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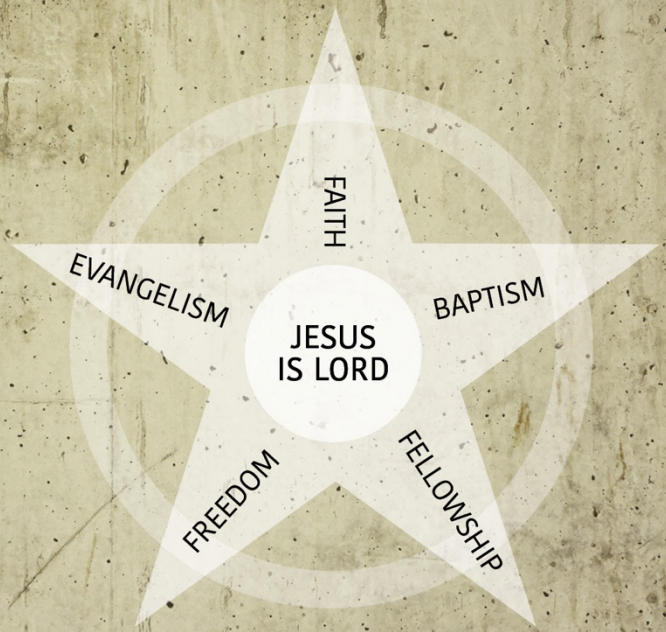

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Gathering of Gatherings: Where the Local and the Catholic Meet[1]

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Throughout their history, Baptists have at times elevated rightly-shaped praxis over clearly articulated conviction. For instance, Stephen Holmes, in discussing Baptist conversations about the sacrament or ordinance of baptism, notes that historically Baptists have been keen to defend the mode of baptism as immersion rather than develop a theology of baptism.[2] Something similar can be observed in Baptists' historical discussions of the local church. While there has been quite a lot of reflection on and talk about the local church, much of that either has been framed in a defensive posture over against a neighbouring group of Christians (or even other Baptist groups) who seem to be a threat to local church autonomy or has been largely focused on the praxis of local church with less emphasis on a strong theology of the local church. What might it mean for Baptists to theologically embrace the local church? What can it certainly not mean? And how might we discuss the responses to these questions in ways that engage the whole Christian tradition while being grounded within Baptist life and thought? If the concern identified is true, then where can Baptists turn for aid in their time of need? After briefing describing Baptists' understanding of the local church, this article aims to deal with these questions by utilizing a relatively new ecumenical methodology and engaging the work of a Catholic ecclesiologist. The result of this exploration will be not only a deeper appreciation for the local church but also a wider set of theological resources for articulating that appreciation within the Baptist tradition.

Baptists and the Local Church

As Baptists emerged from the Separatist movement within the Church of England, they developed a distinct emphasis on the local gathering of believers. Nonetheless, there was still talk of the church outside of

[1] An earlier version of this article was delivered as the 2024 McCandless Lecture at Regent's Park College, Oxford.
[2] Stephen R. Holmes, *Baptist Theology* (New York: T& T Clark, 2012), 90.

the congregation. Both the Particular Baptist's Second London Confession (1677) and the General Baptist's Orthodox Creed (1678) highlight the church as universal, with Christ as its head, even if attention is eventually turned toward particular congregations (called 'churches').[3] Over time, though, calls to return to the "New Testament church" came to be synonymous with becoming a church that did not extend beyond the boundary of the congregation. David Bebbington notes that beginning in the eighteenth century, Baptists on the whole did not do much to emphasize the importance of the church as well as associated topics such as communion, baptism, and ministry. In fact, in contrast to their Christian neighbours, Baptists 'started to assert that it was their honourable achievement to have perceived how marginal [these topics] were to the spiritual life.'[4]

There are several clear examples of this shift. First, the 1833 New Hampshire Confession of Faith stated that 'a visible Church of Christ is a congregation of baptized believers, associated in covenant in the faith and fellowship of the Gospel . . .'[5] While the confession underscores the importance of the local church, it says nothing about the universal church. Within the American context, individualism and autonomy have become the watchwords. A second notable example is Landmark Baptists, who gained sizeable numbers among Baptists in the U.S. in the mid-nineteenth century (and even maintain a strong hold on the Baptist imagination today). Landmarkers (as they were known) saw the local Baptist church (and only specific local Baptist churches) as true churches in an unbroken line of succession to the apostles.[6] While they were certainly peculiar, Walter Shurden indicates that there was a seed of mainstream Baptist conviction in their thought (i.e., the centrality of the local church), noting that Landmarkers were 'not so much an innovation as [they were] a perversion by

[3] "Second London Confession," chapter XXVI, in *Baptist Confessions of Faith* edited by William L. Lumpkin and Bill J. Leonard (2nd Rev. Ed.; Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2011), 283-89; "Orthodox Creed," Article XXIX, in *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 327.
[4] David W. Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries: A History of a Global People* (2nd Ed.; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 185.
[5] "New Hampshire Confession of Faith," article xiii, in *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 382.
[6] For more on Landmark Baptists, see James Leo Garrett, *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), 213-48.

