Paul Fiddes is the most prominent constructive theologian identified with the Baptist tradition on the contemporary theological scene. He is also the tradition’s most significant ecumenical theologian. These are by no means discrete dimensions of his theological work. Fiddes’s participatory account of Trinitarian *koinonia* is not only central to his systematic theological programme; it is also at the core of his distinctive contributions to the Faith and Order stream of the modern ecumenical movement as a Baptist ecumenist. Indeed, Fiddes’s work in ecumenical theology is nothing less than the ecclesiological outworking of this core concept of Trinitarian participation that lends coherence to his systematic explorations of other doctrinal loci. This paper identifies, explores, and extends Fiddes’s contributions to ecumenical theology as they are given expression in the following three contexts: first, his ecumenically-oriented articulations of Baptist ecclesiology; second, the published reports of bilateral ecumenical dialogues with Baptist participation for which Fiddes served as an influential member of the Baptist delegations, as co-chair of the joint commissions, and as editor of the jointly-produced agreed reports from the dialogues; and third, Fiddes’s embrace of the emerging ecumenical paradigm of receptive ecumenism.

**Fiddes as Ecumenist**

First, a brief biographical sketch of Fiddes’s work as an ecumenist. His own theological education formed him well for this work. Fiddes prepared for Baptist ministry at Regent’s Park College in the ecumenical context of Oxford University, an institutional arrangement “committed to doing
theology across the boundaries of the churches.”¹ In *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology*—a key publication for the theme of this paper to which we will return extensively—he reflects on the ecumenical awareness fostered by the setting of his studies and professorial career:

In my own situation at Oxford, candidates are formed for Baptist ministry in a university faculty which includes not only a good number of Baptists, but members of the United Reformed and Methodist churches, Anglicans who are canons of Christ Church Cathedral or teachers in Anglican theological colleges, Roman Catholic theologians who are members of four orders (Benedictine, Jesuit, Dominican and Franciscan), and a Greek Orthodox bishop who is an internationally-known patristics scholar. All happily teach alongside each other. When theological colleagues come to visit us from elsewhere in Europe—especially Germany—or from seminaries in North America, they greatly appreciate the novel experience of working together in seminars across the denominations.²

And in the book’s “Preface and Acknowledgements” Fiddes links its proposals to a perspective on the relation of Baptist identity to that of the whole church represented by members of the Regent’s Park faculty:

I believe that the idea of Baptist identity which emerges from these pages is in continuity with a recognizable strand of Baptist thinking during the last hundred years, though hopefully adding some surprising twists within it. I am thinking of the “track” of Baptist heritage which has been trodden by some of those who have gone before me as members and staff of Regent’s Park College, and notably by Henry Wheeler Robinson, E. A. Payne, Neville Clark, Morris West and Barrie R. White. Indeed, I dedicate this book to the memory of one of them, Dr. Ernest A. Payne, who ordained me to the Christian ministry thirty years ago this year [2002]. Presiding over my ordination as a representative of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, he was also at the time a President of the World Council of Churches. In this he exemplified in himself the Baptist vision which places the community of Baptist Christians clearly within the fellowship of the church universal.³

Not all candidates for ministry formed in this manner eventually write ecumenical theology. But they are prepared to become local church ministers who in their congregational function as theologians-in-residence will have an ecumenical orientation, and it is unsurprising that some of them will become academic theologians—here I employ that designation broadly to include biblical scholars, ecclesiastical historians, and practical theologians as well as systematic/constructive theologians—whose scholarly work is ecumenically oriented. Fiddes’ subsequent doctoral study was not in

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² Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, 5.
³ Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, xv-xvi. Fiddes echoes this on the first page of the first chapter of the book in announcing a major dimension of its argument: “Part of the purpose of this book is to recall tracks made by Baptists in the past that have the potential still to offer guidance for the present day, to affirm that Baptists belong to the long story of the church universal (the ‘catholic church’)” (1).
systematic theology but Old Testament/Hebrew Bible studies, a field in which Baptist scholars in the U.K. had long been making ecumenically-recognized contributions in a way that eclipsed the profiles Baptist scholars in other theological disciplines had beyond the circles of Baptist theological education. Surely Fiddes’s year of postdoctoral study in systematic theology with Jürgen Moltmann at Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen in 1976 and 1977, in the midst of Moltmann’s influential service as a member of the World Council of Churches Commission on Faith and Order from 1963 to 1983, also had an impact on his developing ecumenical consciousness.

Across his career as an academic theologian, Fiddes has not merely had moonlighting stints as a Baptist ecumenist. He has served as co-chair of the international bilateral conversations between the Baptist World Alliance and the Anglican Communion (2000-2005) and co-editor of the published report from that dialogue. He was also co-chair of the international bilateral dialogue between the Baptist World Alliance and the Catholic Church (2006-2010) and co-editor of that

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6 Moltmann devoted a few pages of his autobiography to reflections on his two decades of service as a member of the WCC Commission on Faith and Order: Jürgen Moltmann, A Broad Place: An Autobiography, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 84-87. Fiddes’ study with Moltmann would have taken place around the time Moltmann made a proposal to Lukas Vischer, director of the WCC Commission on Faith and Order from 1966 to 1979, that “a specialist group from Faith and Order should try to find a solution to the filioque problem in the doctrine of the Trinity” (Moltmann, A Broad Place, 86). Moltmann’s proposal resulted in the formation of a working group appointed for that purpose that met in 1978 and 1979 at Château Klingenthal near Strasbourg, France, and in 1981 the WCC published the resulting report Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ: Ecumenical Reflections on the Filioque Controversy and commended it to the churches for study (Lukas Vischer, ed., Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ: Ecumenical Reflections on the Filioque Controversy [Faith and Order Paper, no. 103; Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1981]).

