Ryan Andrew Newson, *Inhabiting the World: Identity, Politics, and Theology in Radical Baptist Perspective*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2018.

Near the beginning of this stimulating new book, Ryan Newson observes that "a central *theological* task in the current context is not really to provide a 'new Christian theology,' whatever that means, but to describe a 'new world' that can be inhabited by Christians seeking to be faithful therein" (2). That description involves both an account of "the current context," which he develops in terms of certain postmodern intellectual and cultural shifts, and a picture of ecclesial identity as it might emerge in relation to these shifts. Newson, a Baptist theologian and professor, wants to claim his picture of the church fits a "radical" construal of his own tradition, and thus he dialogues extensively with sympathetic Baptist and Anabaptist theologians, above all Nancey Murphy and James McClendon. In fact, this volume works both as a compelling proposal in its own right and as a major study of McClendon's *oeuvre*.

Newson sketches his understanding of postmodernity in the first chapter, drawing on Murphy and McClendon's depiction of epochal philosophical transformations—toward epistemological holism, linguistic pragmatism, and metaphysical complexity—and Stephen Toulmin's vision of the reemergence of community-based "cosmopolitics" after the decline of the nation-state. The author suggests that "the desire [of the broad culture, or 'world'] is no longer for *stability and uniformity* but the need to protect *diversity and adaptability*" (19).

The question for Newson is then the shape of Baptist life in such a world, and his answer centers on listening "to oneself and one's embodied, organic desires; to one's neighbors; and to the untamed voice of God" (21). A listening church, he suggests, is diverse and adaptable, refusing the safety of theological or organizational systems worked out in advance of concrete encounters with speaking or expressing others (including, here, one's own body).

Newson's answer bears the marks of McClendon's understanding of Christian theology and ethics as comprising three interwoven strands—the body, society, and resurrection. In his second chapter, Newson surveys McClendon's project, focusing on his philosophical "perspectivism" and

his notion of the three strands. McClendon's conceptual resources enable Newson to embrace the particularity of Baptist Christian identity while avoiding imperialism and relativism, and to conceive of that identity as irreducibly involving Baptist bodies, social relations, and receptivity to the in-breaking reign of God.

The remaining chapters are organized in three sections of two chapters each, with each section corresponding to one of the three strands. In the first section, on the body strand, Newson treats personal identity as a complex phenomenon (chapter three) that is formed—even at the neurological level—by social practices (chapter four). These chapters engage political theory and neuroscience alongside McClendon to portray an embodied, social self whose inherent multiplicity can be (re)oriented via communal social practices to Jesus Christ.

The second section focuses on the social strand. Here Newson insists that the church is "formed at the border of encounter" (chapter five). The communal context of Christian identity formation need not be hopelessly insular or exclusivist if practices of humble listening are central to the church's witness. Of course, the church has often been insular and exclusivist, and the author explores how Christian practices can go wrong by examining race relations in the United States (chapter six).

The third section, on resurrection, outlines the nature of the Baptist radicalism Newson recommends (chapter seven) and the tension between an emphasis on Christian formation via regular practices and openness to apocalyptic surprise (chapter eight). On the one hand, Baptist radicalism is a mode of bold listening and responding to God subject to communal discernment normed by Scripture; on the other, discernment—the subject of Newson's 2017 book, *Radical Friendship: The Politics of Communal Discernment*—and other church practices should be regarded as training for surprise, not for reproduction of ecclesial structures.

Newson's excellent work challenges readers to inhabit the world by cultivating communal habits of listening to the multiplicity, diversity, dynamism, and vulnerability contained within ourselves, our relations within and without the church, and with God. Guided by McClendon, Newson avoids incoherence by construing this listening as rooted in trust and hope in Jesus Christ and commitment to Scripture and the church.

Going beyond McClendon, as he does on the subject of race, Newson might further consider the challenges of inhabiting gendered and sexed bodies in a stolen, ecologically devastated land.

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