intensification.'[7] It should be acknowledged that the experience of Baptists in the UK is much different than that of most Baptists in the United States (especially in the American South). Various practices and structures (such as the coordination of regional associations and general superintendents before that as well as settlement and sustentation efforts) reveal more connection between local congregations and the possibility of oversight from outside the congregation. As a result, this individualizing tendency is almost certainly more exaggerated among US Baptists, even if it is still evident within the UK context. For instance, the Baptist Union of Great Britain's 'Declaration of Principle,' last revised in 1938, holds that 'each Church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer [Jesus'] laws', a statement that has sparked much debate about the shape of church here as well.[8]

The common thread that emerges, then, from most Baptist discussions of the church is the same: for contemporary Baptists (with a few notable exceptions), the church is viewed as only (or at least primarily) the local gathering. Everything beyond its boundaries is a different sort of institution or organization. This is not to say that Baptists have shunned all efforts to cooperate beyond the local congregation. In fact, numerous organizations have been established. Regional associations, state conventions, national conventions and unions, and even a worldwide alliance. Each of these has done important work in supporting local churches, including soliciting answers to difficult questions, shared efforts for education and mission, and even mutual affirmation of ordination candidates. However, despite the ways in which local churches and their congregants might see themselves as inextricably tied to these extracongregational entities, according to their own implicit theology (and sometimes their explicit convictions as well), they were not churches (or church). Thus, as Holmes writes,

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[7] Walter B. Shurden, *Not an Easy Journey: Some Transitions in Baptist Life* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005), 95.

[8] See Richard Kidd (ed.), *Something to Declare: A Study of the Declaration of Principle* (Didcot: Baptist Union, 1996). This aimed at providing more conversation around the Declaration and how it might best shape life for Baptists in the Union. In short, centring on the theme of covenant, they argue that the basis for the BUGB is theological rather than pragmatic. For more on the statement and the mixed response it received, see Andy Goodliff, *Renewing a Modern Denomination: A Study of Baptist Institutional Life in the 1990s* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2021), 120-23.

'There is no "Baptist church" that is not a local congregation: associations, conventions and unions are just that – associations and conventions and unions of local churches.'[9]

Where does this leave Baptists in considering the ecclesial relationship between local congregations? That is, if I am a member of one local Baptist congregation, how can I affirm (or can I affirm) the church-ness of a different local Baptist congregation? If we get past that question, what do we call ourselves – church*es* or simply church? Moreover, what does it mean for Baptists to see themselves as part of a wider church (the church universal or the church catholic)? This is a particularly difficult question since so much of what Baptists have said about the local church is set in opposition to anything outside of it.[10] To provide some insight into answering these questions, attention needs to be given to a recent development in ecumenical studies before engaging with a non-Baptist conversation partner.

Receptive Ecumenism as Path Forward

In the wake of perceived stagnation in ecumenical progress, oft-mentioned descriptions of a long ecumenical winter, and a sense of unrealism at the articulated ecumenical goal of structural unity, a shift in ecumenical approach was necessary.[11] Building on the earlier work of ecumenical encounter through striving together for shared witness and intentional dialogue, receptive ecumenism seeks to embrace this while also looking for ways to embody wider moments of exchange and deeper relationships. To do this, receptive ecumenism looks for 'long-term mutual challenge, development, and growth by bringing the traditions into encounter with each other precisely in their difference.'[12]

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[9] Holmes, *Baptist Theology*, 97.
[10] Holmes asks a similar question: 'If each local congregation governs itself, without intervention from the wider church, how can Baptist churches reflect the riches of whatever broader Christian church they recognize', Holmes, *Baptist Theology*, 104.
[11] Paul D. Murray, 'Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning – Establishing the Agenda' in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism* edited by Paul D. Murray (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 9-10.
[12] Paul D. Murray, 'Introducing Receptive Ecumenism', *The Ecumenist* 51.2 (Spring 2014): 3.

While earlier ecumenical work focused attention on placing different groups in conversation or in shared work (noting that their being in proximity to one another was itself a form of ecumenical progress), receptive ecumenism focuses on the stance of those in such encounters. That is, previously someone entering such work was prepared to represent one's own tradition, possibly even educating the ecumenical other concerning that Christian group. In this mode, Baptists would attempt to tell Catholics what they needed to know about Baptists, and the focal question was, 'What do others need to know about us?' Some of this work, especially the bilateral dialogues that embraced a "differentiated consensus" model, was quite beneficial, often clarifying the distinctions between various Christian groups (e.g., what is the difference between Baptists and Catholics concerning the Virgin Mary?) or even helping ecumenical others understand the nuances within a given denomination or region (e.g., comprehending the history of and differences between all of the Baptist groups in the United States). Even at its best, though, this approach involved managing and even defending the boundaries between traditions, often reinforcing differences rather than creating openings for exchange.

