Transformed by the Spirit: Imagining God's Future

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INTRODUCTION

The American Baptist Transformed by the Spirit initiative sets out to engage local churches in making “adaptive-changes” in discerning God’s calling on the present and joining in the new thing that God is and will be doing. Obviously, the success of this initiative (perhaps the success of the American Baptist Churches overall) depends on the active participation of churches in this initiative, but even more so on their participation in God’s declared future. This essay examines the argument by James Wm. McClendon, Jr. (1924-2000) that faith communities must attend to Christianity’s formative eschatological images, and argues that by actively attending to these images, church communities can imagine themselves and the world differently in light of God’s future; they can live eschatology.1 McClendon’s trioptic baptist vision firmly roots present churches not only in the history of what God has already done, but also in the future of what God will yet do: the images of which are “true, glinting, dancing, awesome, God-given visions that, collected, constitute promise and warning to God’s people.”2 McClendon helps the church see not only its need for biblical literacy (a stated goal of the initiative), but also how to be biblically literate. In order to live by the Bible’s eschatological images that picture God’s future and God’s calling on the present, Baptist congregations must critically reflect on and contextualize those images in their ongoing faith narratives. In other words, they must be theologizing communities. In being theologizing communities, churches actively participate in the Spirit’s work of transformation.

SEEING DIFFERENTLY: “THEN IS NOW”

McClendon, through his trioptic baptist vision, internally relates the present church to God’s future.3 In Ethics, the first of his three-volume systematic theology series (originally published in 1986), McClendon sets out to identify a distinctively baptist vision for theology, a vision that is not contrived but one that is already present in practice in baptist communities. He defines this trioptic vision, this “guiding pattern by which [baptists] . . . shape their thought and practice,” with the two concepts of “this is that” and “then is now.”4 McClendon argues that this trioptic vision (which unites the present church in community with the church of the past and with the church of the future) is a distinctively baptist hermeneutic. He argues that it is because Baptists hold to the hermeneutical practice of understanding ourselves as “the primitive community and the eschatological community” that “uptake” of the biblical story is possible at all.5 That is, the church today can understand the intentions and meaning of Scripture because it is the same church in which the Scriptures were written, the same church by virtue of shared practices with the early church. Additionally, both “this is that” and “then is now” rely upon a foreshortened understanding of time; thus, “this is that” is not an authoritative concept of apostolic succession but is rather the church’s understanding itself as directly addressed by the ancient words of Scripture.6 While both concepts (“this is that” and “then is now”) function together, this essay is primarily concerned with McClendon’s “then is now:” the understanding of the present church as the eschatological church and of the confrontation between God’s future and the church’s present.7 In light of “then is now,” the church only gains “correct perspective” on its present because of its ongoing relationship with the God of history who is doing new things.8 McClendon’s entire body of work is set on showing how theology is necessarily a practice of the church, and with his trioptic baptist vision, he effectively develops a hermeneutical method with which to argue that how the church interprets the Scriptures is “strongly linked” to how the church interprets itself as part of the trans-temporal body of Christ.9 Thus, the church’s understanding of itself in relation to God’s future, and the church’s practice of biblical interpretation and literacy are intrinsically related: the church will understand God’s future by understanding the
visions of that future found in the biblical texts and by practicing those visions in its present.

In *Doctrine*, the second volume of his *Systematic Theology*, McClendon examines what the church must teach in order to be the church, beginning his doctrinal discussion with eschatology rather than the expected prolegomena (which he does not engage until the third volume of his systematic theology, *Witness*). McClendon approaches eschatology as “picture thinking,” in which he engages various biblical and historical pictures of God’s eschatological rule to argue that eschatology is both an image of the end as well as a directive for the present; it is concerned with “what lasts and with what comes last.” Earlier, McClendon had engaged a similar concept in his 1986 reflection on the fundamentalist takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention, when he argued that both the “traditionalists” and the “moderates” had labored under erroneous “cover stories,” that is, “unnoticed stories” or formative images that must be brought to light and “brought under the schooling of the determinative narrative of Jesus Christ.” This is exactly what his eschatology seeks to do: to illuminate biblical images by which false “cover stories” can be exposed and by which the church’s present can be configured in light of the “end picture” of God’s coming rule—when God will be God. This “end picture” of God’s final rule is the governing image for each of the eschatological pictures McClendon engages. In this way, this is a living eschatology that is not only tested in the lives of the community members, but that also configures the community members’ present practices as a means of living “for the day when, beyond all depicting, the reality [the images] depict is complete.”

McClendon argues that the church errs in amalgamating the diverse eschatological images found in the Scriptures—for instance, images of Jesus returning, of believers rising to meet him in the air, of the separation of the sheep and the goats—and argues that the church must instead allow each of the pictures to speak prophetically of its own “unsettling visions.” Among other pictures, McClendon specifically interacts with the “diverse pictures” of the last judgment (1 John 4:17; Heb. 9:27; Jude 6; Matt. 25:31-46), of Jesus returning (John 6:39; Acts 1:11; Matt. 24:6), of resurrection (1 Cor. 15). These diverse pictures do not stand isolated or on their own; rather, they connect with the life of the seer in that they shape the seer’s present experience; they have “recognizable life consequences.” Because of the diversity of the eschatological pictures found in Scripture, and because of the connections that these pictures have outside of themselves, each eschatological picture must be allowed to declare its own connections and to make its own demands—the pictures do not serve the church by answering its questions, but instead shape the church by questioning its questions. The pictures of the end speak prophetically into the life of the church, confronting the church’s own story with new stories of the coming kingdom of God and through that confrontation changing the church’s present. For this reason, McClendon argues, the pictures themselves must be present before the church: “this gallery of pictures is not optional.” Faith communities simply must read, see and wrestle with the images of God’s future that are found in Scriptures. Additionally, this “picture gallery” must be interpreted as part of God’s history in Christ, it must be interpreted though the “master picture” of the Lamb who was slain (Rev. 5:11-14). The ways in which these eschatological pictures shape the lives of believers, and the ways in which eschatological faith prophetically manifests itself against world powers, are ultimately determined by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The following foray into a key philosophical influence on McClendon’s eschatology will prove helpful in illuminating the profound theological shift that McClendon was working towards. McClendon’s “picture thinking” eschatology is heavily dependent upon Ludwig Wittgenstein’s (1889-1951) work on aspect-perception. Ray Monk, in his biography on Wittgenstein, argued that Wittgenstein’s “aim is to change the aspect under which certain things are seen.” Throughout his career, Wittgenstein labored to shift the entire picture through which philosophers saw language—away from a static, propositional picture to a “moving picture” of language as internally connected to the social group in which it was used. He worked to force philosophers to look at how language was actually used in the world by putting before their eyes his infamous “language games.” For example, he was concerned with tightly defined instances of language use in which language and its context are inseparable. He argued that the new picture that arose of how language functioned and meant was not merely theoretical but was actually formative and livable. Additionally, Wittgenstein labored to shift the way that philosophers understood aspect-perception itself (such as the way that one looks at and interprets the world). In his posthumously published *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein sought to redirect philosophers away from internalized, psychological understandings of “seeing the aspect” to an understanding of aspect seeing that was holistically social. To accomplish this, he put before his readers numerous images, one of which is Jastrow’s infamous duck-rabbit (pictured here), in order to reshape the concept of aspect perception by pointing his readers to the numerous connections between their perceptions of the world (exemplified in this image) and their living in physical and social communities. The aspect of any given thing is the
understanding of how that thing fits into the world around it, which is a skill that is learned in community because it necessitates a conceptual framework, given by one’s social communities, that allows the seer to perceive reality at all. In opposition to the epistemological individualism of his day, Wittgenstein argued that, while the “imagination of the individual” is important to aspect, the culturally acquired collective imagination is necessary as well. That is, to judge the aesthetic of music or art—to judge what is good music or art—requires that people acquire the skills and perspectives to do so from their own social communities, for judging something as “true or false” is only possible within one’s social context. Similarly, to judge whether any particular understanding of God’s future is viable or not is to judge it so from within a shared ecclesial context that “teaches us to judge like this.” In short, perceiving God’s future is the task of aspect-forming communities. The church perceives God’s future not primarily as individual followers, but as communities of followers that live in ways that build in it the abilities required to see and interpret the images that reveal that future.

