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# WELCOMING ONE ANOTHER AT THE WATERS: SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR CREDOBAPTISTS AND REFORMED PAEDOBAPTISTS

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*This article aims to stimulate understanding between different (Reformed) approaches to baptism by focussing on the strengths of each view and the extensive common ground. It then turns to propose ways in which the distance between churches with different baptismal practices can be minimised by means of “theological hospitality,” i.e. an understanding and appreciation of the other view and a determined attempt to keep denominational distinctions in proper perspective.*

## The Parting of the Baptismal Seas

Though the New Testament speaks of “*one Lord, one faith, one baptism*” (Eph 4:5), the baptismal seas of Christendom have been parted, so to speak. On one side stand those who use much water and insist that baptism must postdate an intelligent and credible profession of faith. Historically, these have been referred to as *credobaptists*, those who practice *believer’s baptism*. On the other side stand those who require very little water and maintain that baptism is for believers and for the children of one or both believing parents. These are the *paedobaptists*, those who practice *infant* or *household baptism*. Though united in praxis, not all paedobaptists speak with one theological voice. Here, I will limit my discussion to *Reformed* paedobaptists.<sup>1</sup>

Following the lead of W. David Buschart, I will strive in this paper to be “descriptive and affirmative, rather than polemical or defensive.”<sup>2</sup> I am not interested in constructing an argument for the “correct” view

<sup>1</sup> Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestant groups that espouse baptismal regeneration require separate treatment. Richard L. Pratt Jr., “Reformed View: Baptism as a Sacrament of the Covenant,” in *Understanding Four Views on Baptism*, ed. John H. Armstrong (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 63, explains that three denials found in the Westminster Confession of Faith (28.5) distinguish the Reformed view from views that more closely identify baptism and salvation: 1) baptism and salvation are not utterly inseparable; 2) it is possible for a person to be regenerated without being baptised; and 3) not everyone who is baptised is regenerated.

<sup>2</sup> W. David Buschart, *Exploring Protestant Traditions: An Invitation to Theological Hospitality* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 27.

of baptism.<sup>3</sup> Those who prefer such an approach should consult the volumes edited by John Armstrong and David Wright.<sup>4</sup> Rather, the aim of this piece is to offer some suggestions for credobaptists and Reformed paedobaptists, suggestions that if embraced might lead to a more visible unity in the body of Christ. I will issue my challenge in three moves. First, I will draw attention to what I perceive to be the strengths of each position. The starting point, it seems to me, is to admit that each of these views can be well argued on biblical and/or theological grounds. Second, I will attempt to show that credobaptists and Reformed paedobaptists are in basic agreement with respect to the meanings of baptism. In other words, though divergence on both mode and timing makes it easy for us to think of these two views as being worlds apart, far more common ground exists than is often recognised. Finally, having established both key differences and points of common ground, I will discuss ways in which credobaptists and Reformed paedobaptists might become more welcoming of one another.

## The Strengths of Each Position

The arguments in favour of believer's baptism are well known and they need not be rehearsed in detail here.<sup>5</sup> For our purposes, I will state briefly what I consider to be the three strongest points in the credobaptist case. First, there is a recurrent pattern in Acts where people believe and then are baptised (e.g., Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12–13; 10:47; 18:8). Second, the New Testament so links baptism with the reception of the Holy Spirit and the newness of life associated with faith in Christ that a strong case can be made for identifying the subjects of baptism as believers (e.g., Rom 6:3–4;

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<sup>3</sup> In my view, it is unhelpful to think in terms of “correct” and “incorrect,” provided that we are working within the parameters of baptism administered in the name of the Triune God. After reading certain defences of the “correct” view of baptism, one gets the impression that those on the other side of the debate will one day be forced to stand in the corner of heaven for ten thousand years. I suspect not.

<sup>4</sup> John H. Armstrong, ed., *Understanding Four Views on Baptism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007); David F. Wright, ed., *Baptism: Three Views* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> For a full discussion, see Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 339–343; Bruce A. Ware, “Believers’ Baptism View,” in *Baptism: Three Views*, 19–50; Thomas J. Nettles, “Baptist View: Baptism as a Symbol of Christ’s Saving Work,” in *Understanding Four Views on Baptism*, 25–41; Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn Wright, eds., *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007).