agreed report as well. Fiddes was a member of the joint commissions for two series of the national bilateral conversations between the Baptist Union of Great Britain and the Church of England (1992-2005 and 2011-2014); he was sole editor for the report from the second series of those conversations. Fiddes also represented the Baptist World Alliance as a delegate to pre-conversations in 1994, 1997, and 2011 with representatives of the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople aimed at laying the groundwork for an envisioned official international dialogue that has yet to be approved. He was chair of the Baptist World Alliance Commission on Doctrine and Christian Unity from 2000 to 2010 and has served as a member of the General Synod of the Church of England as an ecumenical representative. Fiddes has participated in instruments of multilateral ecumenical dialogue as well, in particular the Joint Working Group of the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church and a World Council of Churches Faith and Order Consultation on Baptism. While there is a proper distinction between ecumenism as intra-Christian dialogue and interreligious dialogue, it should also be noted that Fiddes was also editor of the Baptist response to

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11 These are mentioned in Fiddes, Tracks and Traces, xiv.
the document *A Common Word Between Us and You* issued by Islamic scholars and leaders in 2007.\textsuperscript{12} All these endeavors are not occasional sideline enterprises. They are integral to Fiddes’s constructive theological work and its connections with the life of the church.

**Fiddes’s Ecumenical Articulations of Baptist Ecclesiology**

A consistent theme in Fiddes’s constructive theological work has been his participatory account of Trinitarian *koinonia*—by which I mean an understanding of God as essentially relational and communal, *ad intra* and *ad extra*, which retrieves the patristic concepts of *perichōrēsis* and *theōsis*, makes social Trinitarian connections between the Triune God and humanity in the image of this God, and is informed by a critical appropriation of aspects of process thought, enabling Fiddes to portray the divine-human relationship as one in which God participates in human life and humanity is drawn into participation in the divine life, leading toward the fullness of community as God’s goal for the world. If this is a fair characterization of the doctrine of the Trinity given expression in *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity*, published in 2000, it does not represent a novel turn in his thinking, though this is where he develops his Trinitarian theology and its relevance for Christian living most fully, bringing it into conversation with new dialogue partners.\textsuperscript{13} Participatory Trinitarian *koinonia* is, I think, the overarching theological framework of Fiddes’s first monograph-length ventures into constructive theology: *The Creative Suffering of God*, published in 1988, and *Past Event and Present Salvation: The Christian Doctrine of the Atonement*, which appeared the following year.\textsuperscript{14} In the former book, this sort of participatory Trinitarianism made it possible for Fiddes to propose what I consider a much thicker imagination of the divine experience of human suffering than the one

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offered by Moltmann’s *The Crucified God*, though it is heavily indebted to Moltmann’s insights;15 in the latter volume, it leads him to base “this study of atonement on the conviction that in Christ God participated to the utmost in the human predicament, and has never journeyed farther into the depths of [God’s] creation.”16

Two years after the publication of *Participating in God*, participatory Trinitarianism reappears in *Tracks and Traces*, this time as the theological rationale for a reframing of Baptist ecclesiology in ecumenical perspective. It should be noted that much of the work on material in this book that had its first incarnation as previously presented or published papers and articles overlapped with the period during which Fiddes worked on writing *Participating in God*. There is a sense in which *Participating in God* is an ecclesiologically generic exploration of the implications of participatory Trinitarianism for Christian living (though Baptist convictions and practices are referenced in three passages of the book17), while *Tracks and Traces* is the ecclesiologically specific outworking of Fiddes’s account of participatory Trinitarianism in the form of Baptist ecclesiological proposals.

“Tracks” in the title refers to pathways taken in the Baptist tradition, in relation to the whole Christian tradition and the pathways it encompasses, that “have the potential still to offer guidance for the present day,” and “traces” are the partial apprehensions of the ineffable God—i.e., expressions of theology—that can “point to God and enable us to participate in God’s life” and