Just as Wittgenstein argued that present forms of life are not accidental to understanding the meaning of language and the world, so too are present forms of life indispensable for gaining abilities to use language meaningfully and to live in the world. Wittgenstein rejected his contemporaries’ philosophical priority reversal, in which everyday life was considered “accidental and inessential,” and he challenged philosophers to move beyond their futile search for the perfect proposition and to attend to “life itself.” Wittgenstein wanted philosophers to cease pondering how the proposition “the cat is on the mat” (one example) referenced reality and to begin noticing how actual people in complex communities used language in the everyday to reference reality. At the beginning of his Philosophical Investigations, Wittgenstein rejected Augustine’s representation of a common account of childhood language acquisition, wherein Augustine imagined the pre-verbal child with complete linguistic abilities, only lacking vocabulary (which subsequently was given by their caretakers). In place of this picture of childhood language acquisition, Wittgenstein insisted that socialization in communities necessarily comes prior to any linguistic (and rational) abilities, and in fact grants those abilities. For example, people learn language in its totality because they are part of linguistic communities. Thus, a child does not just have the word “chair” plugged into a pre-verbal concept of “chair,” but rather gains the entire concept of chair by living in communities that use chairs and name them. In the same way, the knowledge necessary to see and say that the duck-rabbit is a rabbit or a duck is knowledge that is learned through experience, is learned from others, and shows itself in the speaker’s actions (such as appropriately exclaiming, “It’s a duck!”): aspect-knowing is a communal activity and shows itself in a person’s abilities to speak and live in a particular community. Wittgenstein worked tirelessly in his lectures and writings to show that the only beginning point for philosophy is “in the middle of a particular, concrete community,” for it is within particular communities with shared language that persons learn to speak, to think, to reason, and so on.

In his own method of internally relating theological language to practicing church communities, and particularly in his eschatology, McClendon takes Wittgenstein’s work seriously by drawing on it to argue that churches gain theological aspect-perception by their living in God’s ongoing narrative. McClendon’s early volume, Biography as Theology, helped to set this trajectory with his Wittgensteinian insistence that “the truth of faith is made good in the living of it or not at all,” and with his demand that churches and theologians must look to the specifics of how faith is made good: primarily to the faith biographies of their community members. No doctrine can be a theological starting point; the only starting point available to theologians and/or churches is in learning the Christian story by living it. Therefore, in order for eschatology or any doctrine to be relevant to the lives of the faithful, it must “enter into the actual shape of the lives of the people in its community of concern,” and one way in which it does so is in attending to its own community witnesses. In Biography, McClendon turned to faith biography in order to avoid the faults of both the fallacious “tradition-free” tradition and the overly subjective autobiographical tradition, initiating a new theological starting point by beginning with the church’s practice/narrative rather than theory or personal experience. McClendon insisted that theologians must not primarily concern themselves with theological propositions per se but, rather, with “propositions by which folk live”; to understand the church teaching is to understand the church living. He insisted that, by paying attention to specific witnesses in the community, the church can know “what in doctrine must be stressed, and what may . . . be laid aside.” That is, doctrine (and in this case eschatology) both shapes and is shaped by the communities who make faith good by living it, and is an ongoing task. McClendon shows that the images provided by faith biographies have the power to cause aspect-change because “they help us to discover in the vision of our subjects that which may have escaped our own vision.” With the incorporation of biography as theology, McClendon does not elevate the life of the community over the authority of Scriptures but, rather, locates the life of the Scriptures in the practices of the church while maintaining that the Scriptures hold the church accountable. The doing of
theology must be responsive and responsible to the church’s witnesses (those whose faith biographies cause aspect-change), taking theological forms that are “adequate to lives such as these.” Wittgenstein insisted that philosophers must pay attention to the ways in which communities actually use words; McClendon echoes this in his argument that theologians must pay attention to how people of faith actually live theology.

This theological turn to the community comes to light in McClendon’s insistence on the self-involving and communal nature of theology, which he first highlights in *Ethics* with his argument that theology is not only perspectival, but also necessarily proceeds from and returns to the community “which stands in the biblical line” (such as “then is now” and “this is that”). In *Ethics*, he turns the theologian not only towards the community but towards the practicing community with his argument that the church can only “see what we mean by ‘truth’” from within the context of its communal narratives. In short, the ways in which the church lives out its faith together, while certainly not always ideal, are the practices that build in the aspect with which it knows, means, speaks, and ultimately lives its theology. The church can perceive and know God’s future because by the power of the Spirit it lives God’s future. But, this necessitates thoughtful and critical appraisals of its faith practices—for practices can be corrupt, and can then corrupt perception of God’s future. For this reason, if the church’s understanding of God’s future is to mature or reach greater clarity, then the ways that it practices its faith together must mature as well—practice and perception of God’s future are inseparable.

McClendon’s entire theological method, from his earlier writings *Biography* and *Convictions*, is intent on discovering, understanding, interpreting and transforming “the convictions of a convivial community.” One essential aspect of this exploratory method is the confrontation between the narrative of Scriptures and the narratives of the practicing community. McClendon urges the church to immerse itself in the study of Scripture, and argues that the baptist way of reading the Scriptures has been to attend to both its plain sense (understanding the stories as real) and its spiritual sense (appropriating the stories). Combined, this is the understanding that the biblical texts as they are read by the community still speak into and confront the present church. The biblical texts are not, however, subject to the community and its ways of reading but are the given “objective” reality that subjects the community to a narrative greater than its own; it “challenges, corrects, and sometimes flatly defeats the tales we tell ourselves about ourselves.” Unlike earlier flat biblicist arguments over biblical inspiration, in McClendon’s plain and spiritual senses the present community is essential to the biblical narrative and its meaning. Not only is the present church the same community as that of the early church (recall, “this is that” and “then is now”), but it is the place in which the fullness of the text is made known. Simply put, there is no revelation without a community to receive it. The community, through its life together and its study of Scriptures, both reads and is read by the Scriptures and thus participates in the “great story” contained therein. McClendon’s work, following Wittgenstein’s turn to the socially-embedded nature of language, reveals that in order for faith communities to perceive God’s future—to see the new thing that God will yet do (“then is now”)—they must purposefully function as perspectival communities: as communities that practice God’s future and by that practice gain the aspect necessary to perceive that future. The community that is confronted and transformed by the biblical texts—and that practices the plain and spiritual senses of the Scriptures—is the community that has gained the skills necessary to perceive what is God’s future and what demands that future makes on the church’s present. It is in this way that faith communities actively participate in the work of the Spirit.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, let us return to the initial task of arguing for the necessary role of local churches functioning as theologizing communities that imagine themselves differently in the light of God’s future. McClendon offers a simply profound argument that God’s future, when engaged through “picture seeing,” makes demands on our present. While each eschatological picture must be allowed to speak into the church community, to make its own connections, these pictures of the end are always to be interpreted through the “master picture” of the Lamb who was slain. This means that the prophetic consequences of these pictures, that is, the ways in which they call the church to practice God’s future in its present context, will be shaped and nuanced by the reality of Jesus Christ and will be understood by communities that live by these images. Eschatology changes the pictures that the church has of the world and thus changes its ways of living in the world as the body of Christ. It is by imagining themselves differently through the images of God’s future—a task that is aided by attending to faith witnesses who have also imagined themselves by these images—and through practicing God’s future in their present that faith communities are able to see and participate in the new thing that God will yet do among them. Living into God’s future is a practice that takes practice, an active participation in the work of the Spirit.