By contrast, receptive ecumenism takes seriously the difference between the ecumenical partners, but reframes one's stance to those differences by asking, 'What is it that *we* need to learn and can learn, or receive, with integrity from our others?'[13] One trailblazer in this approach, Paul Murray, adds that this question is asked 'without insisting, although certainly hoping, that these other traditions are also asking themselves the same question.'[14] The ultimate goal is the cultivation of 'the way of hope-filled conversion.'[15] In a practical way, this approach recognizes not only the gifts that other traditions may be able to share, but also soberly sees the limitations of each tradition and its respective inability to resolve them on its own. That is, Baptists have theological and ecclesiological needs and questions that they are incapable of answering solely from their own resources (or at least from their own present understanding of those resources). This drives all Christian groups to the wider Christian tradition – to share, to

[13] Murray, 'Introducing Receptive Ecumenism', 1.
[14] Murray, 'Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning', 12.
[15] Murray, 'Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning', 12.

listen, and to learn. This receptive ecumenical approach, then, has real promise for progress toward Christian unity, but only as what Murray calls 'an ecumenism of wounded hands.'[16]

In many ways, receptive ecumenism has always been at the heart of the most faithful forms of ecumenical thinking and practice. Murray is adamant that it is not a 'second-best' option in light of present circumstances (that previously-mentioned 'ecumenical winter'), as though we are giving up on the full hope of visible church unity. Instead, he states that, through receptive ecumenism,

> the situation in which we now find ourselves can begin to appear less as a problematic interim before the urgent striving for attainable structural unity can get back on track and more as a long-term learning opportunity in which churches might progress towards their calling and destiny in the only way possible – by slow and difficult growth in maturity.[17]

He also highlights the importance of each tradition engaging in the ecumenical encounter *with integrity*. In other words, the goal is not to ask how one can abandon their own tradition for another. Rather, one's appreciation of gifts and insights from another tradition is precisely predicated on one's own location within a particular Christian group. As Murray writes, it focuses on 'the desire to become more fully, more freely, and more richly what we already are through the expansion of possibilities that relationship brings.'[18] He continues: 'From the Roman Catholic perspective, for example, this… is not a matter of becoming *less* Catholic but of becoming *more* Catholic precisely by becoming more appropriately Anglican, more appropriately Lutheran, more appropriately Methodist, more appropriately Orthodox, etc.'[19]

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[16] Murray, 'Introducing Receptive Ecumenism,' 5. This ecumenism is one 'of being prepared to show our wounds to each other, knowing that we cannot heal or save ourselves; knowing that we need to be ministered to in our need from another's gift and grace; and trusting that as in the Risen Lord in whose ecclesial body these wounds exist, they can become sites of our redemption, jewels of transformed ecclesial existence', 5.
[17] Murray, 'Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning', 15.
[18] Murray, 'Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning', 15-16.
[19] Murray, 'Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning', 16.

Receptive ecumenism can chart a course for a conversation about the local church. If Baptists struggle to understand the depth of relations between the local and the universal or even to articulate a theology of the local church, then perhaps they need to receive ecclesiological and theological gifts from their non-Baptist brothers and sisters in Christ that can help them respond to their needs.

Communion Ecclesiology

Communion ecclesiology developed in the mid-twentieth century as an approach to ecclesiology that did not privilege juridical or institutional descriptions of the church. Instead, aspects of the church that are more directly theological were emphasized, such as Trinitarian relations, the church as the mystical body of Christ, and the relation of the sacraments to the life of the church. Because communion ecclesiology has resonated with Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant thinkers, it is actually quite diverse in itself.[20] Nonetheless, Dennis Doyle has helpfully identified four shared themes. First is a retrieval of a vision of the church from Christianity's first millennium (i.e., prior to the East/West split in 1054). Second, communion ecclesiology highlights a 'spiritual fellowship or communion between human beings and God.'[21] Third is a focus on visible unity through shared participation in the Eucharist, and fourth is 'a dynamic and healthy interplay between unity and diversity in the Church, between the Church universal and the local churches.'[22]

For the Roman Catholic Church, communion ecclesiology's jumping-off point has been descriptions of the church that appeared in the Second Vatican Council. *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), quoting from Cyprian, discusses the universal church as a people who are united by the unity of the Trinitarian persons.[23] Likewise, the visible institutional church and the mystical body of

[20] Dennis Doyle identifies six *Catholic* versions of communion ecclesiology. See Dennis M. Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology* (Orbis, 2000), 19-20.
[21] Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology*, 13.
[22] Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology*, 13.
[23] Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), November 21, 1964, available at https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html, §4.

Christ are not separated from one another, but instead, "form one complex reality which comes together from a human and a divine element."[24] Throughout the text, the focal images for the church are as the people of God and as a pilgrim church.[25] Of course, *Lumen Gentium* is also famous for stating that the Church of Christ subsists, but is not coterminous with, the Catholic Church, providing theological and ecclesial space for non-Catholics.[26] Similarly, *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World) extended the horizon for understanding the nature of the church by discussing human beings as inherently social creatures and with the church serving as leaven in the world.[27]

In *The Word of God in the Life of the Church*, the report from the second international ecumenical dialogue between the Baptist World Alliance and the Roman Catholic Church, communion ecclesiology was a significant piece of the commission's ecclesiological reflections, with both the Catholic and Baptist delegations affirming that

> The church is . . . to be understood as a *koinonia* ('communion,' 'participation,' or 'fellowship'), which is grounded in the *koinonia* of the triune God . . . While the phrase 'communion ecclesiology' is relatively recent, and is more frequently used by Catholic theologians than by Baptist ones, we both recognize it as expressing the heart of the nature of the church.[28]

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[24] Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, §8.
[25] For 'people of God,' see Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, §§9-17; for 'pilgrim church,' see Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, §§48-51.
[26] '[T]he one Church of Christ . . . subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him, although many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure' (Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, §8).
[27] Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), December 7, 1965, available at https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html, §§12, 40.
[28] Baptist World Alliance and Catholic Church, *The Word of God in the Life of the Church*, available at https://baptistworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Baptist-Catholic-Dialogue-Phase-II.pdf, §11.