15 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (New York: Harper & Row, 1974). The framework of participatory Trinitarianism is referenced at various points throughout *The Creative Suffering of God*, but with reference to its relation to Moltmann’s theopassianism as articulated in *The Crucified God*, this passage is significant: “If we attempt to think of God as three subjects with their own consciousness, we may end as Moltmann does with a divine society which is admittedly not independent of mankind in the sense of being impassible and self-sufficient, but whose suffering can still apparently be conceived as caused by the divine persons alone. In contrast, to think of God as a network of relationships is inevitably to involve man and his response, because it is impossible to think of God as a complex of relationships without our participation in God. This is because this manner of speaking of God cannot be objectified like other objects in the world. It is not possible to visualize or portray three interweaving relationships, or three ‘movements’ of being which are defined by their relations to each other. This sort of talk about God only makes sense in terms of our participation in God. In fact, Moltmann himself came close to affirming this sort of thing in his earlier book *The Crucified God*, when he spoke of God as ‘the event of Golgotha’ and to the question ‘can one pray to an event?’ answered that one can ‘pray in this event’” (Fiddes, *Creative Suffering of God*, 140-41; quotation is from Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 247).
“appear only in the context of community.”\textsuperscript{18} In the tracks of the Baptist tradition Fiddes discovers the traces of a theology of participatory Trinitarianism: the Baptist emphasis on covenant as the basis of congregational life has had in mind “not simply…a human act of commitment to each other,” but “an intersection between the promise-making of members of a local congregation, and God’s eternal covenant of grace” in which there is “an integration of the horizontal and vertical dimensions of covenant.”\textsuperscript{19} Fiddes suggests that the centrality to Baptist communities of covenant so conceived “should mean that Baptist theologians will be interested in the theological idea of ‘participation’ in God,” offering Stanley Grenz’s \textit{Theology for the Community of God} as a major example of such a Baptist theological interest, for Grenz employed the “link between human community and divine communion” as the integrative motif that lends coherence to his systematic theology.\textsuperscript{20} Fiddes proceeds to do that himself in a more narrowly focused manner in the remainder of \textit{Tracks and Traces}, offering a reframing of Baptist covenantal ecclesiology in light of a participatory account of Trinitarian \textit{koinonia} that has profound ecumenical implications.

These connections between participatory Trinitarianism and Baptist ecclesiology are made most fully in chapter 4, “Church and Trinity: A Baptist Ecclesiology of Participation,” the concern of which is “not simply the activity of God through the church, but the sharing of the church in God…an ecclesiology of participation…[which] tells us as much about the nature of God who lives in communion as about the church as a social unit.”\textsuperscript{21} In this chapter the focus is primarily on the fellowship of the congregation, but it ends with an opening to forms of participation that transcend the local fellowship:

\textsuperscript{18} Fiddes, \textit{Participating in God}, 1-3.
\textsuperscript{19} Fiddes, \textit{Tracks and Traces}, 18.
\textsuperscript{21} Fiddes, \textit{Tracks and Traces}, 66 (65-82).
Finally, there needs to be a balance between dependence and independence in any human relationship, and the maturity to achieve this usually comes from being part of a wider context of relations, beyond the immediate people involved. Healthy particular relationships are always part of a wider sphere, a network of relationships whose edges we can never calculate. The engagement of a community in the Triune God places its members in a context of relations which is as wide as the world, as God opens the divine life to include all creation.\textsuperscript{22} This globally wide “context of relations” certainly includes ecumenical relationships. Other chapters tease out of the tracks of the Baptist tradition traces of possibilities for inhabiting the network of relationships with the whole church more fully, especially in connection with Baptist perspectives on the nature and function of ecclesial authority, baptism, the Eucharist, and the ecumenical movement itself.

*Participating in God* framed authority in perichoretic terms: rather than exercising power in dominating ways, the God whose inner life is marked by mutuality and reciprocity both models a non-hierarchical exercise of authority and invites humanity not merely to imitate it but to participate in it in both church and the civil order.\textsuperscript{23} In *Tracks and Traces* Fiddes offers, as one would expect, a non-hierarchical account of how authority functions in Baptist congregational polity, but here he focuses on the connection of the church with the divine exercise of authority in the rule of the Christ, who as head of his body draws the church into the life of these perichoretic relationships. Such a critique of the hierarchical models of authority that predominate elsewhere in the church could work against ecumenical convergence on the matter of church order, but Fiddes frames it so as to create openings for Baptist recognition of and participation in expressions of church beyond Baptist congregational and associational life and to welcome the voices of the whole church into the efforts of Baptist congregations to bring their life together more fully under the rule of Christ.

Fiddes locates this rule of Christ in the church both in the gathered local congregation and the embodiment of the church in various forms of trans-local fellowship:

\textsuperscript{22} Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, 81-82.  
\textsuperscript{23} Fiddes, *Participating in God*, 62-108.
The liberty of local churches to make decisions about their own life and ministry is not based in a human view of autonomy or independence, or in selfish individualism, but in a sense of being under the direct rule of Christ who relativizes other rules. This liberating rule of Christ is what makes for the distinctive ‘feel’ of Baptist congregational life, which allows for spiritual oversight (episkope) both by the whole congregation gathered together in church meeting, and by the minister(s) called to lead the congregation....Since the same rule of Christ can be experienced in assemblies of churches together, there is also the basis here for Baptist associational life, and indeed for participating in ecumenical clusters.24

This suggests that a Baptist “gathered church” ecclesiology is at least in theory able to grant a substantial degree of ecclesiality not only to various forms of denominational trans-local associations of Baptists but even to ecumenical gatherings such as national councils of churches, the World Council of Churches, and the joint commissions of national, regional, and international bilateral ecumenical dialogues, for all of these embodiments of the church are instances “where two or three are gathered in [Jesus’] name” (Matt 18:20) for the purpose of bringing their common life under the lordship of Christ, even when the members of these embodiments of the church do not belong to the same local fellowship or denominational communion.25

Fiddes fleshes out what it means for the whole congregation to seek together the mind of Christ in the “church meeting”:

Upon the whole people in covenant there lies the responsibility of finding a common mind, of coming to an agreement about the way of Christ for them in life, worship and mission. But they cannot do so unless they use the resources that God has given them, and among those resources are the pastor, the deacons and (if they have them) the elders. The church meeting is not ‘people power’ in the sense of simply counting votes and canvassing a majority....The aim is to search for consent about the mind of Christ, and so people should be sensitive to the voices behind the votes, listening to them according to the weight of their experience and insight. As B[arrington] White puts it, ‘One vote is not as good as another in church meeting,’ even though it has the same strictly numerical value.26

“In all this,” Fiddes writes, “the pastor’s voice is the one that carries weight”—provided that pastors have created trust in their leadership through service. In this paradigm, pastors share in the congregational exercise of episkope, but the weight their voice carries is associated with the catechetical task of equipping the members of the congregation with the resources they need for

24 Fiddes, Tracks and Traces, 6.
26 Fiddes, Tracks and Traces, 86.
seeking the mind of Christ. While Fiddes does not name here all the resources God has given the church for finding this common mind, among which are the congregational leaders he names, I suggest that here is where pastors in the teaching dimension of their exercise of oversight have the ecumenical function of bringing the doctrine, worship, and practice of other congregations, other Christian traditions, and indeed the whole Christian tradition to bear on the congregation’s process of discerning how Christ is leading them to bring their life together more fully under his rule.  

Participatory Trinitarianism enables Fiddes to make two moves in his treatment of baptism that represent openings for Baptist convergence toward other Christian traditions with differing theologies and practices of baptism, and vice-versa. The first has to do with its sacramental character. It is true that prior to Baptist reactions against the Oxford Movement in the nineteenth century, Baptist confessions of faith routinely called baptism a “sacrament,” and that in the twentieth century many Baptists began to recover a more sacramental understanding of baptism, but much of the Baptist tradition over the past century and a half has been marked by an anti-sacramentalism that sometimes borders on Gnosticism in its reluctance to recognize that God may make use of material means in acting transformatively in human lives. In this many Baptists stand distant from the link between an incarnational understanding of God’s relation to the world disclosed in Christ and a sacramental understanding of the Christian life that belongs to the whole

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27 I have described this process by which the congregation may draw on the resources of the whole church in bringing its life under the rule of Christ as a practice of “Free Church magisterium” in Steven R. Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future: Story, Tradition, and the Recovery of Community* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2016), 165-88.


church in its qualitative catholicity. But in a chapter on “Baptism and Creation” in *Tracks and Traces*, it is the participation of the Triune God not only in human life but in creation itself that makes baptism an event in which God works through material means to draw people into participation in God and God’s network of relationships:

In baptism, then, the candidate and the community find themselves involved in a deeper way in God’s relationships with church, human community and cosmos. The water as an element of creation actually enables that participation to take place, evoking such experiences as birth, cleansing, conflict, journey and renewal. These motifs are planted deeply in the human awareness of the natural world, but they also belong to the story of God’s pilgrimage with people through history, and are finally focused in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Fiddes creatively interprets the materiality of the Baptist practice of baptism as implying a robustly sacramental theology in which there is “the richest expression of the link between redemption and creation”:

Total immersion, and the involvement of persons who have conscious faith, means that there is the greater opportunity for sacred drama involving substantial contact with the element of water. There is potential for a multi-media drama that will involve the person and the community at every level….I want to affirm that the Baptist practice of believer’s baptism does make possible a recovery of the sense of the baptismal water as an actual element of the natural world, as well as a metaphor of God’s redemptive activity. This location of baptism in creation also relates, I want to show, to wider issues of Baptist self-identity and to the Baptist contribution to the ecumenical scene.

This is the stuff of which ecumenical convergence is made (pun intended).

Participatory Trinitarianism also helps Fiddes characterize baptism as integral to a process or journey of Christian initiation, the whole of which is “immersion into the threefold fellowship of God who is Trinity.” In this journey there is “an interplay of divine grace and human faith at all stages” so that “at any stage in this process of making a partnership (or covenant), baptism can be a meeting place between grace and faith and so can focus the two realities,” leading Fiddes to urge Baptists and their dialogue partners “to abandon the stereotypes that infant baptism only expresses

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divine grace, and that believers’ baptism only witnesses to human faith.\textsuperscript{33} As we will see in the next section of this paper, Fiddes has succeeded in drawing this paradigm for baptismal convergence into recent Baptist ecumenical dialogues with other churches that, while joining Baptists in baptizing believers who have decided to follow Jesus in baptism, also baptize infants born to believing parents and nurtured in the faith of the church toward a faith claimed personally.

The chapter “The Church as a Eucharistic Community: A Baptist Contribution” engages this topic as well in a manner open to ecumenical convergence, with movements that parallel those Fiddes made in his treatment of baptism: the Supper too, through material means, draws us into deeper participation in the Triune God’s participation in our lives and our world in ways that cannot be bound to particular explanatory theories of how Christ becomes present in this meal, and there is more than one way in which the place of baptism within the journey of initiation into the fellowship of the Triune God can lead to the table.\textsuperscript{34} There is also a chapter that offers a Baptist perspective on “The Church’s Ecumenical Calling,” which introduces Baptists to the recent emphasis of the ecumenical movement on a Trinitarian \textit{koinonia} ecclesiology that addresses Baptist concerns about what unity might mean—not one world church, but churches in full communion with one another in a unity marked by diversity, rooted in the Triune God’s unity in diversity—even while pressing Baptists to embody in a movement toward visible unity the implications of the invisible, spiritual unity they already affirm.\textsuperscript{35}