1 Cor 12:13; Col 2:12; Titus 3:5). Though he does not hold strictly to believer's baptism, Anthony Lane offers a particularly lucid summary of this link: "For the New Testament writers *faith* means 'faith confessed in baptism' and *baptism* means 'baptism as a confession of faith.' They thought of faith and baptism as a unity, not just on theoretical grounds but because in actual practice they came together."<sup>6</sup> Third, the conclusion of recent scholarship is that there is insufficient evidence to trace the practice of infant baptism back to the apostolic period. The definitive work is Everett Ferguson's tome, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries*. Ferguson concludes: "There is general agreement that there is no firm evidence for infant baptism before the latter part of the second century. This fact does not mean that it did not occur, but it does mean that supporters of the practice have a considerable chronological gap to account for."<sup>7</sup>

We should also note at this stage that credobaptists often argue that the verb βαπτίζω means "to immerse." But John Murray in his classic work, *Christian Baptism*, has demonstrated that, though βαπτίζω and its cognates can be used to denote an action performed by immersion, they can also be used to denote an action that can be performed by a variety of modes.<sup>8</sup> Credobaptists also draw attention to texts such as Acts 8:38–39, where it is said that Philip and the eunuch "went down into the water" and "came up out of the water." While this text seems to describe baptism by immersion, there are other cases of baptism in Scripture where total immersion is not likely in view. How, for example, would the Philippian jailer and his household have been completely immersed at midnight (Acts 16:33)?<sup>9</sup> The mode of immersion perhaps most clearly speaks to the reality of dying and rising with Christ, but this does not mean that immersion is necessary for a baptism to be considered valid. We must admit that Scripture does not *dictate* a certain mode of baptism.<sup>10</sup> What we find in the New Testament are *descriptions*, accounts of various people

<sup>6</sup> Anthony N.S. Lane, "Dual-Practice Baptism View," in *Baptism: Three Views*, 142, emphasis original.

<sup>7</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 856.

<sup>8</sup> John Murray, *Christian Baptism* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1980), 6–30.

<sup>9</sup> Gerald Bray, *God Is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 634.

<sup>10</sup> Here I am reminded of Berkhof's pithy comment: "Jesus did not prescribe a certain mode of baptism. He evidently did not attach as much importance to it as the Baptists do." See Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology, Combined* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 629.

being baptised, and many of our questions go unanswered. Because we know so little about the baptisms recorded in Scripture, it is unwise to be dogmatic about *mode*.<sup>11</sup> With that said, there are some good reasons to think that the credobaptists are on to something with regard to the *timing* of baptism.

But the paedobaptists raise some strong points as well.<sup>12</sup> In my view, the strongest point in the Reformed paedobaptist case is the theological argument that the covenant principle—“to you and your seed”—is consistent throughout Scripture (e.g., Gen 9:9–10; 17:7–8). Sinclair Ferguson explains that since “all former covenant administration includes the children of the covenanted party, and both the people of God and the way of grace are organically one throughout Scripture, the abrogation of the ‘you and your seed’ principle would require a decisive and specific announcement.”<sup>13</sup> B.B. Warfield, the great Princeton theologian, says it well: “The argument in a nutshell is simply this: God established His Church in the days of Abraham and put children into it. They must remain there until he puts them out. He has nowhere put them out. They are still then members of His Church and as such entitled to its ordinances. Among these ordinances is baptism, which standing in similar place in the New Dispensation to circumcision in the Old, is like to be given to children.”<sup>14</sup> According to Reformed paedobaptists, infants of believing parents are baptised on the ground that they are children of the covenant, prospective heirs of salvation.

