an Almyraldian type understanding of the atonement. See C. Michael Wren, Jr., “R. B. C. Howell and the Philadelphia Confession: A Modification of Early Baptist Calvinism,” a paper presented at the Southeastern Regional Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in March 2007 at the Baptist College of Florida.; James M. Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines: A Compendium of Theology*. (Valley Forge.: Judson Press, 1878), 103, 105, 107, 242; J. R. Graves, *The Work of Christ in the Covenant of Redemption: Developed in Seven Dispensations* (Memphis: Baptist Book House, 1883): 95-108.

“Calvinistic missiology” a descriptive label based on the statistical data regarding baptisms, worship attendance, and membership patterns New Orleans Baptist Seminary compiled regarding Founder’s Movement Calvinists? If I am correct, perhaps the phrase “Founder’s Movement missiology” functions as a more appropriate term without impugning the missiological theology and practice of Calvinist Baptists in general.

Third, I hope Dr. Lemke explains his methodology of comparing and contrasting The Baptist Faith and Message, Westminster Confession, and the Together for the Gospel Statement. First, the Baptist Faith and Message and Westminster Confession are comprehensive confessional statements formally adopted by denominational groups; in this case the SBC and the PCA. The Together for the Gospel Statement is neither comprehensive nor denominational. Second, only four individuals signed the Together for the Gospel Statement: Ligon Duncan, C. J. Mahaney, Mark Dever, and Al Mohler. (All four men serve on the Board of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals and are involved in the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood.) Would Dr. Lemke’s improve his theological comparison if he included the doctrinal statement of Mars Hill Community Church? Why does he not identify someone in the Irenic Calvinist category and use a representative doctrinal statement for purposes of his comparison?

Fourth, I hope Dr. Lemke’s equating of Baptists as semi-Augustinian semi-Pelagian engenders deeper conversation. Justo González denies the usefulness of the term semi-Pelagian: “Indeed, the so-called semi-Pelagians were in truth ‘semi-Augustinians’”<sup>8</sup> In his recent book on *Arminian Theology*, Roger Olson, professor of theology at George Truett Theological Seminary, recognized the validity of the term and he labeled semi-Pelagianism a heresy. Olson defines semi-Pelagianism as a teaching that “embraces a modified version of original sin but believes that humans have the ability, even in their natural or fallen state, to initiate salvation by exercising a good will toward God.”<sup>9</sup> Olson decries the term semi-Pelagianism that Lemke advocates. I fear that true semi-Pelagianism shapes the practical

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<sup>8</sup>Justo González, *A History of Christian Thought: From Augustine to the Eve of the Reformation*, Vol. 2, revised edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 57. Gerald Bonner concurs: “Although commonly called semi-Pelagians [they] would be better termed semi-Augustinians.” Gerald Bonner, “Pelagianism,” in *Dictionary of Historical Theology*, ed Trevor A. Hart (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 424. Dropping “semi-Pelagian” from the Baptist equation serves a practical purpose. New Orleans Semi-Augustinian Theological Seminary is a shorter name than New Orleans Semi Augustinian Semi Pelagian Theological Seminary! Further, *Mere Semi-Augustinian* serves as a better title for Dr. Lemke’s next book.

<sup>9</sup>Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 17-18. Olson regards semi-Pelagianism as humanistic synergism. In distinction, he calls Arminianism evangelical synergism. Olson concurs with Rebecca Weaver’s analysis of Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism. Yet, based on Weaver’s book, Dr. Lemke embraces the term semi-Pelagianism. In contrast, based on the same analysis, Olson labels semi-Pelagianism heretical. Further, Olson attempts his own architectonics of Arminianism: “Arminianism of the heart” and “Arminianism of the head.” “Arminianism of the heart” is the theological heir of Jacob Arminius, while “Arminianism of the head” is the theological heir of semi-Pelagianism and the Enlightenment.

theology of many contemporary Baptists who assume they make a decision towards God without the prior activity of God's grace in their lives, whether one understands God's grace in an Arminian or Calvinistic sense.