The ecumenical dialogue commission distilled the differences between Baptists and Catholics concerning how this affirmation is manifested within each tradition, but one additional and significant insight was added.

Early Baptist churches described themselves as covenanted to follow the Lord's ways and covenanted to walk together as a community.[29] By shining a light on a vertical dimension of covenant that linked together the individual believer and God as well as a horizontal dimension of covenant that tied together all gathered Christians, covenant theology prompted a more robust notion of salvation and the journey of the Christian life for Baptists. In *The Word of God in the Life of the Church*, this covenant ecclesiology was linked with communion ecclesiology and extended from the dual relationships of the believer and God and the local gathering of believers among themselves to include extracongregational gatherings such as associations and unions.[30] This connection provides an opening for more exploration of communion ecclesiology and the gifts it may offer to Baptist thinking on the local church. To deepen this conversation, the work of Jean-Marie Tillard offers precisely the resources for Baptists to cultivate a deeper sense of the local, one that embraces the importance of the local while bringing it into contact with the whole church.

The Ecclesiology of Jean-Marie Tillard

Jean-Marie Roger Tillard, a French Dominican ecclesiologist with deep Canadian roots, stands in a unique place before, during, and after the Second Vatican Council. Influenced by the earlier work of fellow Dominicans Yves Congar and Marie-Dominique Chenu, Tillard found himself at a crossroads concerning reflection on the nature of the church (both within Catholicism and between the Catholic Church and other Christian pilgrims separated from it). Before his death in 2000, Tillard's ecumenical vision was honed in dialogues with the Faith and Order commission of the World Council of Churches, the Disciples of Christ, the Anglican Communion (both internationally and in Canada),

[29] See Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2003), 21-47.
[30] Baptist World Alliance and Catholic Church, *The Word of God in the Life of the Church*, §17.

and the Orthodox.[31] Of particular interest to Tillard was the relationship between the universal church and the local church. Four major works constitute Tillard's version of communion ecclesiology, all originally published in French: *The Bishop of Rome* (1982), *Church of Churches* (1987), *Flesh of the Church, Flesh of Christ* (1992), and *The Local Church* (1996).

To unfold his theology of the local church, it is necessary to discuss the Jerusalem church, specifically on the Day of Pentecost. It is somewhat customary to declare that Pentecost is the 'birthday of the church.' While Tillard at times demurs from such a declaration, he does say that it is the 'origin of the church . . . at least as the epiphany of its nature.'[32] Like the appearance of YHWH at Sinai, Pentecost gathers together the people of God into a communal entity, 'dominat[ing] and condition[ing] the vision of the church that gradually will be integrated into the Christian consciousness.'[33] This link with the Hebrew Bible is important for Tillard, In fact, he underscores the fact that *ekklesia* is used by the Septuagint as the translation of the Hebrew *Qahal*, what he describes as 'the gathering of the believing People, called together by God.'[34] By placing Pentecost and Sinai in continuity, Tillard is able to say that '[t]he Church of Pentecost "fulfils" the vow of the theophany on Sinai.'[35] Moreover, like the covenant event at Sinai, the grace poured out at Pentecost is once-for-all (*ephapax*), a specific local event that casts ripples across the entire history of the universal church.

In his discussion of the dynamics of Pentecost, Tillard identifies three essential elements at the heart of the church that emerge in that moment: the descent of the Holy Spirit, apostolic witness, and communion. The Book of Acts describes the ongoing life of the church as carrying these three elements forward (cf. Acts 2:42-47). In

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[31] For more biographical information about Tillard, see Brian P. Flanagan, *Communion, Diversity, and Salvation: The Contribution of Jean-Marie Tillard to Systematic Ecclesiology* (New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 49-53 and Christopher Ruddy, *The Local Church: Tillard and the Future of Catholic Ecclesiology* (New York: Crossroad, 2006), 4-6.
[32] J.-M. R. Tillard, O.P., *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion*, R. C. De Peaux, O. Praem., trans. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 3.
[33] Tillard, *Church of Churches*, 3.
[34] Tillard, *Church of Churches*, 84.
[35] Tillard, *Church of Churches*, 11.

particular, concerning communion, Tillard, following the insights of several early church fathers, sees an inversion of Babel in the Pentecostal event. In Genesis 11, peoples are scattered due to the confusion of their shared language, while in Jerusalem, peoples are gathered together despite speaking different tongues. As such, this inversion centres on the relation of unity and difference: 'At Babel only one language, symbol of a vibrant unity, is shattered by proud human intention. On the feast of Pentecost the diversity of languages, symbol of the barrier which has grown up among peoples, is unified in the common understanding of the apostolic Word.'[36] As can be seen, the unity found here does not eliminate difference but draws the church together precisely through its differences, creating a unity-in-diversity. According to Tillard, the church, in the end, exists as a 'communion of differences.'[37]

Tillard's attention to the Jerusalem church extends further, however, because he is adamant that the Jerusalem church is a local church. This may seem like something to be taken for granted until one reflects on Tillard's own Roman Catholic tradition, where the emphasis is placed on the universal church (at times, even according to Tillard, over against the local). Through this Roman Catholic set of lenses, it is easier to see the Jerusalem church as the universal church. Moreover, once the universal church looms large over this ecclesial landscape, other local churches are more easily identified as *parts* of the universal. Therefore, for Tillard, it is important to maintain that the Jerusalem church on Pentecost is a *local* church. In a manner that will feel familiar to many Baptists, with the Jerusalem church identified as local church, its members gather together to discern the way of Christ and live by the Spirit in their local context.