Adding weight to the paedobaptist case is the fact that children in the NT are told to obey their parents in the Lord (Eph 6:1); they are not treated as little pagans, but seem to be treated as members of the covenant who owe their allegiance to Christ. Additionally, though there are relatively few instances of baptism recorded in the NT (Acts 2:41; 8:12, 13, 38; 9:18; 10:48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5; 1 Cor 1:14, 16), roughly

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<sup>11</sup> The evidence seems to favour the view that in the early church *mode* was not stressed the way most credobaptists stress it today. The *Didache* provides the earliest surviving description of the administration of baptism. According to *Did.* 7.3, in cases of insufficient water, the baptismal waters are to be poured on the head of the candidate three times, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Nothing in the text indicates that this mode made the baptism less valid.

<sup>12</sup> For a full discussion of the Reformed paedobaptist view, see Sinclair B. Ferguson, “Infant Baptism View,” in *Baptism: Three Views*, 77–111; Pratt, “Reformed View,” 59–72; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 622–643; Murray, *Christian Baptism*.

<sup>13</sup> Ferguson, “Infant Baptism View,” 102–103.

<sup>14</sup> B.B. Warfield, *Studies in Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932), 408.

a quarter of the cases are baptisms of “households.” Whether or not there were infants in these households is not for paedobaptists the significant point. The point is that baptisms of entire households reveal that God deals with families, not just individuals.

Vital to acknowledge is the fact that both baptismal views share a commitment to the Scriptures. The credobaptist case might be thought of as a more proof-textual reading of the New Testament. The Reformed paedobaptist position finds less biblical support in this respect, though it demands theological engagement with the overarching plan of redemption. But each view affirms the authority of the Bible and seeks to formulate and practice a theology of baptism that is consistent with the revealed will of God.

## Points of Agreement

Having outlined some of the clear and defensible differences between credobaptists and Reformed paedobaptists, we need now to consider the degree of common ground that exists between the two. Are these two views in basic agreement about what baptism signifies? Both historic confessions and more recent articulations of the positions suggest a high level of agreement with respect to the meanings of baptism.

The credobaptist London Confession of Faith (1689) was taken over largely from the paedobaptist Westminster Confession of Faith (1647). According to the Westminster Confession of Faith, “Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptised into the visible church; but also, to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life” (28.1). The London Confession of 1689 reads as follows: “Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament instituted by Jesus Christ. It is intended to be, to the person baptised, a sign of his fellowship with Christ in His death and resurrection, and of his being engrafted into Christ, and of the remission of sins. It also indicates that the baptised person has given himself up to God, through Jesus Christ, so that he may live and conduct himself ‘in newness of life’” (29.1). Here we find fundamental theological agreement; in both confessional statements, baptism is said to signify a relation of union with Christ and cleansing from sin. But we discover as well some differences in terminology. Two of these call for brief comment.

One difference is the use of the term “ordinance” in the London Confession where the Westminster Confession uses “sacrament.” In an effort to distance themselves from Roman Catholic sacramental theology,<sup>15</sup> most credobaptists have refused to refer to baptism as a “sacrament,” preferring instead the word “ordinance”; baptism is a ceremony “ordained” by Christ. Reformed paedobaptists, on the other hand, retained the word “sacrament” without thereby endorsing the Roman Catholic view. On the Reformed view, baptism is a means for the *strengthening* of grace, and the operation of baptism as a means of grace is not limited to the *moment* of its administration any more than that of the Lord’s Supper is limited to the moment of its celebration.<sup>16</sup> So in the *Directory for the Publick Worship of God* (1645), the minister concludes the baptismal service by praying that, if the child should attain the years of discretion, the Lord “*would so teach him by his word and Spirit, and make his baptism effectual to him.*” As Gerald Bray reminds us:

The sacraments are spiritual food for those who are spiritual. There is no sense in trying to feed a corpse, because a corpse cannot receive the food offered to it. Similarly, there is nothing to be gained by administering the sacraments to spiritually dead people, because they cannot receive them either. Food sustains and supports life but does not create it—in spiritual terms, only the Holy Spirit can do that. The Apostle Paul makes this abundantly clear in Ephesians 2:1–10, a passage of Scripture that describes the passage from spiritual death to life in detail. It is when that transition has occurred that the sacraments find their place.<sup>17</sup>

Credobaptists speak similarly of the spiritual benefit that comes from baptism. In what is perhaps the most widely used systematic theology text written from a credobaptist perspective, Wayne Grudem writes: “Although we must avoid the Roman Catholic teaching that grace is imparted even *apart from* the faith of the person being baptized, we must not react so strongly to this error that we say that there is no spiritual

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<sup>15</sup> Roman Catholics generally argue that baptism conveys grace *ex opere operato*, *that is*, the administration of the outward sign is a virtual guarantee that the inward grace is present in the recipient.