While the practice of God’s future will necessarily take innumerable forms in ecclesial and everyday life, one very tangible way in which
baptist churches can do so is in their practice of the Lord's Supper. One image of God's future that the church simply must engage is that of the marriage feast of the Lamb found in Revelation 19:6-9, an image which invokes the persecuted saints and confers blessing upon the invited guests. Besides the obvious necessity of actually engaging and becoming familiar with this text, churches can ask themselves a few leading questions: What does it mean for the church to practice this image, so as to acquire the perspective necessary to understand it? And, simultaneously, what demands is this text making on us? With what questions does it confront us? One way that the church can practice this text is to practice the Lord's Supper as a forerunner of the wedding feast—actively incorporating the witnesses and presence of saints who have been faithful through trial and persecution. Not only is baptism history richly endowed with those witnesses, the baptism present is also as baptist churches welcome refugee Christians from Burma. By regularly and purposefully engaging in practices that correlate to this biblical image, the end picture of the Lamb in unitive celebration with those who have persevered can come into clearer focus. With further Scripture reading and practice the demands that the Spirit, through the picture, puts on the participants may very well cause congregations to shift the ways that they practice the text, and thus God's intended future.

A theologizing community, then, is a church that takes seriously its responsibility to see and perceive God’s future, and a church that participates in the work of the Spirit by actively attending to its own formative practices (for all practices are formative, whether or not they are intentional or positive). As McClendon has argued, biblical literacy is a non-negotiable aspect of a church’s ability to perceive both the truth of God's future and the truth of its own present. These images of God's future are not intended to affirm some sort of modern personal utopianism, as McClendon so rightly points out. Rather, they point the community of readers to God's future and confront whatever in the community of readers is out of sync with God's intended future. Eschatology, the study of God’s future, is inseparable from discipleship, the practice of God’s future, as McClendon’s concept of “then is now” so aptly argues. The task of increasing biblical literacy among American Baptist Churches (one of the stated goals of the Transformed by the Spirit Initiative) is vital for attaining a viable future for the ABC-USA, if the reading of Scriptures is markedly more than personal devotions or a Charles Hodge-like collection of theological “truths” or “facts.” The study of Scriptures engages the whole life of the interpretive community and the breadth of its practices. The study of Scriptures entails bringing the life of the community under the schooling of the narrative of Jesus Christ and his future coming, as well as seeing the biblical narrative through eyes that have learned to see. In this way the “cover stories” that the churches tell themselves about how they should or should not be can be challenged and transformed can be justified as viable or not, can ultimately be transformed by the Spirit, and can become part of the new thing that God will yet do among the American Baptist Churches, USA.

NOTES


3. McClendon, a former Southern Baptist, uses "little b" baptist to refer to the breadth of heirs of the radical reformation, including "big B" Baptists. Although this essay is directed at American Baptists, along with James Wm. McClendon I will be using "baptists" throughout this essay when speaking of baptists in general, and "Baptists" when speaking of American Baptists in particular.


6. McClendon, Ethics, 32. McClendon draws the phrase "this is that" from Peter's speech in Acts 2:16 where he (Peter) proclaims, "this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel." Italics in original. For his discussion on a foreshortened sense of time, see his Doctrine, 89-93.

7. Ibid., 37. Scripture confronts its readers with another world and asks if it is not in truth their world; it confronts them with another hope than their own hopes, and thus teaches readers to ask, "What wait I for? My hope is in thee" (Ps 39:7 KJV).


9. Ibid., 44. "There is a strong link between the plain sense of Scripture and the church's self-understanding as a continuation of the biblical story." Bold in original.

10. Ibid., 44, 75.


12. McClendon, Doctrine, 66.

13. Ibid., 69.

14. Ibid., 77.

15. Ibid., 92.

16. Ibid., 101.

17. Ludwig Wittgenstein was an Austrian-born professor of philosophy at Cambridge.


22. Monk, 531.
23. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1969), 94. Also, Wittgenstein asks, "could I say what a picture must be like to produce this effect? No. There are, for example, styles of painting which do not convey anything to me in this immediate way, but do to other people. I think custom and upbringing have a hand in this" in *Philosophical Investigations*, §168.
27. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §355. "Can one learn this knowledge? Yes; some can learn it. Not, however, by taking a course of study in it, but through ‘experience’—Can someone else be a man’s teacher in this? Certainly. From time to time he gives him the right tip."
30. Stanley Hauerwas and Kelly S. Johnson, "Reading McClendon Takes Practice: Lessons in the Craft of Theology," *Conrad Grebel Review* 15, no. 3 (1997). Hauerwas and Johnson make this important point: "[McClendon] does not let us start with God, for such a God cannot be other than an abstraction—even as trinity. Rather, he forces us to focus on learning the story through becoming servants to the rule of God found in Christ" (245).
32. McClendon, *Biography*, vi. "The one sort could see no horizons; the other could find no bearing." id., vii, ix.; Harvey, in "Beginning in the Middle," writes that McClendon "knows full well the futility of trying to concoct some sort of method capable of lifting us out of this time and place and allowing us to view all the kingdoms of the world in a moment" (251).
33. Ibid., 164.
34. Ibid., 80.
35. McClendon, *Ethics*, 23. "Ethics, thus has both a descriptive task and a normative one."
37. McClendon, *Doctrine*, 41. "Whenever [the Bible] speaks, its story not only supports and conserves, but challenges, corrects, and sometimes flatly defeats the tales we tell ourselves about ourselves."
39. Ibid., 70.
40. McClendon, *Ethics*, 41, 345. "What is argued for here is only the pedagogical priority of ethics, not its logical priority (none has that), certainly not the reduction of all else to ethics." (41).
41. Ibid., 2.
42. McClendon, *Doctrine*, 41.
43. Ibid., 46; "Without a community that lives to enact it, the Bible cannot convey its full message, while a Christian community without the Bible risks disintegration and chaos."
Why Baptist History Matters: Rauschenbusch and Latourette

BILL PITTS

Baptist history has mattered deeply to Baptist leaders in the past, including Baptists who have devoted their lives primarily to scholarship. This paper explores the influence of Baptist history in the lives of two significant Baptist historians—Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918) and Kenneth Scott Latourette (1884-1968). Both were Baptist historians; neither was primarily a historian of Baptists. Rauschenbusch, who was a professor at Rochester Theological Seminary, always wanted to write church history. However, his passion was Christian social justice, and after publishing his first book on the subject, he was constantly asked to address the question of the social gospel. He responded with numerous lectures and publications, and he made a powerful impact on Christian thinking about justice. Latourette was an American Baptist who devoted his life to missions. Illness in China deterred him from his life goal of service abroad. He returned to the United States where he conceived and carried out a grand plan for chronicling the history of

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the expansion of Christianity. He was a professor at Yale, and he served
the missionary effort as one of its most visible scholars and apologists.

Rauschenbusch and Latourette represent two successive generations of American Baptist scholars whose work influenced not only Baptist and non-Baptist churches but also denominational boards as well as hundreds of individuals. Although neither ever published a Baptist history, each man was nevertheless profoundly influenced by and reflected on his Baptist heritage. What did they have to say regarding why Baptist history matters? Answers to this question may be pursued by examining how they were personally shaped as Baptists, what values they especially affirmed in the Baptist tradition, and the ways in which their own original writings contributed to an enlarged view of Christianity among Baptists.

Walter Rauschenbusch: Advocate for Baptist Principles

Rauschenbusch was deeply shaped by his Baptist family and his Rochester education. His lineage was German Lutheran; his family had produced five generations of Lutheran ministers. However, his father, August Rauschenbusch, changed that tradition. August came to the United States in 1846 to minister to German immigrants in New York City. He lived with a German Baptist family, and their convictions regarding baptism caused him to devote careful study to the New Testament evidence. He became convinced that baptism was intended for the converted only and that the widespread practice of infant baptism was wrong. He was baptized by immersion in 1850. Walter later wrote, "It was a step that cost him dear; it cut his family to the quick; it completely alienated many of his friends; it rendered his entire future uncertain; but he followed the truth." Both Rochester University and Rochester Theological Seminary were established in the mid-nineteenth century. The seminary was committed to training English and German speaking students for ministry. Because he was university trained, August was invited and accepted an offer to head the German department of the seminary in 1858.