The Reformation divide between the Remonstrants and Dortians was not between Augustinianism and Pelagianism. As Timothy George correctly noted this debate was an “intra-Reformed” debate.<sup>10</sup> The Remonstrant-Dortian battle was between Augustinians and semi-Augustinians. Evangelical Arminianism exemplifies semi-Augustinianism! Non-Calvinist Baptists, therefore, can stop short of an affirmation of semi-Pelagianism in their rejection of Calvinistic theology.

#### PERSONAL POINTS OF DISAGREEMENT

First, I disagree with Dr. Lemke’s understanding of Dr. Timothy George’s ROSES acronym. In his exposition of Radical Depravity, Dr. Lemke wrote, “Compared with total depravity, *radical depravity* agrees that every aspect of our being was damaged through the Fall and we can do nothing to save ourselves, but affirms that humans are not totally evil because we retain the image of God despite our fallenness” (p. 9). This statement implies that total depravity necessitates the loss of the image of God. Calvinists theologians affirming total depravity also affirm the retention of the image of God after the fall, albeit the image marred by the fall but renewed in Christ.

Further, Dr. Lemke misstates Dr. George’s view on election. Lemke wrote, “In contrast to the double predestination of unconditional election, God sovereignly elects those whom He foreknows will respond to Him.” According to several Calvinist theologians, unconditional election does not entail the acceptance of double predestination. Actually, Dr. George affirms unconditional election but he denies double predestination. In his discussion of double predestination, Dr. George asked, “Does God elect some for salvation and others for damnation *in the same way*?<sup>11</sup> Dr. George understands election to salvation as God’s active choice, but he qualifies reprobation as passive or God “passing them by.” Therefore, election to salvation and reprobation are not “in the same way.”

Moreover, Dr. George affirms election in terms of God’s foreknowledge of the fall of man. In contrast, the Dutch Remonstrants affirmed election based on simple foreknowledge of human response: “That God determined, by an eternal and unchangeable purpose in Jesus Christ his Son, before the foundations of the world were laid, determined to save, out of the human race which had fallen into sin, in Christ, for Christ’s sake, and

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<sup>10</sup>Timothy George, *Amazing Grace: God’s Initiative – Our Response* (Nashville: Lifeway, 2000), 60.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 76. Italics mine.

through Christ, those who through the grace of the Holy Spirit shall believe”<sup>12</sup> The Remonstrants affirmed that faith functioned as the pre-condition of election. Dr. George denies that election rules out a genuine human response, but I do not believe that Dr. George defines election as based on simple foreknowledge of human response as did the Remonstrants: “Election is unconditional in the sense that it is not based upon our decision for God, but rather God’s decision for us.”<sup>13</sup>

Second, in my opinion Dr. Lemke misunderstands and even misrepresents the theological triage of Dr. Albert Mohler. Using the analogy of a medical triage, Dr. Mohler identified three orders of theological priorities. First-order theological issues are the theologically urgent central doctrines. First-order theological issues include “the Trinity, the full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, justification by faith, and the authority of Scripture.” Mohler identifies the meaning and mode of baptism as a second-order theological issue. Second-order theological issues create boundaries between denominations. Thus, believer’s baptism by immersion functions as a denominational boundary or a Baptist distinctive. Dr. Mohler wrote, “Standing together on the first-order doctrines, Baptists and Presbyterians eagerly recognize each other as believing Christians, but recognize that disagreement on issues of this importance will prevent fellowship within the same congregation or denomination.” For Dr. Mohler, eschatology is an example of a third-order theological issue in which members of the same local congregation (or theological institution within the same denomination) may disagree.<sup>14</sup>

Dr. Lemke chastises Dr. Mohler for locating baptism as a second-order theological issue. For Dr. Lemke the doctrine of salvation is an essential belief that Baptists should place among the first-order issues. He claimed that the issue regarding the meaning and mode of believer’s baptism is the doctrine of salvation. For Dr. Lemke classifying baptism as a second-order theological issue compromises the soteriological issue. In biblical teaching, baptism is not salvific; rather baptism is a dramatic portrayal of the Gospel of salvation. I fail to see how placing baptism among the second-order theological doctrines compromises soteriology. Dr. Lemke’s theology of baptism does not differ from Dr. Mohler’s theology of baptism; therefore, where is the soteriological compromise?