\textbf{Fiddes’s Influence on Bilateral Ecumenical Dialogues}

The influence of Fiddes as ecumenical theologian is evident in recent international bilateral dialogues between the Baptist World Alliance and the Anglican Communion (2000-2005) and the BWA and the Catholic Church (2006-2010). In both of these dialogues, Fiddes served as co-chair and as co-

\textsuperscript{33} Fiddes, \textit{Tracks and Traces}, 145.
\textsuperscript{34} Fiddes, \textit{Tracks and Traces}, 157-92.
\textsuperscript{35} Fiddes, \textit{Tracks and Traces}, 194-97 (193-227).
editor of the jointly-produced agreed reports. Both published reports are the lengthiest of the reports produced by any of the international bilaterals involving all Christian communions that have burgeoned in the half-century since the Second Vatican Council provided their initial impetus, and they are arguably the most substantial of them. If one has read Fiddes, one can easily hear Fiddes’s voice throughout these reports. While they are the work of all the members of the delegations to these conversations, these reports bear the unmistakable imprint of Fiddes’s own ecumenical theology.\textsuperscript{36}

The Anglican-Baptist international dialogue represented a novel experiment in ecumenical conversations at this level: rather than appointing two delegations with relatively fixed membership that met annually across the span of the dialogue, this was a regionally contextualized dialogue that met in six different regions of the world in which there are opportunities for encounter between Baptists and Anglicans at the grassroots, with the majority of the membership for each regional phase of the dialogue drawn from churches in that region and a small continuation committee with

\textsuperscript{36} As a fellow member of the Baptist delegations to the BWA dialogue with the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church, I can sketch out the following process of authorship for these reports. Each year’s week-long round of dialogue would begin with a series of papers presented on themes addressed in that round from the perspective of each communion, with extensive discussion following each paper. Later in the week smaller working groups would be charged with identifying convergences, remaining differences, and matters meriting further discussion in regard to various aspects of the themes addressed that week. The final day of each round was usually a plenary discussion led by presentations from the smaller working groups, with general discussion focused on working toward agreed language for a detailed summary of these convergences, remaining differences, and matters meriting further discussion. Fiddes served as the secretary for this summary, recording this agreed language on his laptop computer with the working document projected on a screen. (The “Foreword” to the Anglican-Baptist dialogue report acknowledges Fiddes, “who undertook an astounding labour of love in producing a rolling digest of the substance of the conversations at each stage; a digest which ultimately became the heart of the completed text” [Anglican Consultative Council and Baptist World Alliance, \textit{Conversations Around the World 2000-2005}, 6].) Following each round of dialogue, Fiddes would enlist a pair of delegates, one from each delegation, to expand the summary memorandum into a draft of a section of the final report, which would in turn be presented at the beginning of the following year’s round of conversations and edited in light of input from the whole joint commission. A week in the final year of the series of conversations would be devoted to assembling these draft sections into a provisional report and then hammering out a penultimate draft of its text. The co-chairs then were officially tasked with serving as co-editors for further work on the final report, which was submitted again to the members of the delegations to the joint commissions for feedback, and then the final document was submitted to meetings of responsible divisions of the respective world communions for official approval, after which the reports were official issued with the world communions themselves technically functioning as the corporate authors of the report. In the case of both of these bilateral dialogues and their reports, Fiddes functioned as the primary editor. While the reports are the product of the members of the delegations to the joint commissions, whose communal authorship Fiddes has faithfully represented, Fiddes’s voice was an influential one in these discussions, and readers of Fiddes’s works will recognize his authorial style in the language of the reports.
three members from each communion that participated in all six rounds of the dialogue and included Fiddes. One of the major fruits of this approach was the inclusion after Part One of the report, which contained the more traditional summaries of convergences and remaining differences, of Part Two, “Stories”—a thick narration of the ways Anglicans and Baptists in different contexts have been able to envision and embody various local expressions of Christian unity in relation to one another. Surely being able to tell this concretized story together is one of the most significant achievements of the dialogue, and it is a pity that the inclusion of this report in one of the massive volumes of the *Growth in Agreement* series sponsored by the World Council of Churches abridged it by excising the “Stories” section.\(^37\) But that section was directly authored by representatives from those regions; Fiddes’s contributions as co-chair and co-editor of the report are most evident in Part One.

In the first part of that report, Fiddes’s own perspectives on the major themes addressed in the conversations (ecclesial continuity, confession of the apostolic faith, mission and ministry, baptism, church membership, the Eucharist, *episkopē*, and the meaning of ecclesial recognition) have overlapped with, and perhaps influenced, the way the regional joint commissions and the continuation committee have framed the convergences proposed in the report. I call attention to two specific examples. First, in substantiating the report’s claim that “there is more common ground between Baptists and Anglicans in appeal to the historic creeds than is often supposed; there is certainly no disagreement about the content of the creeds,” the report includes this passage that qualifies the standard description of Baptists as non-credal:

> The distinction for Baptists between creeds and confessions is not an absolute one, and the issue seems to be more about the way that statements of faith are *used*. In Baptist confessions of the past and present the major creeds and statements of the world-wide church have in fact often been explicitly acknowledged. A confession of a group of English General Baptist churches in 1678, for instance,

explicitly affirms that the Creed of Nicaea and the so-called Athanasian Creed are to be “received” and “believed” and “taught by the ministers of Christ.” Generally, moreover, the ordering of the early Baptist confessions follows the shape of the creeds, and their doctrinal formulations show creedal influence, even to the extent of particular wording. In the later twentieth century the German-language Baptist confession used in Germany, Austria and Switzerland declares that “it presupposes the Apostles’ Creed as a common confession of Christendom,” and the Norwegian Baptists in their confession have affirmed “the content” of both the Apostles’ and the Nicene Creed. A model covenant service, recently produced by the Baptist Union of Great Britain for use in churches in 2001, provides in its main text the alternatives of a selection of Scripture verses and the Apostles’ Creed as a means of confession the Christian faith, and includes the Nicene Creed in further resources. It is also worth recalling that at the First Baptist World Congress on July 12, 1905, all the Baptists stood voluntarily and recited the Apostles’ Creed, “as a simple acknowledgment of where we stand and what we believe.”

Compare this with the following passage from the first chapter of Tracks and Traces, published in 2003 (two years before the publication of the dialogue report) and adapted from a chapter in an edited multiauthor book published in 2000, which in turn was a revision of a paper delivered at a consultation in 1999:

The distinction then is not an absolute one, and is rather more about the way that statements of faith are used. In many Baptist confessions, the major creeds of the world-wide church have in fact been explicitly acknowledged as trustworthy witnesses to faith. A General Baptist confession of 1679, for instance, affirms that the Creed of Nicaea and the so-called Athanasian Creed are to be “received” and “believed” and “taught by the ministers of Christ.” At the very first Congress of the Baptist World Alliance, in London in 1905, the chairman Dr Alexander McLaren called on the vast gathering to repeat together the words of all the Apostles’ Creed as “a simple acknowledgment of where we stand and what we believe.” In the later twentieth century the German-language Baptist confession used in Germany, Austria and Switzerland declares that “it presupposes the Apostles’ Creed as a common confession of Christendom,” and the Norwegian Baptists in their confession have affirmed “the content” of both the Apostles’ and the Nicene Creed. The model covenant service, recently produced by the Baptist Union of Great Britain for use in churches in 2001, provides in its main text the alternatives of a selection of Scripture verses and the Apostles’ Creed as a means of confession the Christian faith, and includes the Nicene Creed in further resources.

It does not require sophisticated source-critical analysis to recognize the source material behind the passage in the agreed Anglican-Baptist report. An only slightly adapted version of this passage also appears in a contribution by Fiddes to the report from the second series of conversations between the Baptist Union of Great Britain and the Church of England published in 2015.

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A second example of Fiddes’s influence on the Anglican-Baptist international dialogue report is its subsection on “Baptism and the Process of Initiation” (§§ 40-52). It seeks to move beyond the impasses inevitably confronted by credobaptist and pedobaptist communions when “common baptism” is the ecumenical paradigm proposed for convergence between them by proposing instead the recognition “that the ‘beginning’ of the Christian life—or initiation—is not so much a single event, but a process or journey which may extend over a considerable time” (§ 42):

During the course of the conversations, the suggestion has gained ground that baptism, whether of infants or disciples, certainly plays a key part in this story of “beginning” but is by no means the whole of the story. In seeking for greater understanding between churches, it was urged that comparison should be made not simply between the ways baptism is practised as a single event, but between varying shapes of the whole journey of initiation. This journey will include, as well as baptism, the working of the grace of God that prepares the human heart, early nurture within the community, the responsible “yes” of faith by the individual, a sharing for the first time with other Christians in the Lord’s Supper, and the commissioning of disciples for service. Thus, the question that arises is not whether the two communions can affirm a “common baptism”; these conversations did not have that aim. The question is how far each communion might be able to recognize that members of the other have made the same journey, wherever the place of baptism is located within it.41

This is the paradigm that Fiddes commended in *Tracks and Traces*. The delegations to the Anglican-Baptist joint commission embraced it and through the publication of the report submitted it to the churches of their communions for consideration in the process of reception, but they have done so at least in part through the persuasiveness of Fiddes’s theological voice in the commission.

A penultimate draft of the report *The Word of God in the Life of the Church* from the second series of conversations between the Baptist World Alliance and the Catholic Church (2006-2010) included a lengthy introduction that contextualized the report’s summary of consensus, differentiated consensus, and remaining differences on the dialogue’s themes (The Authority of Christ in Scripture and Tradition, Baptism and Lord’s Supper/Eucharist as Visible Word of God in the *Koinonia* of the Church, Mary in the Communion of the Church, and Oversight and Primacy in the Mission of the Church) in relation to previous dialogues that each communion had held with other Christian world communions. This introduction also summarized the most significant

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convergences between Baptists and Catholics forged in the dialogue and suggested reasons they were significant. In the process of approving the final text of the report, it was decided that this introduction should not be part of the official document. When the report was published in a special issue of the American Baptist Quarterly, however, this introduction—authored by Fiddes—prefaced the section of the issue devoted to the text of the report. Reading the report in light of this introduction only confirms conclusions about the influence of Fiddes on the dialogue and its report that may be reached by reading the report through the lenses of the corpus of Fiddes’s writings.