Here it is important to describe a distinction that Tillard makes between the particular and the local. The particular, as the word etymologically suggests, is a component of a whole. In that sense, all particulars constitute the whole. The local, however, can be the whole while also being situated in a specific place (i.e., located). Further, the local is embedded in and interacts with 'the cultures, geographies, and

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[36] Tillard, *Church of Churches*, 8.
[37] J.-M. R. Tillard, O.P, *Chair de l'Église, chair du Christ: Aux sources de l'ecclésiologie de communion* (Paris: Cerf, 1992), cited in Ruddy, *The Local Church*, 185n23.

histories – in short, the humanity – of its surroundings.'[38] Thus, despite the tendency for pastors and scholars (and even the texts of Vatican II) to use 'particular' and 'local' somewhat interchangeably, the differences between the two are theologically important, especially for the early church. As Christopher Ruddy writes of Tillard: 'the Jerusalem church is not a mere part of a larger, universal whole, but rather is a genuinely local church, manifesting the fullness of the *ephapax* ["once-for-all"] grace of Pentecost in and through a given place's history and culture, a place that is, in fact, at the center of salvation history.'[39]

Communion as *koinonia* stands as a central concept for Tillard's ecclesiology, encapsulating not only the nature of the church, but also the relationship between local congregations. Indeed, communion resides at the heart of the one and the many. There are many churches scattered across space and time, but there is also only one church. As such, the communion between local Christian communities does not function in an additive fashion. Instead, each congregation shares in the same communion found in the church at Pentecost—that is, 'entry into complete participation in a full and definitive (already eschatological) gift from God.'[40] By focusing on communion among such difference, Tillard is presented the challenge of how Christians can be truly one and catholic. In other words, in a world where diversity is manifested in language, culture, practice, ritual, nationality, and ethnicity, how can I know that a gathered communion across the street is church and even 'go on' together as church? For Tillard, 'no local church can regard its "difference" as the supreme value in terms of which everything in it must be judged.'[41] This means that a local church must have porous boundaries and 'cannot reduce the Church of God to itself.'[42] In short, 'all ecclesial self-sufficiency is excluded,'[43] local churches must remain always open to helping and being helped by other churches.[44] Thus, while local churches are distinct from one

[38] Ruddy, *The Local Church*, 7.
[39] Ruddy, *The Local Church*, 59.
[40] J.-M. R. Tillard, *L'Eglise locale: Ecclésiologie de communion et catholicité*, 41; cited in Ruddy, *The Local Church*, 186n26.
[41] Tillard, 'The Local Church within Catholicity', *The Jurist* 52 (1992): 452-53.
[42] Tillard, 'The Local Church within Catholicity', 453.
[43] Ruddy, *The Local Church*, 97.
[44] Tillard, *L'Eglise locale*, 380; cited in Ruddy, *The Local Church*, 97.

another, they cannot be separated. In this paradigm, then, recognition becomes a crucial task for moving forward, local churches seeing in their neighboring local churches and other ecclesial structures the signs of the church of God—signs of 'what the Spirit of God caused to be born in the local church of Jerusalem.'[45] Recognition even works at an intercontextual level as Tillard says that this process is what 'permits a Parisian to *re-cognize* his own Eucharist in the Sunday celebration of a Maronite community, for a parishioner from Warsaw to *re-cognize* his own evangelical conviction in the preaching in a basic Brazilian community, for an adult to *re-cognize* his own faith in the catechesis of his young child.'[46] Such mutual recognition, Tillard notes, is 'the concrete fabric of *koinonia*.'[47] By seeking this sort of recognition, the church truly becomes 'a *communion* of local Churches.'[48]

Tillard's ecclesiology embraces the traditional four marks of the church: unity, holiness, apostolicity, and catholicity. However, his distinct emphasis on the local, exemplified by the Jerusalem church, nuances each in particular ways. The oneness of the church is grounded in the 'integrity of God's gift' and the local church 'already possesses the entirety of the church.'[49] While this unity is not manifested in uniformity, the divided character of the church does prompt an eschatological hope for full and visible unity.[50] Tillard describes the church's holiness as primarily theological and then ethical. That is, 1 Peter 1:15-16, the church's sanctity consists of participating in the God who is holy. Ethical living flows from this wellspring.[51] At the same time, like all the marks of the church, holiness is both a gift and a task, one that is embodied in lived local experience. The apostolic character of the church is witnessed in its memory of what God has done in Jesus Christ. That memory, though,