<sup>16</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 641–642.

<sup>17</sup> Gerald Bray, *The Faith We Confess: An Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles* (London: Latimer Trust, 2009), 137.

benefit at all that comes from baptism, that the Holy Spirit *does not* work through it and that it is *merely symbolic*.<sup>18</sup>

Another difference is the Westminster Confession's insistence that baptism is "a sign and seal of the covenant of grace." As a sign, baptism points to the realities of union with Christ and the washing away of sin. But for Reformed paedobaptists, baptism also sets the seal of God on that which it signifies. Louis Berkhof writes, "[Baptism] assures the recipients that they are the appointed heirs of the promised blessings."<sup>19</sup> We should note, however, that on the Reformed view, to be an *heir* to the promises of God is not the same thing as actually *benefiting* from them. Important to remember is the fact that Reformed paedobaptists are concerned that those baptised as infants should make a confessional commitment when they are old enough to do so. This is represented by the rite of "confirmation," the moment when someone baptised in infancy publicly acknowledges that he or she has *accepted* the promised inheritance and has become a believer. This practice of infant baptism and confirmation is not unlike the practice of infant dedication and believer's baptism found in most credobaptist congregations today.<sup>20</sup>

Returning to the fundamental agreement about what baptism signifies, we can say that this agreement is evidenced as well in contemporary sources. Grudem says that baptism portrays "the amazing truths of passing through the waters of judgment safely, of dying and rising with Christ, and of having our sins washed away."<sup>21</sup> Also writing from a credobaptist point of view, Gregg Allison explains that baptism in the New Testament has several meanings: it associates the person with the Triune God; it pictures cleansing from sin; baptism also depicts escape from divine judgment; finally, baptism signals entrance into the new covenant community.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 954 (emphasis original). Likewise, G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Paternoster, 1972; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 263, writes: "The Apostolic writers make free use of symbolism of the baptismal action; but they go further and view the act as a *symbol with power*, that is, a sacrament" (emphasis added).

<sup>19</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 641.

<sup>20</sup> See the discussion in Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 770–771.

<sup>21</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 969.

<sup>22</sup> Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 357. Allison also writes: "I need to emphasize that paedobaptism agrees with these various meanings of baptism. Taking Calvin (and following his discussion) as representative, paedobaptism acknowledges that



Murray, a Reformed paedobaptist, writes: “Baptism signifies union with Christ in the virtue of his death and the power of his resurrection, purification from the defilement of sin by the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit, and purification from the guilt of sin by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ.”<sup>23</sup> Consider as well how paedobaptist theologian, J.I. Packer, defines baptism.

Christian baptism ... is a sign from God that signifies inward cleansing and remission of sins (Acts 22:16; 1 Cor 6:11; Eph 5:25–27), Spirit-wrought regeneration and new life (Titus 3:5), and the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit as God’s seal testifying and guaranteeing that one will be kept safe in Christ forever (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 1:13–14). Baptism carries these meanings because first and fundamentally it signifies union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection (Rom 6:3–7; Col 2:11–12); and this union with Christ is the source of every element in our salvation (1 John 5:11–12). Receiving the sign in faith assures the persons baptized that God’s gift of new life in Christ is freely given them.<sup>24</sup>

This oft-cited definition has found strong approval even among credobaptists.<sup>25</sup>

In sum, it appears that credobaptists and Reformed paedobaptists are indeed in basic agreement about the meanings of baptism. In both cases, baptism is “a monument to the love of God,”<sup>26</sup> the God who seeks us out and unites us to himself, cleansing us of our sinfulness, giving us new life in him. Whether baptism is administered *in anticipation of conversion* or only when there is good reason to think that the recipient has *already experienced conversion*, the gospel of Jesus Christ is showcased with equal fervour.