Identifying all the traces of Fiddes’s influence in the report is well beyond the scope of this section of the paper, but the following examples related to convergences in understandings of the nature of ecclesial koinonia, baptism, and the role of Mary in the life of the church will suffice. In keeping with the conventions of the report, the statements in bold type represent agreement between Baptists and Catholics in the dialogue; in the report the sections set in regular type either elaborated the bold-type agreement or detailed areas of remaining divergence in relation to what representatives of the two communions could propose as agreements.

Some of these agreements make connections between ecclesial koinonia and participation in the life of the Triune God in ways that are indebted both to the recent ecumenical emphasis on this understanding of communion and to Fiddes’s appropriation and development of it:

7. The One God exists from eternity in a life of relationship, in a communion (koinonia) of three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ, the eternal Son, is the Word of God as God’s self-communication of self-giving love. Jesus Christ is thus God’s self-revelation who draws us into the communion of God’s own triune life and into communion (koinonia) with each other. This means that the Word of God in the church in the fullest sense is Christ himself who rules as Lord in the grace and power of the Spirit. 43

11. The church is thus to be understood as a koinonia (“communion,” “participation” or “fellowship”), which is grounded in the koinonia of the triune God. Believers are joined in koinonia through participation in the communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. At the same time they are in koinonia through their participation in the community of believers gathered by

Christ in his church.…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.14

Another Baptist-Catholic convergence proposes that this koinonia of the church may be understood in terms of covenant (§ 16)45—traditionally more of a Baptist emphasis, and one developed at length by Fiddes in relation to an ecclesiology rooted in participatory Trinitarianism in Tracks and Traces. One may also hear echoes of Fiddes’s perspectives in that book on what it means for the whole congregation to seek together the mind of Christ in the “church meeting” in this expression of a convergence between Catholics and Baptists on the need for local churches/congregations to be interdependent in their efforts to bring their life together under the rule of Christ:

26. Local churches and congregations have communion with each other in order to hear the Word of God and find the “mind of Christ” together.46

The approach to mutual baptismal recognition elaborated in Tracks and Traces and affirmed in the Baptist-Anglican international and British national dialogues is put forward as a Baptist-Catholic convergence:

101. Initiation into Christ and his church is a process wider than the act of baptism itself. We can work towards a mutual recognition of the different forms that initiation takes among us, as an entire “journey” of faith and grace.47

The dialogue’s overarching convergence on Mary is developed in terms of Mary as a model of discipleship in the communion of the church (§§ 132-61). But a convergence described by Fiddes in his introduction to the report as “bold”48 in more ways than one for Baptists is this:

156. The prayer of Christians always shares in the greater intercession of Christ as Son to the Father (I Jn. 2:1), exemplified in his life and continuing in his exaltation (Heb. 7:25). As the Apostle Paul puts it, we say “Amen” to God through Christ (2 Cor. 1:20) and so we pray to the Father through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. We pray like this in the company of all the saints

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who are praying with Christ, those who are alive and those who have gone before us. So the church prays with Mary (Acts 1:14) and learns to pray like Mary in the communion of saints. For instance, Mary's prophetic canticle, the “Magnificat” (Luke 1:46-55), expresses the church's song of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord its Saviour, its preferential love for the poor and lowly, and its mission to establish God's reign of justice.49

In other words, Baptists, while not able to join Catholics in affirming the practice of praying to Mary, are nonetheless able to join them in the recognition that if when we pray we are praying along with the communion of saints, and if Mary belongs to the communion of saints, then when we pray we are praying along with Mary and should be conscious of doing so. This too is a proposal promoted elsewhere by Fiddes. In his most recent book Baptists and the Communion of Saints: A Theology of Covenanted Disciples, co-authored with Brian Haymes and Richard Kidd, Fiddes contributes a chapter titled “Praying with Mary and All the Saints.”50 The proposals made in that chapter were very much on his mind when Fiddes co-chaired the conversations in the round of this series devoted to the role of Mary in the life of the church when the joint commission was hosted by the Baptist House of Studies at Duke Divinity School in Durham, North Carolina in December 2008, and he succeeded in persuading Baptist and Catholic delegates alike toward this way of expressing a groundbreaking convergence.

**Fiddes and “Receptive Ecumenism”**

A newer approach to ecumenical engagement has been gaining traction in the international ecumenical community in recent years. Some older approaches to ecumenism perhaps created Baptist resistance to institutional expressions of the quest for Christian unity such as the World Council of Churches by giving the impression that the price of visible unity would be the surrender of some of the things held most dear by each church. “Receptive ecumenism,” however, is an approach to ecumenical dialogue according to which the communions in conversation with one

another seek to identify the distinctive gifts that each tradition has to offer the other and which each could receive from the other with integrity. This paradigm for ecumenical engagement was given expression by Pope John Paul II in his 1995 encyclical on ecumenism *Ut Unum Sint.* “Dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas. In some ways it is always an ‘exchange of gifts’” (§ 28). Some bilateral dialogues, such as that between the Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council, have worked toward concrete proposals for the exchange of ecclesial gifts. Yet as an international conference on receptive ecumenism held at Durham University (UK) in 2006 defined the enterprise, “the primary emphasis is on learning rather than teaching....each tradition takes responsibility for its own potential learning from others and is, in turn, willing to facilitate the learning of others as requested but without dictating terms and without making others’ learning a precondition to attending to ones’ own.”