Dr. Lemke asked two questions of Dr. Mohler regarding Presbyterian infant baptism. Dr. Lemke prefaced his questions with the following comment. “The issue at stake is whether Baptists would recognize Presbyterians infants as saved *on the basis* of their infant baptism” (italics mine). No Southern Baptist would recognize a person as saved *on the basis* of baptism, either infant baptism or believer’s baptism. The Westminster Confession does

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<sup>12</sup>“The Remonstrance, or The Arminian Articles, 1610,” in *Creeds & Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, vol. 2, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 549.

<sup>13</sup>George, 75.

<sup>14</sup>Albert Mohler, “A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Ministry,” *Commentary* (20 May 2004); available online at [http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary\\_pring.php?cdate=2004-4-20](http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary_pring.php?cdate=2004-4-20).

not necessarily regard baptized infants as regenerate: “Grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it [baptism] as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it, or that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.”<sup>15</sup>

Dr. Lemke frames his first question as follows: “Do any of Mohler’s ‘essentials’ rule out declaring that a Presbyterian infant who has been sprinkled is *saved* (or, for that matter, that the infant was *lost* before the age of accountability)?” Dr. Lemke attempts to impale Dr. Mohler on the horns of a false dilemma. No doubt, Dr. Mohler affirms the infant child of a Presbyterian family that dies in infancy as saved. The basis of the infant’s salvation, however, is neither infant baptism nor Presbyterian heritage. “When it comes to those incapable of volitional, willful acts of sin, we can rest assured God will, indeed, do right. Precious little ones are the objects of His saving mercy and grace.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, Dr. Lemke fails to impale Dr. Mohler on this false dilemma.

Dr. Mohler affirms the doctrine of the age of accountability as strongly as Dr. Lemke. Dr. Mohler’s understanding of the doctrine of the age of accountability provides the answer for Dr. Lemke’s question in the case of an infant who has not died. In his exposition of the *Abstract of Principles*, Dr. Mohler affirmed the relation between transgression and moral accountability: “Born under the curse of their primal parents, all human beings commit actual transgressions—truly all have sinned—as soon as they are capable of moral action.”<sup>17</sup> Because infants are incapable of moral action, Dr. Mohler would not condemn an infant child of a Presbyterian, a Baptist, a Muslim, or a secularist to a position of separation from God until they reach the stage of moral accountability. Dr. Mohler affirms the Baptist Faith and Message. An individual is not under condemnation from God until they are capable of moral action and transgress God’s law.<sup>18</sup>

Second, given Mohler’s theological triage, Dr. Lemke asked, “If Mohler’s ‘essentials’ were applied literally, could not these guidelines imply that we should not recognize as a Christian a fervent, mature Pentecostal Christian who affirms Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord but has a defective view of the Trinity, while we would ‘eagerly recognize’ a sprinkled Presbyterian infant as a Christian?” I will split my response to this two-part question. Since Dr. Lemke addresses his question to Dr. Mohler, my response is an attempt to state the issues, as I believe Dr. Mohler would. Please understand that I do not know Dr. Mohler; therefore, my response, at best, is based on my understanding of the coherence of his theology. I am the responsible part for any misrepresentation of Dr. Mohler’s theology.

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<sup>15</sup> Westminster Confession, Article 28.5.

<sup>16</sup> R. Albert Mohler, Jr. and Daniel L. Akin, “Why We Believe Children Who Die Go to Heaven,” available online at <http://www.sebts.edu/president/resources/viewFile.cfm?DocumentID=422>.