## Toward a More Visible Unity

Given this high level of agreement, is it possible for credobaptists and Reformed paedobaptists to demonstrate greater unity of fellowship? In this section, I will suggest two paths forward. The first, I expect, will ruffle

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baptism signifies cleansing from sin, mortification of the flesh, and union with Christ” (354 n. 147).

<sup>23</sup> Murray, *Christian Baptism*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993), 212.

<sup>25</sup> Ware, “Believers’ Baptism View,” 41 n. 34, endorses Packer’s definition.

<sup>26</sup> Bray, *God Is Love*, 636.

the feathers of more than one boisterous bird. The second suggestion is the tamer of the two.

First, the feather ruffling. A position that has gained considerable support in recent years is that of dual-practice baptism, the offering of two tracks in a single congregation: 1) infant baptism and confirmation, or 2) infant dedication and believer's baptism. In this case, church leaders presumably would highlight the strengths of each view (as I have tried to do above), and families within the congregation would have the freedom to decide which track they want to take with their children. Respected theologian, Anthony Lane, has argued at length for dual-practice baptism.<sup>27</sup> Lane reminds interpreters that what we find in Acts is, strictly speaking, *converts' baptism*, not believers' baptism.<sup>28</sup> Neither Luke nor any other NT author gives an unequivocal answer to the question: What happened to the children of the first Christian converts? Were they baptised with their parents? Were they baptised at some subsequent stage? Lane argues, "Whether they were baptized that day or at the age of five, twelve or eighteen, their baptism was *an adaptation of adult converts' baptism to the changed situation of those brought up in a Christian home.*"<sup>29</sup> Lane surveys the evidence of the first four centuries, drawing attention to the diversity of baptismal practice in the early church. From this, he concludes: "The New Testament practice of baptism was converts' baptism, the immediate baptism of those who come to faith as part of their initial response to the gospel. This needs to be modified for children born into a Christian home, either into infant baptism or into baptism at a later date.... Both approaches can be defended on biblical grounds. No grounds exist for insisting on one to the exclusion of the other. This policy of accepting diversity is the *only* policy for which the first four centuries of the church provide any clear evidence."<sup>30</sup>

The dual-practice view has also found (at least temporary) approval among biblical scholars. In the first edition of his *Systematic Theology*, Grudem encourages churches to consider dual practice. He writes, "One way forward could be for paedobaptists and advocates of believers' baptism both to come to a common admission that baptism is not a major doctrine of the faith, and that they are willing to live with each other's views on this matter and not allow differences over baptism to be a cause for division within the body of Christ. Specifically, this would mean allowing both

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<sup>27</sup> Lane, "Dual-Practice Baptism View," 139–171.

<sup>28</sup> Here, Lane follows Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*.

<sup>29</sup> Lane, "Dual-Practice Baptism View," 143, emphasis added.

<sup>30</sup> Lane, "Dual-Practice Baptism View," 171, emphasis original.

views of baptism to be taught and practiced in denominations on both sides of the question.”<sup>31</sup> He goes on to say, “If such concessions in actual practice were made by both sides on this question, the issue might in fact diminish the level of controversy within a generation, and baptism might eventually cease to be a point of division at all among Christians.”<sup>32</sup> New Testament scholar, Michael Bird, takes a similar position in his recent work, *Evangelical Theology*. Bird argues that the dual-baptism view is a defensible and even desirable stance because it allows us to hold together two competing theologies on a nonessential matter of faith. He writes, “A dual-baptism position enables us to make sure that baptism, a symbol of the gospel, becomes a means of gospel unity, rather than an occasion for division in the already-all-too-much divided churches.”<sup>33</sup>