Paul Fiddes has been a notable Baptist participant in this receptive ecumenism project. In an article published in the journal *Louvain Studies,* he embraces this paradigm and responds “to the challenge of considering what Baptists might learn and receive from their ‘others’ among the Christian tradition.” When Fiddes affirms a suggestion “that the result of this exercise should be not only to anticipate the time when all will be one in Christ, but also to become ‘more deeply, more richly, more fully’ what we already are (whether Catholic, Anglican, Methodist or Baptist) through a process of imaginatively and lovingly exploring others’ particular gifts,” this coheres with his

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54 Quotation from a briefing document distributed to conference participants in Walter Cardinal Kasper’s “Foreword” to *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning,* ed. Murray, vii.
56 Fiddes, “Learning from Others,” 55.
development in *Tracks and Traces* of a communion ecclesiology in which when unity is made more fully visible there remains diversity in unity, rooted in the unity in diversity of the Triune God.\(^{57}\)

In the article Fiddes identifies four specific areas in which Baptists might more intentionally learn something from the wider church through the practice of receptive ecumenism: tradition, episcopacy, infant baptism, and the visibility of the church. Beyond the new Baptist appreciation for the coherience of Scripture and tradition that surfaced in the second series of conversations between the Baptist World Alliance and the Catholic Church,\(^{58}\) Fiddes suggests that Baptists might intentionally extend the communal interpretation of Scripture that takes place within the local church to the church in its historic and contemporary catholicity. Furthermore, Baptists might incorporate the broad contours of the catholic tradition into their worship through “the more regular use of the creeds” as acts of worship that “celebrate God’s drama” and “present the Trinity as the supreme meta-narrative.”\(^{59}\) Regarding episcopacy, Fiddes sees potential for convergence between Anglican conceptions of the episcopate as a sign of apostolic succession and the Baptist practice of appointing trans-local or regional ministers, who may similarly serve as “a focus of unity and continuity” in the church.\(^{60}\) Concerning infant baptism, Fiddes proposes that Baptists might learn from this practice the recognition that God’s grace is at work in the lives of very young children, that the faith of the church plays an important role in the formation of Christians, and that

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\(^{58}\) Fiddes, “Learning from Others,” 61-64, refers to papers presented in the first two years of the second series of conversations between the Baptist World Alliance and the Catholic Church (2006-2010), insights from which were incorporated into the section on “The Authority of Christ in Scripture and Tradition” in the final report: Baptist World Alliance and Catholic Church, “The Word of God in the Life of the Church,” §§ 34-71.

\(^{59}\) Fiddes, “Learning from Others,” 63.

\(^{60}\) Fiddes, “Learning from Others,” 66. Earlier in the article (55-56) Fiddes offers as an earlier Baptist anticipation of current receptive ecumenism proposals the example of John Howard Shakespeare, General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain 1898-1924, who in his book *The Churches at the Cross-Roads: A Study in Unity* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1918), 83, asks of his fellow Baptists, “Is there any reality in the doctrine of the Holy Ghost as the guide and teacher of truth, and if so, can we believe that a form [i.e. episcopacy] which goes back to the beginning of Christian history, and has taken its place in the greater part of Christendom as the recognized organ of the unity and continuity of the Church’ arose without the guidance of the Spirit?” and of others, “Or, on the other hand, can we believe that the guidance of the Spirit has been so completely withheld from the non-episcopal churches that they have gone quite astray?”
infant baptism may be regarded as a legitimate practice within a “whole process of initiation” or “journey of beginnings” (even if Baptists continue to baptize only believing disciples within their own communities). And in dialogue with the Eastern Orthodox tradition, Fiddes suggests that Baptists, who already affirm the visibility of the local church but typically regard the catholic or universal church as the invisible community of all the redeemed of all the ages, might work toward thinking “in terms of a constant becoming visible of the whole catholic church.”

The whole receptive ecumenism project could easily be rooted in Fiddes’s participatory Trinitarian koinonia ecclesiology. Such an exchange of gifts is a way of participating more fully in the ecclesial life of another even while participating more fully in the life of the Triune God who is the giver of these gifts to the churches. Fiddes himself does not make this move explicitly, but his embrace of the ecumenical paradigm of receptive ecumenism can be seen as yet another expression of the participatory Trinitarianism at the core of both his constructive theological projects and his work as a Baptist ecumenical theologian.

In my new book *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future* I have made my own proposals for how Baptist identity might be re-described in ecumenical perspective and what it might mean for Baptists to join the whole church in a pilgrimage toward the church that is fully under the rule of Christ, with visible unity as one of the marks of such a church. But the book is replete with references to the work of Paul Fiddes, and I am confident that my own perspectives as an ecumenical theologian have been shaped by his thought in many ways that have gone undocumented in the book. Any progress that Baptists make in this pilgrim journey toward the

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ecumenical future will be along pathways forged by Paul Fiddes—not only our most prominent constructive theologian, but our most significant ecumenical theologian as well, whose vision of “the promised end”\textsuperscript{63} includes the unity for which our Lord prayed (John 17:20-23).

\textsuperscript{63} Allusion is to Paul S. Fiddes, \textit{The Promised End: Eschatology in Theology and Literature} (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).