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[45] Tillard, 'The Local Church within Catholicity', 453.
[46] Tillard, *Church of Churches*, 224.
[47] Tillard, 'The Local Church within Catholicity', 453.
[48] Tillard, *Church of Churches*, 114.
[49] Ruddy, *The Local Church*, 61.
[50] Ruddy, *The Local Church*, 62-63.
[51] This should not give the impression that Tillard has a triumphant notion of the church's life, such that all of the church's ethical judgments are pure, accurate, and sound. Indeed, in later writings, he describes the church as pilgrim and wandering, highlighting the eschatological tension between the present state of the church and its future destiny. See J.-M. R. Tillard, *The Eucharist: Pasch of God's People*, Dennis L. Wienk, trans. (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1967), 199, 278.

does not reside in the past. Indeed, as the grace of Pentecost was once-for-all (*ephapax*), the church now shares in the apostolic church. That remembrance is reenacted at each local Eucharistic action.[52]

Finally, Tillard is adamant that catholicity cannot be conceived as quantitative or geographical: 'The Church is not catholic simply because it is called to expand throughout all the earth or because it is established through the summation of all the communities assembled in the communion of one faith, one baptism, one Eucharist.'[53] Instead, the catholicity of the church refers to 'the entirety of the plan of God for His People, at the end of a long journey through the centuries of history.'[54] This plan is received by the Jerusalem church at Pentecost and is inculturated there. Like the Jerusalem church, all local churches are catholic as well. In each community the same wholeness is manifested within diverse cultures and places. Like communion, catholicity does not follow the logic of addition. As new communities of Christians are founded, they share in the full grace granted to the Jerusalem church, but they do not add anything to the whole church or its catholicity.[55] In fact, Tillard declares that 'even when it was only the community at Jerusalem, the Pentecostal church was already fully the catholic Church of God.'[56]

Tillard's qualitative conception of catholicity reframes the relationship between the local and universal. Previously, the focus was on the tension between the two – a push-and-pull centring on questions of authority and ecclesiality (this sort of dynamic has been present in many Christian communions). At its worst, a zero-sum game could emerge between the local church and the universal church. Through Tillard's conception of catholicity, though, rather than the catholic and the local standing at odds with one another, the church is catholic *because it is local*. Tillard, by focusing on the Jerusalem church as both

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[52] Ruddy, *The Local Church*, 74.
[53] Jean-Marie Tillard, 'Corps du Christ et Esprit Saint: Les exigences de la communion', *Irénikon* 63 (1990): 182; cited in Flanagan, *Communion, Diversity, and Salvation*, 76.
[54] Tillard, 'The Local Church within Catholicity', 449.
[55] "When a new church is founded, it cannot be said that the Church of God becomes more catholic; catholicity is actualized when salvation is incarnated in a new human place where faith, *koinonia*, the Eucharist, solidarity, the mission of all the churches of God are found', Tillard, 'The Local Church within Catholicity', 451.
[56] Tillard, 'The Local Church within Catholicity', 449.

local and catholic, dynamically holds both together: 'There will be no more catholicity in the gathering of local Churches 'scattered throughout the world' than was present in the single local Church of Jerusalem.'[57] This dynamic relationship also reshapes how the church is understood such that '[t]he church of Jerusalem, while *fully* the church of God, is not the *whole* church of God,'[58] and at the same time, "'There is no Church universal that is not also to be found inculturated in local churches."'[59]

With an emphasis on the localized practice of the church, it is not surprising that sacraments reside at the heart of Tillard's thinking, especially since part of his ecumenical work involved the reception of the Faith and Order convergence text *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*. For Tillard, baptism is a sacrament of faith, and he even notes that faith is a necessary condition of baptism, doing so in a way that, according to Ruddy, emphasizes the believer's 'free acceptance of the church's faith.'[60] Baptism is foundational to the church's unity, establishing equality between believers. In the liturgy of the eucharist, Tillard finds 'the normative expression par excellence of the local church, the Church of God in *such* a place.'[61] In short, in the eucharist, the church is what it does. The shared nature of the eucharist across multiple communions has a centripetal quality, drawing diverse peoples together: 'In gathering as the baptized around the eucharistic table with its bishop (or his presbyter), the local church fully expresses its

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[57] 'There will be no more catholicity in the gathering of local Churches 'scattered throughout the world' than was present in the single local Church of Jerusalem', Tillard, "The Local Church within Catholicity', 450.

[58] Ruddy, *The Local Church*, 69. There are distinct echoes of Tillard's thinking in particular sections of the latest Faith & Order convergence text, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, especially concerning the relationship between local churches and the universal church. Lines like 'Each local church contains within it the fullness of what it is to be the Church. It is wholly Church, but not the whole Church' (§31) and descriptions of the church as a communion of local churches highlight the importance of Tillard's ecclesiology to the global ecumenical movement. See World Council of Churches, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (Geneva: WCC, 2013), available at https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/The_Church_Towards_a_common_vision.pdf.

[59] Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology*, 154.

[60] Ruddy, *The Local Church*, 87.