<sup>17</sup> R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “A Brief Affirmation and Interpretation of the Abstract of Principles of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary,” (February 1993), 12.

<sup>18</sup> Baptist Faith and Message, Article III.

In my opinion, Dr. Mohler would not recognize an Oneness-Pentecostal as a Christian brother. He wrote in his commentary on theological triage, “These first-order doctrines represent the most fundamental truths of the Christian faith, and a denial of these doctrines [as the Oneness rejection of the Trinity] represents nothing less than an eventual denial of Christianity itself.” I conclude, therefore, that Dr. Mohler would not recognize an Oneness Pentecostal as a brother because a denial of the Trinity is a denial of Christianity. Further, I believe that Dr. Mohler would apply Leibniz’s “Law of the Indiscernability of Identicals” to this issue. For example, Dr. Lemke and the provost of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary are identical, if and only if, they share the same properties and nature. If a proposition accurately expresses a truth regarding the provost of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and the proposition is not true of Dr. Lemke, then Dr. Lemke is not the provost of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Since Baptists affirm the Trinitarian nature of God and Oneness Pentecostals deny the Trinitarian nature, I believe that Dr. Mohler would deny that Baptists and Oneness Pentecostals worship the same God.

Dr. Lemke, how would you answer your own question, “Would you recognize as a Christian a fervent, mature Pentecostal Christian who affirms Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord but has a defective view of the Trinity?” I ask this honest question because I do not know how you would answer.

The language of “eagerly recognize” in the second part of the question mimics Dr. Mohler’s language. “Standing together on the first-order doctrines, Baptists and Presbyterians eagerly recognize each other as *believing Christians*.” Dr. Lemke transforms Dr. Mohler’s language. He borrows the phrase “eagerly recognize” but deletes the essential adjective “believing.” (So much for essentials!) The context of Dr. Mohler’s language provides the proper form of the question, “would we ‘eagerly recognize’ a sprinkled Presbyterian infant as a *believing Christian*? ” No, Baptists would not recognize the infant as a believing Christian, but neither would Presbyterians. Charles Hodge wrote of infant baptism, “The difficulty of this subject is that baptism from its very nature involves a profession of faith; it is the way in which by the ordinance of Christ, He is to be confessed before men; but infants are incapable of making such confession; therefore, they are not the proper subjects of baptism.”<sup>19</sup> Presbyterian theologians, as exemplified by Hodge and Berkhof, do not recognize, let alone “eagerly recognize”, a sprinkled Presbyterian infant as a

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<sup>19</sup>Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribner and Co., 1871), 546. Dr. Hodge defends infant baptism on the grounds of the nature of the church, not on basis of the faith of the infant. Likewise, Louis Berkhof denies that infants possess active faith; hence, one may not ascribe the term “believing Christians” to infants. Dr. Berkhof wrote, “Now it is perfectly true that the Bible points to faith as a prerequisite for baptism, Mark 16:16; Acts 10:44-48; 16: 14, 15, 31, 34. If this means that the recipient of baptism must *in all cases* give manifestations of an active faith before baptism, then children are naturally excluded. But though the Bible clearly indicates that only those adults who believed were baptized, it nowhere lays down the rule that an active faith is absolutely essential for the reception of baptism.” Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1949), 637. Dr. Berkhof argues that the absence of evidence is evidence. He does not argue that infants possess faith.

believing Christian. Why, then, ask a Baptist theologian if he would recognize a sprinkled Presbyterian infant as a believer?<sup>20</sup>