Walter attended the Baptist church regularly with his family. Following a spiritual crisis of unbelief, Rauschenbusch professed his faith and was baptized at the First German Baptist Church in Rochester on March 16, 1879, during his senior year in high school. Moreover, Rauschenbusch wrote, "Very soon the idea came to me that I ought to be a preacher and help to save souls."

August set a high standard of education for his students and for his son. Rauschenbusch was highly successful in school. The elder Rauschenbusch thought the educational standards in Germany were superior to those in the United States, and he wanted Walter to be exposed to the German educational system and the German piety he knew as a boy. Walter returned to Germany for a year of school at the gymnasium (high school) in Gutersloh. This experience gave Rauschenbusch the opportunity to compare his Baptist upbringing with German Lutheranism and Catholicism. He frequently shaped arguments in his writings by describing contrasting interpretations of Christianity. He loved Lutheran hymnody, but he favored Baptist polity and separation of church and state, and he resisted Lutheran views of the sacraments. In addition, Rauschenbusch reflected the prevailing anti-Catholicism held by Protestants of his era. He regularly condemned the Catholic Church for its authoritarian structure as well as its sacramental theology. Rauschenbusch's life was shaped by his family, his Baptist church, and his remarkable success as a student. By the time he was seventeen he affirmed that he would devote his life to doing "hard work for God." His next step was educational preparation to become an effective Baptist minister.

Rauschenbusch returned to the United States where he earned his A.B. degree at Rochester University (1885) and simultaneously began his ministerial training at Rochester Theological Seminary. Rauschenbusch's professors represented a mix of traditional and new approaches to interpretations of the Bible, science and theology. He was deeply influenced by the stimulation of his academic training and adopted an openness to new ideas. During the summer vacations of his theological training (1884-1886) he worked as interim pastor of a small German Baptist congregation in Louisville, Kentucky. This opportunity gave him valuable practical experience in ministry. It reinforced his call to be a minister and helped shape his view of ministry as living a Christ-like life.

Upon completion of his training, Rauschenbusch considered his vocational options, including missionary appointment. Under the influence of his father, Rauschenbusch accepted a call from the Second German Baptist Church in Manhattan, a small congregation of 125 members. The church was located just north of Hell's Kitchen, a notorious district in New York City near tenements and factories. At that time New York's population was 1.5 million; almost 400,000 of these people were German immigrants. The German Baptists numbered 12,500 in 147 congregations across the United States and Canada. Rauschenbusch plunged into his work as pastor in June, 1886, and the church ordained him in October, 1886. He was passionate about ministry. He wrote to his friend Munson Ford, "It is now no longer my hope to be a learned theologian and write big books. I want to be a pastor, powerful with men, preaching to them Christ."
In his work as pastor Rauschenbusch was also confronted by the patterns of social and economic change that affected his congregation and the wider American society. In sermons preached in 1889 he began to allude to “salvation of society” as well as salvation of the individual.14 In 1888 Rauschenbusch formed close friendships with two young Baptist ministers, Leighton Williams and Nathaniel Schmidt. They met regularly in order to discuss their tasks. They defined their work as ministers in terms of obedience to Christ and effort devoted to the transformation of society. Rauschenbusch’s discovery of the social gospel was born in the heart of a pastor. He worried about the thousands of people in New York who lived in economically deprived conditions. People without work were reduced to begging. Tenement life was crowded and unsanitary. Rauschenbusch movingly wrote, “Oh, the children’s funerals: They gripped my heart . . . why did the children have to die?”15 Rauschenbusch saw firsthand the plight of the poor. In an 1889 speech to a Baptist audience Rauschenbusch said, “By reason of the pity and sympathy which the Lord Jesus Christ has implanted in my heart, I have not been able to look on things I see about me unmoved, or without thinking on the causes of those sad appearances.”16

Following his formal education Rauschenbusch continued to be passionate about learning. He did not limit himself to reading more theological texts. Instead, he read analyses of American society. Rauschenbusch found a tool for analyzing society’s problems by reading Henry George and Richard Ely, contemporary economists. Their analyses helped him articulate what he called “the social problem.” These men focused on the wide disparity in distribution of wealth in the United States. Rauschenbusch was drawn to the idea of working for the salvation of society by creating a more equitable economy.

In 1891 Rauschenbusch’s church gave him a sabbatical to study in Europe, where he energetically researched social Christianity and produced a 450-page manuscript entitled “Revolutionary Christianity,” emphasizing the idea that Jesus intended to create a new type of community.17 Rauschenbusch believed that Jesus’ message of the Kingdom of God originally meant that he intended social salvation as well as individual salvation, but the church had lost half of the message. As a young minister Rauschenbusch came to this fresh understanding of Christianity. He did not publish his book upon his return. However, as a professor he revised the text and published it sixteen years later as Christianity and the Social Crisis (1907), where he publicly articulated the Social Gospel. He thereby not only broadened Baptist horizons; he called the entire church to accept its social responsibilities. The response was overwhelming.19 It energized many ministers with fresh commitment to their tasks. The Social Gospel would be his great creative legacy.

As a young minister Rauschenbusch wrote on behalf of Baptist principles. In 1891 he published “Keep Them Separate,” a brief article on church and state.19 At the Baptist Congress in 1895 Baptist addressed the issue of “Centralization in Baptist Polity.”20 There was much discussion of this issue by speakers at the Congress. Rauschenbusch conceded that centralization had occurred on mission boards, but he thought this was an inevitable and necessary development as the church adjusted to realities of modern life. Because Baptists were so firmly devoted to democracy, he argued that centralization was not a threat to Baptist life: “the Spirit of America . . . and the spirit of the Baptists . . . both make for liberty.”21 Here he was expressing commitment to American cultural values as well as to his Baptist tradition.

Following ten years as a minister in New York City, Rauschenbusch accepted a call to Rochester Theological Seminary’s German Department to train ministers for German Baptist churches. When Benjamin True, professor of church history in the seminary, died suddenly, Rauschenbusch was asked to fill his position. He accepted the position in 1903 and prepared to train ministerial students for churches in the Northern Baptist Convention. His classes presented new challenges.

Rauschenbusch realized that one of his key tasks was convincing young Baptist ministers of the value of studying general church history. He noted that they were keenly aware of the relevance and importance of studying the Bible and homiletics, but the value of studying church history was not self-evident to them. He counseled students to look for ways “the spirit of Jesus” had been demonstrated in the past and ways it had been denied. He said that in church history students would learn the history of “morals and emancipation;” for example, he praised the church’s fight to end slavery and alcoholism and its support for democracy and solidarity. Church history would also reveal the church’s failures: he denounced its tyrannies and the Inquisition. Study of the past should help inform ministers so that they would make good social choices throughout their careers. Church history would give the minister a “broad perspective” on life. It would “combine clear . . . convictions about right and truth with sympathetic insight.”22 The historical perspective could provide increased tolerance and also “distrust of one’s own infallibility.”23 Rauschenbusch also emphasized the importance of learning the critical method which employed historical perspectives not only for interpreting scripture but also for evaluating claims made about church history. For example, he criticized
as error Roman Catholic claims for the papacy, Church of England claims of apostolic succession of bishops, and Baptist claims of a succession of immersion of believers throughout history. In another persuasive argument Rauschenbusch thought that popular interpretations of the millennium ("salvation by catastrophe") were easily undermined by reflective thinking. These and other false claims should be exposed, and ministers should have the critical tools to make valid historical judgments.

As a professor Rauschenbusch critiqued his Baptist denomination, pointing to both strengths and weaknesses. He said that Baptists were less interested in church history than Anglicans or Lutherans in part because of Baptist individualism. Baptists had enjoyed amazing growth, but Baptist thought was "rather flat and thin" and Baptists lacked "a common memory" as well as understanding their place "in the whole story of Christendom." Church history would help Baptists overcome provincialism and develop awareness of their tradition. In short, knowing church history was crucial in the formation of a Baptist minister and was therefore a vital part of Baptist seminary training. Finally and significantly, church history should inspire ministers to be prophetic. Rauschenbusch wanted ministerial students to develop a revolutionary mentality that was willing to challenge the status quo. He wrote that "the scribe sees [God's] will as written law; the prophet feels it as a living force and fire in his bones."