[61] Tillard, *L'Eglise locale*, 263; cited in Ruddy, *The Local Church*, 205n128.

communion with God, humanity, and creation.'[62] However, while the eucharistic liturgy links all local churches together, there is also a centrifugal force that grounds each local community in their place. That is, the located character of the eucharist allows the gathered community to highlight the differences that are joined together at the eucharistic table and then sent out to be in the world that they have together consumed: the body of Christ. As such, each local community's actions after the liturgy also reflect the differences that mark each local community and the work that each context requires of those communities.

What Can Baptists Learn?

One way to follow this exposition of Tillard's thinking on the local church would be to focus on the places where he seems to tilt toward Baptist thinking. These do exist. For instance, Dennis Doyle remarks on how Tillard's always-inculturated character of the church universal within the church local allows him to affirm aspects of free church theology, such as 'the constitutive role of the local church.'[63] Baptists might even celebrate a bit ('See, even the Catholics are recognizing that we are right on this.'). Alternatively, we might spotlight the remaining differences between Tillard's conception of the church and various Baptist versions. For instance, Tillard, even though he criticizes titular sees (i.e., dioceses that no longer functional exist within the Catholic Church), retains a significant role for the episcopacy and even the papacy within his theology of the local church. Moreover, his communion ecclesiology is built on the Catholic understanding of the local, which centres on the diocese led by the bishop rather than the parish led by the priest (the latter of which would be more analogous to a Baptist notion of the local church as grounded in the gathered congregation). However, to move down either of these paths would depart from the earlier commitment to receptive ecumenism. As a reminder, the question is not, What do Catholics need to learn (or have learned) from Baptists? or How are Baptists different from Catholics? Instead, it is, What can Baptists receive with integrity from Catholic communion ecclesiology more broadly and Tillard's version of it in particular? Along this path, four key insights deserve attention.

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[62] Ruddy, *The Local Church*, 90.
[63] Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology*, 154.

First, Tillard's vision of the local church recognizes the church outside the local congregation, that is, in bodies and structures that are not congregations. For Catholics, this looks like the diocese beyond the boundaries of the parish as well as synods of bishops beyond the diocese. Each is not only derived from the local (which is important for Tillard), but also embodies the church. As mentioned earlier, Baptists have had the practice of forming cooperative endeavors that exist outside the local congregation. However, as John Colwell writes of his own British context, 'Too often in practice . . . denominational committees and councils have been perceived as institutional and organizational rather than ecclesial and, increasingly over recent years, assemblies (both of Associations and the Union) have become more celebratory than ecclesially deliberative.'[64] While Colwell's comments directly concern the Baptist Union of Great Britain, they are apt commentary on Baptists in the United States as well. Even if cooperative efforts are seen as essential to the work of the church, they are not understood to be church in themselves.

For Baptists to receive this gift from Tillard would mean recognizing the ecclesiality of other congregations but also the ecclesiality of extracongregational structures such as associations, unions, and conventions. Even the Baptist World Alliance might be conceived as retaining a sense of church-ness. These cooperative endeavours—which Baptists already describe as helpful for local churches to accomplish their mission—would gain a deeper significance and theological weight. Such an understanding of extracongregational organizations has some distinct resonance with Paul Fiddes's suggestion that covenant ecclesiology places the local congregation in relation with external organizations such as associations and unions.[65] For Fiddes, this is centred on the 'rule of Christ':

> Because Christ rules in the local congregation, the congregation has a liberty that cannot be infringed by any external ecclesial power…. Since Christ also rules in assemblies of churches when they gather, the local church meeting *must* give serious attention to the way that this wider

[64] John Colwell, 'Integrity and Relatedness: Some Critical Reflections on Congregationalism and Connexionalism', *Baptist Quarterly* 48.1 (2017): 20.
[65] See Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, 43-45.

> association has discerned the mind of Christ, to be ready to trust fellow churches, and to have good reason if it is to challenge their proposals.[66]

In this manner, the theological category of 'church' would expand for Baptists beyond the local while still extending from the local.

Second, for Baptists to receive Tillard's ecclesiological vision with integrity would mean a reconfiguration of the local. Tillard's emphasis on the local church grounds it in particular contexts and cultures. As Ruddy states, the church is 'to sink its roots into the "fleshly earth" and draw sustenance from it.'[67] That is, local churches are unavoidably shaped by their locations, both in who they are and in what they do. This is where catholicity resides for Tillard. Or as Stanley Hauerwas notes, '[T]he catholicity of the church is necessarily local,' with local at least meaning that 'claims of unity begin with the concrete life of actual congregations.'[68]

Baptists, despite their emphasis on the local church, can occasionally make 'local church' into an abstraction that prevents genuine attention to the particular contextual details of a given place. Instead, as Fiddes writes, 'the local church is a community which gathers together a whole range of people, cutting across barriers of age, class, culture and temperament . . . Its strength comes from being a gathering of the "unlike".'[69] Like Tillard, Fiddes takes seriously the difference encountered within the local church, but not as an obstacle to unity. The local needs to be attended in all of its complexity, messiness, and wonder. To do this would provide what John Inscore Essick and Mark Medley describe as 'a fresh understanding of the local, which may be capable of resisting and countering parochial and individualistic dangers latent in Baptist ecclesiology.'[70]

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[66] Paul S. Fiddes, 'Covenanting Churches,' 37 in *Seeds of the Church: Towards an Ecumenical Baptist Ecclesiology*, edited by Teun van der Leer, Henk Bakker, Steven R. Harmon and Elizabeth Newman (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2022).
[67] Ruddy, *The Local Church*, 59.
[68] Stanley Hauerwas, 'Which Church? What Unity? Or, An Attempt to Say What I May Think About the Future of Christian Unity', *Pro Ecclesia* 22.3 (2013): 273.
[69] Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, 254.
[70] John Inscore Essick and Mark S. Medley, 'Local Catholicity: The Bodies and Places Where Jesus Is (Found)', *Review & Expositor* 112.1 (February 2015): 53.