Dr. Lemke refers to my public response during the panel discussion after his oral presentation of the paper in footnote 78. I remain convinced that “justification by faith” is sufficient for Baptists to deal with the type of questions Dr. Lemke raised about infant baptism. A Presbyterian from another generation, Louis Berkhof commented on the connection between justification and faith, “The preposition *dia* [*dia pisteos* in Rom. 3:25; Gal. 2:16] stresses the fact that faith is the instrument by which we appropriate Christ and His righteousness. The preposition *ek* [Rom. 3:30; 5:1] indicates that faith logically precedes our personal justification, so that this, as it were originates in faith.”<sup>21</sup> Presbyterians affirm that faith precedes justification, deny that a sprinkled infants possess faith, yet “We affirm justification by faith alone is both essential and central to the Gospel. We deny that any teaching that minimizes, denies, or confuses justification by faith alone can be considered true to the Gospel”<sup>22</sup> Baptists are not responsible for the dilemma Presbyterians encounter. Do I think that they minimize justification by faith in terms of infant baptism that ingrafts the infant into Christ? Yes. This dilemma should function as a further source for Dr. Lemke’s *shadenfreude*.

Moreover, the International Mission Board operates on the theological triage model for global partnerships. The International Mission Board recognizes that the world evangelization task is larger than Southern Baptists, or even Baptists. The IMB developed a new paradigm in light of spiritual needs and our inadequacy. “Out of a new question [what is it going to take?], missionaries have come to see their need for a broader community of evangelical colleagues.”<sup>23</sup> The International Mission Board has established five levels of relationships with non-IMB entities, a partnering triage, to continue Dr. Mohler’s analogy. Level One allows partnerships to serve the purpose of gaining access to a people group. Level Two partners include prayer ministry, partnerships with Catholics and even secular

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<sup>20</sup>Some older Calvinistic theologians, both Presbyterians and Baptists, affirmed an interval of time between regeneration and conversion. Berkhof wrote, “In the case of those regenerated in infancy, there is necessarily a temporal separation of the two [regeneration and conversion], but in the case of those who are regenerated after they have come to years of discretion, the two generally coincide.” Berkhof, 491. James Boyce also affirmed an “appreciable interval” between regeneration and conversion. James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, reprint edition (Handord, CA: den Dulk Christian Foundation, n. d.), 381. In Berkhof’s and Boyce’s theology, then, an infant, or adult, may be regenerated but not converted. In the article on justification by faith, *The Together for the Gospel* statement denies a separation between regeneration and conversion. “We further deny that any teaching that separates regeneration and faith is a true rendering of the Gospel.” Article XII.

<sup>21</sup>Berkhof, 520.

<sup>22</sup>*Together for the Gospel*, Article XII.

<sup>23</sup>*Something New Under the Sun: Strategic Directions at the International Mission Board* (Richmond: Office of Overseas Operations, 1999), 27.

agencies, such as the International Red Cross and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, for meeting human needs. Level Three permits partnerships with Great Commission Christians to present the gospel. Level Three partnership groups include local non-Baptist churches, TransWorld Radio, or Campus Crusade for Christ. Level Three partners ascribe to Mohler's first-order theological doctrines: Trinity, full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, justification by faith, and authority of Scripture. At Level Four (church planting) and Level Five (theological education and mission-sending structures), IMB personnel collaborate only with baptistic churches (level 4) or Baptist churches (level 5). In Levels Four and Five, then partners affirm both first-level and second-levels of the theological triage. Level Four, then, rules out involvement with groups, like Presbyterians, that do not advocate believer's baptism. The elevation of baptism to a first-order doctrine logically entails the abandonment of Level Three partnerships with para-church groups and non-immersion evangelicals to present the Gospel.

If Baptists place baptism among the first-order theological issues, with whom can we do the work of evangelism except a fellow Baptist? We certainly would not share evangelism partnerships with anti-Trinitarians or groups that deny the deity or humanity of Jesus. If baptism is elevated to a first-order theological issue, then the practical consequences limit evangelism partnerships to fellow Baptists. On what basis could one allow an exception for evangelism partnerships with paedobaptists but not with anti-Trinitarians?