As one who frequently self-identifies as a Reformed evangelical with a heart for ecumenism, I am drawn to the idea of dual practice. In theory, it sounds like a clear move toward more visible unity. However, I can attest to at least one pastoral difficulty associated with this approach to baptism. For several years I served in a denomination in New Zealand that had an unwritten rule of dual practice. Each family within the church decided whether to pursue infant baptism and confirmation or infant dedication and believer’s baptism. The problem that arose was that it was not uncommon for families who had opted for believer’s baptism to exit the Sunday worship gathering at the time when an infant was scheduled for baptism. Dual baptism, though implemented with good intentions, in this case actually brought about *a more visible disunity within the congregation*. Churches that settle on dual practice will need to take pains to explain that infant baptism and believer’s baptism are equally valid options, “equivalent alternatives,” to use Lane’s phrase.<sup>34</sup> Otherwise, I suspect the sort of silent protest I have described will be a regular occurrence, and not just in the Land of the Long White Cloud.

A second approach is what Buschart has referred to as ecclesiological hospitality.<sup>35</sup> Buschart rightly argues, “The existence of diverse traditions within Protestantism, and also within the larger Christian community, is an occasion for hospitality.”<sup>36</sup> Here, I wish to

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<sup>31</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 982. Grudem, however, alters his position on dual baptism in the 2007 edition.

<sup>32</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 983.

<sup>33</sup> Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 771.

<sup>34</sup> Lane, “Dual-Practice Baptism View,” 164.

<sup>35</sup> See the full discussion in Buschart, *Exploring Protestant Traditions*, 255–275.

<sup>36</sup> Buschart, *Exploring Protestant Traditions*, 262.

apply the concept of ecclesio-theological hospitality specifically to the discussion of Christian baptism. This is the tamer of my two suggestions because ecclesio-theological hospitality does not require those who hold credobaptist convictions to *practice* infant baptism, or vice versa. Deeply held convictions need not be abandoned, nor need they be downplayed.<sup>37</sup> Ecclesio-theological hospitality instead calls for *an understanding and appreciation of the other view and a determined attempt to keep denominational distinctions in proper perspective.*

My fear is that if we ask ten Baptists to comment on Presbyterians, nine of them will rather effortlessly say something like, “They’re not like us; they baptise babies.” This sort of reflexive utterance of divergence is unhealthy. Church leaders need to do what they can to reprogram the minds of their parishioners so that the different expressions of the one church will concentrate more on what we all have in common. Ministering alongside one another and praying publicly for one another will prove helpful in this regard. Just recently I witnessed a Baptist minister pray for every Presbyterian congregation in his community during the pastoral prayer. Such practices implicitly communicate to our own congregations that those on the other side of the baptismal divide are our co-labourers in gospel ministry. More direct strategies include, dare I say, welcoming one another into membership without imposing a certain theology of baptism<sup>38</sup> and teaching our own congregations about the strengths of the other baptismal view. There is much for credobaptists and paedobaptists to learn from one another.<sup>39</sup> And perhaps it is precisely by assisting our congregants in the task of listening, comprehending, and respecting the other view (the very task I have tried to stimulate herein), that we will attain a greater awareness of shared beliefs.<sup>40</sup>

## An Eschatological Epilogue

Each expression of the one church must be viewed in its eschatological context. Believers dwell between the appearings, ever mindful of what

<sup>37</sup> Indubitably, this will be an objection to my first suggestion.

<sup>38</sup> Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 387, captures the problem here: “The Baptist considers the Paedo-Baptist unbaptized; the Paedo-Baptist theologian regards a submission to believers’ baptism after the receiving of infant baptism to be an affront to the Word of God and nigh to blasphemy. Conscience thus strikes on conscience: the Paedo-Baptist bridles with indignation and the Baptist feels compelled staunchly to maintain his here-I-stand-I-can-do-no-other attitude.”

<sup>39</sup> See the helpful treatment of this topic in Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 769.

<sup>40</sup> With Buschart, *Exploring Protestant Traditions*, 274.

Christ has accomplished for sinners, always longing for that future culmination of the Son's redemptive work. Christ gave himself for us "to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession" (Titus 2:14). The reality of the *oneness* of the people of God will be fully manifest in that glorious day when individuals who are reconciled to God in Christ, but who held differing baptismal theologies, will unite in worship of their one Lord. In light of this glorious future, there is no question as to the direction in which the variously hydrated versions of the church should be moving.

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