Rauschenbusch was drawn to the dissenters in church history. His folder for Wyclif is by far his largest collection of notes on a single person. Rauschenbusch's father had chosen to become a Baptist and spent much time researching the Anabaptist movement which he saw as kindred in spirit with the Baptists. Walter Rauschenbusch frequently discussed the Anabaptists, seeing them as models of genuine Christianity. When Rauschenbusch gave his inaugural lecture to the Rochester Seminary audience on September 14, 1903, he was not only informing the audience; he was attempting to demonstrate to them the relevance of church history. He chose as his subject "The Prophetic Character of the Anabaptist Movement." The Anabaptists were prophetic in Rauschenbusch's view because they represented an "advance movement" in the "process of spiritual emancipation." Rauschenbusch supported his claim by highlighting key features in Anabaptist life that appealed to him. The Anabaptists demanded that the established church end all abuses in the use of tithes. They opposed ceremonialism and adopted new ways of understanding baptism and the Lord's Supper. Third, Anabaptists taught that the personal experience of Christianity was "the only essential" of the faith. Whereas Luther formulated the doctrine of salvation by faith alone, the Anabaptists insisted on religious experience as well. Fourth, the Anabaptists gave far more emphasis to ethical conduct than to doctrine. Instead of the pleasures of the world, they sought to raise standards of morality. Fifth, the Anabaptists "undertook to organize a church of believers." This was their reason for rejecting infant baptism. Moreover, Anabaptists shared their goods with needy brethren.

Sixth, the Anabaptists repudiated compulsion on behalf of religion. They had suffered brutal punishments and death for their beliefs. They advocated separation of the church from the state. Seventh, the Anabaptists emphasized the activity of the Holy Spirit in the heart. "The Spirit is the principle of freedom," Rauschenbusch wrote, "and hence of progress." Rauschenbusch identified American Protestant cultural values with an Anabaptist interpretation of Christianity. Finally, Rauschenbusch affirmed that the Anabaptists believed in "a religious transformation of social life." Whereas Luther distrusted the masses, the Anabaptists embraced them. Rauschenbusch saw the Anabaptist Christians as the truest expression of Reformation of the church and as people who possessed "prophetic power." In short, they were an "ideal" expression of Christianity.

Rauschenbusch thought in terms of a normative Christianity by which the many expressions the church in history should be judged. Key criteria of a genuine church would include emphasis on personal experience of Christ, a democratic authority structure of the local church, and separation of church and state. Anabaptists and Baptists shared these beliefs.

Rauschenbusch affirmed the importance of Baptist history most fully and most directly in "Why I Am a Baptist," a five-part series of articles published in The Rochester Baptist Monthly. In the first article, which he called "Prelude," Rauschenbusch described two models of becoming a Baptist. He noted quite frankly that he was Baptist because his father was a Baptist. This is the experience of most Baptists, Rauschenbusch declared. But his father was Baptist by choice; he "found in the Baptists" teachings the truths that he had been grasping for, and under great loss of position and trouble of soul, became a Baptist." Rauschenbusch used the two models to emphasize the importance of personal choice in Baptist life. He said that people are Americans by birth but must also become Americans by conviction. Similarly, Baptists must adopt their views by personal conviction.

In the articles that followed Rauschenbusch developed four major categories of reasons for being Baptist. This series is, in effect, an articulation of key Baptist principles and a vigorous argument for their validity. Rauschenbusch asserted that the Christian faith, as Baptists hold it, sets spiritual experience boldly to the front as the one great
thing in religion. He said that Baptists call each person to conscious repentance from sin and faith in Christ. If someone wants to enter a Baptist church, said Rauschenbusch, the only criterion is evidence of such experience. Infants do not yet have the capacity for religious experience. The point of religion is to put people in contact with God. How is this accomplished? Rauschenbusch once again used his knowledge of church history to draw contrasts among Christian traditions. He noted that the Catholic Church emphasized sacraments and rituals. The Lutherans stressed catechism and confirmation. Baptists relied on experience as the bedrock of their faith. For Rauschenbusch, the starting point of personal experience has significant implications. He observed, for example, that “the great mass of men take their religion at second hand,” but he says that this is not true religion. The essence of religion is that it be experienced by the individual.

Rauschenbusch concluded his thoughts on experience by conceding that not all Baptists recognize experience as the core of their faith. Some insist on “immersion in a purely legal and ritualistic spirit.” Others “would be only too glad if we had an iron-clad Baptist creed.” And he recognized that “experience” can be a “shallow emotion” for some. Nonetheless, he clearly embraced voluntary personal experience as the foundational Baptist principle that for him makes religion true and vital.

Rauschenbusch organized his second argument around Baptist social expression and organization. Following his very strong emphasis on individual experience, he noted, “But religion is not a purely individual matter. Nothing in life is. We are social beings, and all elements of our life come to their full development only through social interchange and cooperation.” Baptist social organization has several important implications according to Rauschenbusch. First, he says Baptist churches admit only people “who deliberately apply” for membership and who seek to distinguish themselves from “the world.” Secondly, Baptist churches are “Christian democracies.” The congregation confers power to ministers and officers. Rauschenbusch believed that the “democracy of the Baptist churches is something to be proud of.” He thought this was the structure of the apostolic church. Furthermore, “each church is sovereign in its own affairs.” Finally, in social expression, Baptists “decline all alliances with the state. They accept no dictation from the State in their spiritual affairs. They ask no favors from the State...” Again Rauschenbusch was a realist. He accepted that he had set forth principles which were not always practiced, and he cited ways Baptist practices had subverted their democratic organization, but he affirmed the importance of having democratic principles “in their very constitution.”

In developing the third set of reasons why he was a Baptist, Rauschenbusch focused on worship. His strategy was to discuss a variety of forms of worship and to critique most of them. He noted that primitive religion was based on seeking the rewards of good harvests, health and protection. However, Rauschenbusch noted, Christianity had also adopted forms of “superstitious ideas” in the way they understood the sacraments of the church, especially the Lord’s Supper and baptism. On these issues he said that Baptists are radical Protestants. Moreover, Rauschenbusch concluded that real worship, “the only kind that God cares for, is a Christ-like life.” Jesus’ prayer, Rauschenbusch declared, was meant to teach “utter simplicity.”

Rauschenbusch’s final article on Baptist identity addressed the intellectual component of religion. He noted that “religion appeals to the whole of man and... there is an intellectual element in all religions.” He suggested that people want to have answers to questions of how the world originated, why there is suffering, and what comes after death. Rauschenbusch rejected the binding authority of creeds and confessions of faith. Baptists, he said, have no such creeds. Baptists have statements, but they are non-binding. So in Rauschenbusch’s view Baptists have always recognized the Bible alone as their authority. Rauschenbusch was clearly aware that Baptists have created intellectual problems relating to authority. For example, he acknowledged that some Baptists have “turned the Bible into one huge creed” by insisting that everyone accept their interpretation. Another problem Rauschenbusch identified is that we [Baptists] have paralyzed the Bible by turning it into a law book and a collection of proof texts. He concluded that at their best Baptists have “sought the adjustment between Freedom and Authority” by rejecting creeds while trying to learn from the Bible how to guide their lives. In a postlude Rauschenbusch expressed the hope that readers may have a clearer understanding of “their own faith and the nature of our denomination.” He concluded by expressing his reservation about writing this series for Baptists. He wrote, “I should do harm if I give to Baptists the impression that we are the [the only] people and there are no others.” He said that Baptists are capable of being narrow in their views and also there are fine qualities in other denominations. Rauschenbusch reflected on Baptist principles throughout his career and on many occasions offered a spirited defense of the Baptist tradition. Despite his passionate defense of Baptist ideas, Rauschenbusch was keenly devoted to the unity of the church. He was present at the formation of the Federal Council of Churches in 1908. The Council, in turn, adopted much of his social agenda. He exhibited a sense of balance in his commitment to his own denomination.
and his commitment to the universal church. Defense of the Christian
tradition, especially its Anabaptist and Baptist expressions, mattered
deeply to Walter Rauschenbusch.