Frankly, Dr. Lemke's unfair assessment of Dr. Mohler's theological triage perplexes me. I can only reach one conclusion. Dr. Lemke commits the informal fallacy of guilt by association. The Jewish leaders who opposed Jesus committed this fallacy: "He eats with sinners; therefore, he must be a sinner." Dr. Al Mohler fellowships with Presbyterians, therefore, he must be compromising Baptist distinctives.<sup>24</sup>

#### SHALL (CAN) WE GATHER AT THE RIVER?

I agree with Dr. Lemke that Baptists suffer from an identity crisis. This malaise originates in Baptist pulpits, and perhaps, reaches the status of a pandemic infecting large numbers of Southern Baptists. Moreover, I heartily concur with Dr. Lemke's conclusion. "Let Baptists be Baptists by conviction, and let Presbyterians be Presbyterians by conviction. May we be unified as witnesses to Christ for the glory of God, and one in the Spirit in our affirmation of Jesus as Lord, but also people of integrity who do not comprise our doctrinal convictions." In contrast to Dr. Lemke, I respectfully disagree that locating baptism as a second-order issue in a theological triage compromises Baptist doctrinal convictions.

My areas of disagreement with Dr. Lemke focused on his discussions related to the positions of Dr. Timothy George and Dr. Al Mohler. I hope I have faithfully represented

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<sup>24</sup>Based on the use of this fallacy, I can call and raise the ante. Richard Neuhaus and Peter Kreeft spoke in chapel during the same week at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Dr. Akin hangs with Catholics, therefore, Dr. Akin must be a Catholic. This is not a criticism of Daniel Akin; it is a further illustration of this fallacy. I confess that I enjoyed listening to the podcast of Peter Kreeft's address, "Will There Be Sex in Heaven?"

the positions of these two Baptist leaders. As well, I hope I understand Dr. Lemke's viewpoints accurately and fairly represented his position. Misrepresentation of the positions of our fellow Baptists will not solve our Baptist identity crisis. The issues Dr. Lemke raised concerning the viewpoints of Dr. George and Dr. Mohler have nothing to do with whether one is a Calvinistic Baptist or a non-Calvinistic Baptist. The issue is, "Did Dr. Lemke correctly and fairly represent the views of Dr. George and Dr. Mohler?" In my opinion, he failed to engage accurately their positions.

Baptists and Presbyterians can collaborate to communicate the Good News. Baptists and Presbyterians cannot gather at the river of baptism; after all, Presbyterians do not need a river. A more important question is, "Can Baptists gather at the river?" Specifically, can Calvinist Baptists and non-Calvinist Baptists gather at the river? At times, I am pessimistic about the possibility. If we cannot unite on the issue of baptism, what hope exists for Southern Baptists? In my opinion, the proliferation of Baptist identify conferences provides some measure of hope, although they do bring to light numerous tensions within Southern Baptist life.

In light of Dr. Lemke's paper, I do have a proposal for unity within the Baptist family. The Ohio River flows into the Mississippi. Yes, Louisville influences New Orleans. *Can we gather at the river? Shall we as Baptists gather at the river in New Orleans?*

I propose that we do evangelism together and conclude our campaign with a baptismal celebration in the Mississippi River conducted under the authority of local churches. Dr. Mohler could travel downstream. Dr. George may need to portage a short distance to the Tombigbee River, but eventually, even he could arrive in New Orleans. Dr. Mohler, Dr. George, and Dr. Lemke could unite in a baptism service in the Mississippi River. I believe that Dr. George would gladly baptize individuals God elected unconditionally yet who genuinely responded to the gospel. What a day that would be! I believe that Dr. Mohler would gladly immerse new believers as well as Presbyterians converting to the Baptist denomination. What a day that would be! I believe that Dr. Lemke would experience *shadenfreude* as he immerses repentant semi-Pelagians who formerly thought they made a decision for Christ unaided by God's prior gracious activity in their life. (Yes, non-Calvinistic Baptists solidly affirm the prior necessity of God's grace to enable a person to make a personal decision for Christ.) What a day that would be!

I am a theological nobody from the theological backwaters of the Southern Baptist Convention. I humbly, therefore, beseech my brothers. Let us gather at the river of baptism!