Third, Tillard's emphasis on the local as communion, and the wider church as a communion of communions, is instructive for Baptists. In many ways, this is ground that has been traveled by earlier Baptist covenant ecclesiology. However, the linkage between the two approaches may further develop Baptists' own ecclesiological resources and reflection. The covenantal relationship centers on the people gathered together in one place and committed to participation in the worship and service of this one community. This community is gathered by God, not to be a solitary enclave, but to share in the wider people known as *ekklesia*—the people whom God has called forth across space and time (an *ekklesia* that Tillard recognizes as gathered). As such, if a Baptist congregation might be best conceived as a gathering and a gathered one, then the catholicity of the church might be best described as a 'Gathering of Gatherings.'

Fourth, Tillard's notion of the local church is not developed over against the universal or catholic church. Inspired by these insights, Baptist might recognize the catholic as present within the local. Moreover, the divine commission of the *ekklesia*, which is sometimes diminished within Baptist ecclesiology since it can easily elevate the place of the universal, is maintained as well. That is, Baptists can boldly declare that the church is established by God and not simply a human creation. To do so, it might be helpful to take a clue from Tillard's ecclesiology.

To truly receive this gift from Tillard's ecclesiology will likely require some rethinking of the relationship between a local congregation and its neighbours. Often using terms such as 'autonomy' and 'independence,' the focus has been the liberty of the local congregation at the expense of everything apart from the local. However, if the local is always already catholic, then there is no zero-sum game between them. Moreover, something is lost when the local is not seen in a dynamic relationship with the catholic. Catholicity, then, leads to a different notion of liberty, as John Colwell suggests: 'If a local church is to be recognized as church its liberty must be bounded by a commitment to catholicity.'[71]

[71] Colwell, 'Integrity and Relatedness', 16.

Conclusion

In 2017, former Baptist World Alliance General Secretary and Jamaican Baptist theologian Neville Callam remarked that there was an opportunity for global Baptists to 'affirm a communion ecclesiology that honors historic Baptist emphases.'[72] He stated that the BWA, while not an overseeing or supervisory body over churches or conventions and unions, was more than simply an affinity group or 'a voluntary association of people claiming to share a common heritage.'[73] Instead, Callam described the BWA as 'a fellowship or communion of churches' with an 'ecclesial density.'[74] What might this ecclesiology look like? Through Tillard's work, Baptists who love and value the gathered local church are challenged to see that gathering as participating in the larger gathering of God across space and time. This 'Gathering of Gatherings' does not set the local over against the universal, and it has profound implications for intra-Baptist relations and ecumenical conversations.

In the rabbinical Jewish tradition, Pentecost (or Shavuot) marked a time to remember the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. This was an occasion that served as something of a covenant renewal. Stemming from Tillard's emphasis on the church at Pentecost, Baptists might see Pentecost as an opportunity to reconsider the nature of the local church. This will require giving deeper attention to the contours of our local contexts (what Tillard calls the 'fleshly earth'), which will also necessitate seeing a wider horizon for what is church. In truth, embracing the church as a 'Gathering of Gatherings' is a summons to recover a sense of the pilgrim church. In this way, Baptists can become

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[72] Ken Camp, 'BWA Leader emphasizes "essential oneness" of Christian world communion', *Baptist Standard*, March 29, 2017, available at https://www.baptiststandard.com/news/texas/bwa-leader-emphasizes-essential-oneness-of-christian-world-communion/

[73] 'Baptist World Alliance has deep "ecclesial density,"' www.baptistworld.org/news/bwa-has-deep-ecclesial -density; for more on Callam discussing the ecclesiological significance of the BWA, see Neville Callam, 'A Word from . . .', *Review and Expositor* 111.4 (2014): 317-19.

[74] BWA Communications, 'Baptist World Alliance has deep "ecclesial density,"' available at https://www.baptistworld.org/news/bwa-has-deep-ecclesial-density. For full lecture, see https://mediaspace.baylor.edu/media/Dr.+Neville+Callam+-+%22The+Case+of+the+Baptist+World+Alliance%22/0_q1z3mshn/39060762.

more Baptist in their understanding of the local church, even if they do so by carefully listening to the work of a Catholic ecclesiologist.

Note on Contributor

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Designed by Micky Munroe. The image is based on a painting that was for many years displayed in Helwys Hall, Regent's Park College, Oxford and was designed by Henry Wheeler Robinson (College Principal, 1920-44), representing the five principles of Baptist life: faith, baptism, evangelism, fellowship and freedom. See H. Wheeler Robinson, 'The Five Points of a Baptist's Faith' *Baptist Quarterly* 11.2-2 (January-April 1942), 4–14.