Kenneth Scott Latourette: Inclusive Baptist

As was true for Rauschenbusch, Latourette’s Baptist home, church,
and university experience were decisive in shaping his life. Latourette
noted the lifelong Baptist commitment of his grandparents, but he
declared that the great influence in his life was his home life: “My
father and mother built their home around the Christian faith”
centered on morning family worship, including Scripture reading and
memorization, singing and prayer. The family attended the Baptist
church regularly. Latourette’s father was a deacon, both parents taught
Sunday School throughout most of their married life, and the church
was the center of the family’s social as well as its religious life.63

Latourette observed that in his boyhood his Baptist Church “was in
the Moody tradition with emphasis upon John 3:16 as the best brief
summary of the Gospel.” He recalled, “As we reached our teens we
were encouraged to make a formal commitment to Christ and through
baptism . . . to make public profession of our faith and become church
members.”64 Following the profession was the inevitable question of
how to live out the Christian life. The piety he described is no surprise:
he said that regulations emphasized in his church reflected customary
evangelical ethical and social standards. His father did not use tobacco
or alcohol. He wrote that “we did not dance, go to the theater, or use
traditional playing cards.” The children were “encouraged in thrift and
work.” In sum, “the family was knit together in deep Christian faith,
family worship, and Pietistic Baptist church life.”65

The other great influence on his life was his parents’ idealization of
college life. Often they spoke favorably of lifelong friendships,
teachers’ sacrifices and their examples of Christian character, and the
joy of reading. All of this impressed him.66 Latourette’s parents sent
him to McMinnville (later Linfield) College, primarily because of its
Baptist affiliation and the family’s many connections with it. Latourette
indicated that Pacific University was academically superior, and he
sometimes wondered what vocation he would have followed had he
attended Pacific. He concluded that “the probabilities are that I would
not have become a missionary” whereas the McMinnville training set him
on that course.67 Throughout his college years he taught a Sunday
School class of boys in the local Baptist church and served as president
of the college Y.M.C.A.

Through the influence of the Y.M.C.A. Latourette began the custom
of observing “the morning watch . . . fifteen minutes to an hour of
private Bible reading and prayer.”68 But the most decisive influence of
the Y.M.C.A. on Latourette was that it introduced him to the most vital
foreign missionary organization of the day, the Student Volunteer
Movement and its “Declaration” which confronted college students
with the demand to affirm that “It is my purpose, if God permits, to
become a foreign missionary.”69 Latourette had assumed he would
follow in his father’s footsteps as a lawyer and banker, but “with great
agony” he signed the declaration.70 He entered Yale for his senior year,
where the Y.M.C.A. again served as his social center. He also joined
Calvary Baptist Church where he taught Sunday School throughout the
years of his training at Yale.71 The Baptist influence remained signif-
icant in his life.

An end of his senior year Latourette considered attending
Rochester Theological Seminary because “it had the reputation of
being the best of the Baptist seminaries in the North.”72 But a new
organization, the Yale Missionary Society, was beginning a new school,
Yale-in-China. Because of his missionary interest Latourette was invited
to prepare to teach in the new School in Changsha, China. He wrote
that this invitation “seemed to me to fulfill my purpose to be a
missionary.” Moreover, he observed that “from childhood I had been
nurtured in a tradition established by dedicated Christian college
teachers.”73 Latourette prepared for teaching in a mission setting by
pursuing a doctorate in history. He went to China in 1910, but his work
was cut short by amoebic dysentery, and he returned to the United
States in 1911.74 He was unable to fulfill his desire and commitment to
be a missionary, but he could use his Ph.D. to teach history.

During his convalescence Latourette taught for a while at Reed
College. He later judged that “religiously the atmosphere [at Reed]
would increasingly have been uncongenial.” He moved to Denison
where the “students were mostly from Baptist families.”75 Once again a
Baptist college nurtured the young scholar and gave him direction.
Harlan Page Beach, professor of missions at Yale, asked Latourette to
succeed him at Yale when he retired four years hence. Latourette told
his Denison president about this prospect and asked permission to
begin offering a course on missions. The proposal was approved, and
Latourette offered the course on a regular basis. This was a decisive
step in his life: “out of it [the mission course] eventually grew my major
course at Yale and the seven volumes which in dimension are my
magnum opus.”76 During his Denison years Latourette was ordained in
his home Baptist church in Oregon City, and he served as chaplain as
well as professor at Denison.

Latourette’s autobiography suggests that his character and career
were shaped by family, college, and missionary organization. Ministers
and missionaries often recount the influence of early family training and church experience as decisive in their call to ministry. Latourette’s character and piety were also shaped in this manner. However, the Christian college shaped the choice and direction of his vocation. Denominations, including Baptists, have invested heavily in establishing colleges and universities for educating young people with the added aspiration of instilling influence from their Christian tradition. The influence of the “Christian college environment” is often not clearly articulated, but rather remains intangible and undefined. For Latourette it was crucial. He was shaped by a Baptist family and church, but found his life direction in opportunities provided by two Baptist colleges.

Scarlet Bates reported that Latourette’s forty plus published volumes had sold over one million copies. Despite his prolific publishing output and the deep influence of his Baptist heritage, Latourette never wrote a Baptist history, a manual of Baptist principles, or a monograph devoted explicitly to some dimension of Baptist life. Instead, Latourette affirmed the Baptist tradition by giving countless hours to his American Baptist denomination through weekly Sunday School teaching in his local Baptist church, through serving on the denominational educational and missionary boards, and through his service as president of the American Baptist Convention in 1951-1952. He was a devoted Baptist. Yet he did not push his denominational affiliation on others nor propose reasons that it was a superior form of Christianity. David Ewrn Morgan wrote that when he met Latourette for the first time, he identified himself as a Baptist. He recalled that Latourette responded, “So am I.” But Morgan also observed:

Nobody ever boasted less of his denominational alignment, but no one was ever so proud of what was of special value in his own tradition: as Dr. Ernest A. Payne said in “Salute to Dr. Latourette”...

“He has been truly catholic and ecumenical in his appraisals and in his sympathies, but unswervingly loyal to his Baptist convictions.”

Latourette recalled that the Northern Baptist Convention suffered rancorous controversy in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. Latourette was personally affected when the Fundamentalists accused the American Baptist Foreign Mission Board of appointing missionaries who were doctrinally unsound. Fundamentalists demanded that prospective missionaries agree to creedal statements. He recalled years later, “I was sick at heart over the distrust and seeming denial of Christian love.”

Latourette supported the principle that each Christian should interpret the Bible led by the Holy Spirit. Despite the pain occasioned by controversy, Latourette neither left the Baptists nor grew inactive in his relationship with them. His was a firm lifelong commitment to Baptists.

A major task of Latourette as president of the American Baptist Convention in 1951-1952 was to address Baptist state conventions. For that assignment Latourette recalled, “My standard address was in what I believe to be the major mission of Baptists to preach the Gospel to the poor.” Latourette often noted that Baptists were drawn from “the rank and file, especially . . . those of lower incomes and modest education.” He wrote in his address that he was matching Baptist historical experience with their current opportunities.

How did Latourette’s scholarship address Baptists? Latourette wrote a lengthy introduction to church history. For his treatment of Baptists, Latourette relied on standard accounts. He explained English origins, American growth, and worldwide planting of Baptists. He gave all denominations recognition, but he was criticized for failure to offer interpretation: “Latourette supplied almost no guidelines into the distinctive thought and practices of the denominations. This . . . weakness is [evident] throughout his work. He provided . . . little interpretative depth” of Baptists in his writings.

It may be argued that interpretation is not the primary task of an introductory survey. In any case, Latourette’s chief interest was in was tracking and chronicling Christianity’s expansion.

Latourette’s Christian vision was inclusive rather than denominational. The interdenominational character of Yale Divinity School may have had an effect on his perspective. Also consciousness that he was a Baptist working in a traditionally Congregationalist seminary likely had its influence. Latourette had historical rather than theological training. Writing for his era he thought it was especially important to overcome “provincial” perspectives. Denominations had tended to stress their differences and to compete. He was ironic in spirit and sought to avoid conflict within and between churches; he had seen too much conflict within his own denomination. Instead of being an outspoken advocate for Baptist views, Latourette’s approach to church history was to emphasize to students that they should balance “a thorough knowledge of one’s own branch of the Church and loyalty to it, coupled with a recognition of its place in the Universal Church.”

If judged by his specific reflections on traditional Baptist principles, Latourette’s contributions would prove disappointing in comparison with those of Rauschenbusch. However, Latourette assumed the older Baptist principles; his focus was on new developments in the church. Things were changing rapidly at the turn of the century. Rauschenbusch himself called for an enlarged view of Christianity when he urged all Christians, including Baptists, to embrace a social as well as an individual gospel. Latourette was also caught up in two
additional trends in the church: a new emphasis on missions and the quest for Christian unity. These ideas so absorbed his vision that he wanted to present a picture of Christians of all varieties and in all places throughout the world. To write an apology for Baptists might well work against the quest for Christian unity. However, the main point here is that Baptist identity itself changed significantly in the twentieth century. Baptists devoted new energies to new trends. They perhaps agreed more on missions, but they also took strong stands either for or against the Social Gospel and the Ecumenical Movement. Latourette, by his life commitments and his writings, was an important advocate for missions and unity as central for Baptist and larger Christian identity.

Latourette remained committed to missions throughout his life. His perspective was marked by a sense of excluding no Christian from his purview. In sum, Latourette was an inclusive Baptist. His student and close friend, Richey Hogg, observed that he was both [Baptist] and ecumenist. He demonstrated consistency in this outlook. This is evident in his lifelong devotion to missions, his work for Christian unity and in his scholarship. Before coming to Yale Latourette was already a member of the Board of Managers of both the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society and the American Baptist Board of Education, thereby contributing to Baptist life in the two areas that most concerned him. In his autobiography Latourette wrote, “missions were my major interest.” In addition to his work for American Baptists, he was asked to join the International Board of Missions group that met to promote world missions. The group produced the International Review of Missions, which became the leading journal of missions in the United States. He combined hands-on experience, administrative advice and scholarly endeavor to push forward world missions. Latourette simultaneously served the mission board of his own denomination and the world Christian mission effort through the International Missionary Council. He did not choose one over the other but affirmed the value of both missionary efforts. Latourette looked at the grand picture of the spread of Christianity throughout the world. The success of missions was his lifelong dream, prayer, and work. He travelled much of the world, visiting mission stations, attending missionary conferences, and researching missionary archives. He remained optimistic that the vision of “the evangelization of the world in this generation,” the motto preached in his youth by the Student Volunteer Movement and held by Latourette throughout his life, would prevail.

The twentieth century world missions movement was galvanized at meetings held in Edinburgh in 1910, Jerusalem in 1928 and Tambaram (near Madras, India) in 1938. Latourette was deeply involved in planning the 1938 meeting. For him this was a landmark meeting because for the first time representatives from the “younger churches” were more numerous than those from the “sending churches,” a sign that global Christianity was becoming a reality. For Latourette it was a “marked advance over earlier world missions conferences.” He sought to overcome the strong Eurocentric/Western identity of Christianity by affirming the spread of Christianity throughout the world.

Closely associated with the International Missionary Council was the emergence of the World Council of Churches. A conference met at Utrecht in 1938 to draft a constitution for a World Council of Churches. The Northern Baptist Convention asked Latourette to represent the denomination. Latourette devoted much energy to the World Council of Churches throughout his career because it would be a vehicle for promoting worldwide Christianity. Once again he demonstrated that he was an inclusive, ecumenical Baptist Christian. Latourette was a protege of John R. Mott, leader of the student mission movement and then a leader of the ecumenical movement, two great initiatives of the modern church. But he was also anchored in his own denomination. It was as a representative of Baptists that he was sent to Utrecht and to Tambaram.

Latourette’s forte was chronicling Christianity’s expansion. He noted, “My writing was an outgrowth of the global outreach of the Christian faith.” Latourette’s most significant book was The History of the Expansion of Christianty. He published its seven volumes from 1937 to 1945. Sales averaged 17,000 copies per volume. In retirement Latourette extended his coverage with five more volumes in his Christianity in a Revolutionary Age. Together these twelve volumes provide 6000 pages detailing the expansion of Christianity. The key term for Latourette’s vision of the church is “expansion.” Ernst Benz praised Latourette for introducing “a new epoch” in the writing of church history because he combined church history and mission history. Latourette’s global narrative is a geographically comprehensive work showing when and where churches were planted and where they suffered losses over the centuries.

Latourette not only offered global perspective but also an inclusive denominational perspective. He invariably addressed the mission activity of Roman Catholics, Orthodox Churches and Protestant denominations. This confessional inclusivity once again demonstrates a perspective shaped by the World Council’s outlook. By the time he published his textbook on Christianity in 1953, he chose not to write long sections about nineteenth and twentieth century missions, but instead shifted his language to describe the growth of world
Christianity. Latourette’s vision was increasingly of a worldwide church. Here was a Baptist with an inclusive vision of Christianity.

Latourette found patterns in church history. One of the most notable of them was his emphasis on the recent past. In narrating the expansion of Christianity Latourette found that he needed three of his seven volumes to cover the period from 1800 to 1914. Even in his general textbook he reserved almost one third of it for this most recent era. So great was the change in the world picture of Christianity that he called the nineteenth century (1800-1914) “The Great Century” of Christian expansion. Many scholars subsequently adopted this language to describe the nineteenth century.

Latourette thought neglect of recent church history created “the impression that nothing especially significant has occurred since [the Reformation] and that Christianity is a waning force.” Instead, he argued, “the Gospel has never been quite so potent as in the past century and a half.” Therefore “we need to reapportion . . . space in our church histories.” The success of new ideologies and statistical decline in European churches provided interpreters with a basis for supporting secularization theory. Latourette rejected this view, providing evidence to balance European losses with worldwide gains for Christianity. Through his “Great Century” notion Latourette advanced consciousness of world Christianity in a new way. He presented a highly optimistic view of the prospects of Christianity. His writings were shaped by his understanding of missions, and he challenged readers to adopt a worldwide perspective.

Should missions be counted as a major Baptist principle? Should Christian unity? Latourette did not offer a summary of classic Baptist principles, but he was devoted to these twin themes. Baptists divided sharply over the ecumenical movement, but shared a commitment to missions. David Bebbington has recently suggested that missions is “the most important development in which Baptists participated during their four centuries of existence.” Baptist identity has been under much discussion in recent years. Historians are perhaps now more than ever attuned to the idea that Baptist identity has changed and is diverse. At its inception four hundred years ago Baptists focused on the nature of the church, its proper composition, governance, ministry and worship as well as its proper relationship to the state. These early convictions remain significant issues for Baptists. However, Baptist identity has not remained static. Although foreign missions were not part of original Baptist interests, western Christians became increasingly aware of the world’s cultures and populations. Carey initiated the foreign missionary enterprise among Baptists, and he figures significantly in the Latourette narrative and in modern Baptist consciousness. Supporting the foreign missionary enterprise became a central Christian practice for Baptists. After caring for local church expenditures, many Baptist churches in the twentieth century devoted the largest portion of their financial resources to missions. Moreover, because of their personal sacrifices missionaries were viewed by rank and file Baptists with respect sometimes bordering on reverence. Baptist commitment to foreign missions was, of course, not dependent on Latourette’s writings. And Latourette’s devotion to missions was not dependent on Baptists. This was not a cause and effect relationship. Instead, Latourette’s intense commitment to missions is perhaps symbolic of growing Baptist consciousness of and commitment to missions around the world as an essential mark of Baptist practice and identity.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Rauschenbusch and Latourette were shaped by early Baptist influence in home, church and higher education. Both men affirmed the Baptist tradition and spent much time and energy in its service. They were also both church historians who were devoted to the welfare of the entire church. Finally, through their writings both added creative new dimensions to understanding Baptist identity. Rauschenbusch followed his father’s career paths. He praised his father for his courageous decision to shift from the Lutheran to the Baptist faith. He grew up in a Baptist church in Rochester, and his education at Rochester shaped his outlook on church and society. Latourette described at length his religious training in home and church and his awakening to missionary consciousness at a Baptist college. Both men were clearly deeply influenced by the Baptist ethos of their youth and their education. Baptist identity in home, church and higher education had a critical influence in shaping these men.

Rauschenbusch and Latourette were not only shaped by Baptists, they also served the denomination throughout their lives in a variety of ways. Rauschenbusch ministered to the immigrant population at Second German Baptist Church in New York City for ten years. He began by addressing their spiritual growth, but soon he began to focus on people’s physical as well as spiritual needs. He was also active in the life of his denomination, providing leadership in speaking at the Baptist Congress and in his writing. Rauschenbusch moved from ministry to seminary in order to train Baptist ministers. Moreover, convinced that his Baptist faith was the path of liberation for Christianity, he boldly set forth an extended defense of the Baptist tradition in denominational publications.
Latourette was methodical about his piety. Wherever he went, he joined the local Baptist church and taught Sunday School classes. He was an educator; he was passionate about missions; and he encouraged young people to consider a life devoted to missions. He readily agreed to serve on both the American Baptist Education and the Foreign Mission Boards. In addition, he served as President of the American Baptist Convention from 1951-1952. In that role he sought to bring unity to the convention. Latourette was a deeply committed Baptist, but the ecumenical movement for Christian unity was much farther advanced in Latourette’s generation, and he was deeply involved in the work of the World Council of Churches.

These scholars made an impact on their own generation and beyond. Rauschenbusch’s great legacy was to become the best known spokesman for the Social Gospel. Latourette’s goal was to account for and describe the historical spread of the Christian Church. Both Baptist scholars reached audiences well beyond the Baptists, but their ideas may also be seen as contributing to awareness of new principles being adopted by Baptists in the twentieth century: social responsibility, missions and unity. Both men embraced all of these trends.

As historians and dedicated church members both men were obliged to deal with the relationship of the denomination to the larger Christian community. Rauschenbusch gave more specific attention to denominational self-understanding. Latourette’s generation developed a passion for Christian unity, and he therefore focused more on promoting the welfare of the ecumenical church. But both men affirmed their deep level of commitment to both their Baptist denomination and the worldwide Christian community. They both believed in the importance of the fresh impetus for Christian unity in the twentieth century.

Baptists fiercely debated their social responsibility in the century following Rauschenbusch’s publications. Yet he so effectively presented his argument that he helped keep the issue before the churches for a century. Latourette repeatedly emphasized humanitarian dimensions of missions. Today many Baptists across the world recognize the social as well as evangelistic dimensions of Christianity. The program of the Baptist World Congress in 2010 clearly attested to the importance of justice and service issues for Baptists worldwide.106 Baptists may rightly cherish Rauschenbusch for making their “thin and flat” intellectual tradition much deeper and richer by articulating the Social Gospel for all Christians. Latourette was another Baptist scholar who offered something new: he accomplished the task of describing the expansion of Christianity, giving modern Christians a clearer vision of their place in the world. Baptists have sustained a powerful impetus for foreign missions for two hundred years. Missions provided the seed for planting today’s worldwide Christianity, including a worldwide communion of Baptists. The missionary enterprise seems increasingly to be a key feature of Baptist identity. Reflection on the lives of Rauschenbusch and Latourette suggests that Baptist history matters because it has shaped many lives, because through its organizations the Baptist denomination has offered numerous channels for Christian service, and because history is where Baptists turn to understand their historic principles and enrich their changing identity.

NOTES

2. Evans, The Kingdom Is Always But Coming, 2.
7. Minus, Walter Rauschenbusch, 16.
17. Minus, Walter Rauschenbusch, 79. Evans contends that the original name was “Christianity Revolutionary,” 93.
20. The Baptist Congress (1882) was a forum for Baptist leaders to address a host of questions concerning the faith and life of Baptists in the United States. See Evans, The Kingdom Is Always But Coming, 75 and Hudson, “Introduction,” 21-22.
22. Rauschenbusch, "Introduction to Church History," family papers, box 1. These sentiments are all expressed in his introductory lectures. See "The Rauschenbusch Family Collection," Group 1903, in the American Baptist Historical Society’s archives on the Mercer University campus in Atlanta, Georgia. The Rauschenbusch papers occupy 180 boxes. Boxes 1-6 and 18-22 contain his church history lectures. The first Lectures begin on p.1 of Box 1.


25. Rauschenbusch, "Introduction to Church History," Family papers, box 1.


27. Rauschenbusch, Family papers, box 3.


29. Rauschenbusch, "The Prophetic Character, 2." In Rauschenbusch’s view the church advanced as it became freer and more democratic.


34. Rauschenbusch, "The Prophetic Character," 15. Moreover, Rauschenbusch wrote that this separation had become part of American life.


36. Rauschenbusch, "The Prophetic Character," 18. Rauschenbusch is here affirming Anabaptist support for his view that Christianity is social.


38. He is of course not engaging the question of Baptist origins, widely debated by historians in the twentieth century. He is affirming that both groups embraced key tenets of genuine Christianity.

39. Walter Rauschenbusch, "Why I Am a Baptist," The Rochester Baptist Monthly XX (1905-06), 2-3, 85-88, 106-108, 134-136, 156-159. This was his most thorough and systematic attempt to summarize why Baptist thought and practice matters. It amounts to a brief Baptist manual. His audience was the general Baptist community. Rauschenbusch’s reflections are perceptive, and in 1958 The Baptist Leader published a revised reprint of his articles with comment by H.H. Barnette. See Walter Rauschenbusch, "Why I Am a Baptist," The Baptist Leader (January 1958): 1-10.


64. Latourette, Beyond the Ranges, 15-17.


67. Latourette, Beyond the Ranges, 18-19.

68. Latourette, Beyond the Ranges, 21. He observed that this time of private devotion was also later called the "Quiet Time." (My Guided Life, 284.)

69. Robert Speer wrote a very influential recruiting pamphlet which argued that Christians are called to missions unless they had some strong reasons that they could not answer this mandate of scripture. The argument persisted Latourette. See Robert E. Speer, "What Constitutes a Missionary Call?" (New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1903).

70. Latourette, Beyond the Ranges, 22-23. This decision disappointed Latourette’s father; Latourette’s defense was that he made the commitment out of a sense of duty. (See "My Guided Life," 284-385.)

71. Latourette, Beyond the Ranges, 26.

72. Latourette, My Guided Life, 287.

73. Latourette, My Guided Life, 287; Beyond the Ranges, 31.

74. Latourette, Beyond the Ranges, 45.

75. Latourette, Beyond the Ranges, 52-53.

76. Latourette, Beyond the Ranges, 54.


79. Latourette, Beyond the Ranges, 121.

80. Latourette, Beyond the Ranges, 122.


86. Rauschenbusch himself had closed his essay on “Why I Am a Baptist” by expressing the fear that his words might be used to perpetuate an argument for a Baptist superiority. (See Rauschenbusch, “Why I Am a Baptist,” 139.)
88. Latourette, Beyond the Ranges, 79.
90. Latourette, Beyond the Ranges, 76-77.
91. Latourette, Beyond the Ranges, 102. Latourette repeatedly cited the Tabaran statistic in his writings.
92. Latourette, Beyond the Ranges, 107.
93. Latourette, Beyond the Ranges, 199.
94. Lowell Regatz wrote that “no parallel work has appeared in any language.” (Review of History of the Expansion of Christianity in American Historical Review 51 [1945]: 96.) Richey Hogg declared that all of his work derived from this seminal work. (Hogg, 78.)
96. Latourette, Beyond the Ranges, 110.
101. Latourette, A History of the Expansion of Christianity. He devoted volumes 4, 5, and 6 to the nineteenth century, and his last volume to the twentieth century.