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Theological Poverty or a Richness of Beliefs:

Congregational Baptism

seen through the lens of Ordinary Theology

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

Abstract

Theological Poverty or a Richness of Beliefs:

Congregational Baptism seen through the lens of Ordinary Theology

This thesis investigates the beliefs of regular churchgoers relating to baptism using the lens of Ordinary Theology. It explores the proposal that ordinary theologians demonstrate evidence of theological poverty as defined by Camroux (2008) and whether ordinary worshipers construct their own beliefs in place of systematic theology. It is set in the tradition of Congregationalism and develops the framework of the four voices of theology (Cameron et al. 2010a).

The study employs qualitative semi-structured interviews with the addition of focus groups. The data comes from thirty-six members from six churches affiliated to the Congregational Federation, their six Ministers and two academics from within Congregationalism.

This research shows that there is a paucity of systematic theology in these churches but that there is not a theological vacuum. The contributors have developed their own ordinary theologies about baptism that are personal, reflected upon and frequently unarticulated. An attempt is made to encompass these beliefs into an existing framework, the closest being a Second Great Commandment Theology.

This thesis proposes that greater consideration should be given to the ordinary theologians that worship in our church congregations, and that leaders in the Congregational tradition need to facilitate this. The thesis also proposes that Cameron's four voices should be expanded to provide for the voices of ordinary theologians.

These findings make unique contributions to knowledge in the field of baptismal theological poverty that could be expanded by studying the theology of communion within the Congregational tradition and of baptism and communion in other traditions.

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Figures, Tables and Appendices

Abbreviations

BEM   Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (WCC)

BCP   Book of Common Prayer

CF   Congregational Federation

CIPT   Congregational Institute for Practical Theology

EFCC   Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches

NRSV   New Revised Standard Version of the Bible

                (Used throughout this thesis)

OT   Ordinary Theology

ST   Systematic Theology

TP   Theological Poverty

URC   United Reformed Church

WCC   World Council of Churches

The use of previously published material

The relevant literature informing this research is introduced throughout this thesis rather than as a separate chapter. It will define the state of current knowledge on each different aspect of the research where this is most relevant and where it will address different facets of the research question. Both current and historical material is included and, where literature is lacking or divided, this is addressed. It will demonstrate where each aspect of this research contributes to the current understanding of baptismal theology and praxis, of Congregationalism, and of Ordinary Theology. In this way, it will show the originality of the areas of study.

An Outline of the Thesis

Section 1 provides an overview of the background information for the thesis and introduces the subjects that are essential for understanding the arguments made in the body of the thesis. It contains the material that sets the context of the study and provides the definitions and descriptions on which the thesis is built. It reviews the important ideas within which the study is conducted and, without which, the results and conclusions would be less coherent.

Chapter 1 places the thesis in its contextual setting and charts the development of the research from its initial stages through to its final title. It also provides an explanatory introduction to the thesis. The following three chapters provide essential basic information that is used to form the framework for the investigative work of the study.

The term 'theology' is addressed in Chapter 2 and its use is delineated within this study, exploring the definitions that I have used for Systematic Theology and Ordinary Theology. These definitions are important because, before the term 'theological poverty' can be identified and used, theology must, itself, be defined. Once established, this is used to qualify the expressions 'Ordinary Theology' and 'theological poverty' both of which concepts must be considered and carefully described. The discipline of Systematic Theology is adopted as the exemplar of theology used in this thesis. The construct of Ordinary Theology is developed and justified as both 'ordinary' and 'theology', and contrasts are drawn between the two models of theology. Using these definitions of Systematic and Ordinary Theology, the presence or absence of theological poverty is explored, looking for evidence, both of its presence and the nature of any poverty that is demonstrated.

Chapter 3 moves on to consider baptism as the subject of study in this thesis. Baptism is introduced in broad historical terms in order to provide some of the key ideas about what baptism has been and is now, and what its theologies include. In this way, the various theological details that have developed over the centuries are examined and, in many cases, shown to have declined and withered in today's theology and praxis.

The remnants of some of these historical theological examples are identified where they occur in the study. Additionally, the absence of some of the theologies and details that were considered of great importance in their historical times will also be noted.

The importance of understanding the context of Congregationalism and of the CF is explained in Chapter 4. The Congregational Way of being Church,[1] is explored including its history and polity, particularly as it relates to baptism in the Congregational tradition. The influence and impact that the Congregational Way has on the ecclesiology of the tradition is explained with particular reference to the baptismal theologies and practices demonstrated in this study.

Section 2 describes the empirical material used in this thesis. Having set the background to the research, this section contains and expands on the methodology and results of the study. It then starts to examine the results from the data and considers the main themes that have emerged from the articulations of the contributors.

Chapter 5 shows how the study employs a qualitative research approach using fieldwork, semi-structured interviews and focus groups to gather the data. The methods and processes used are described, as is my positionality as the researcher, together with appropriate ethical considerations. The coding and analysis of the data are described including the initial use of computer software, and how this is followed by a manual phase in order to allow the data to direct the emergence of the results.

Following from the initial analysis of the results, Chapter 6 starts to examine the data and considers the main themes that emerge from the articulations of the contributors. It deals with important areas relating to infant baptism in some detail, focusing on the themes that appear to be valuable to the contributors. Already, at this early stage, certain obvious hiatuses are noted to have occurred where the classical theologies of baptism appear to be missing in the articulations of the contributors, and these are explored.

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[1] The Congregational Way is a phrase that is recognised nationally and internationally and is used to describe the practices that are hallmarks of Congregationalism, highlighting its historical and theological underpinnings.

Having considered the results for infant baptism, Chapter 7 repeats the process by reflecting on the articulations of my contributors relating to the subject of adult baptism. In particular, it identifies the way in which the articulations of some contributors draw a distinction between the baptism of adults and believers' baptism, and the impact that results from this differentiation.

Developing from consideration in Chapters 6 and 7 where the individual being baptised is the focus of attention, Chapter 8 considers the method or mode of baptism with aspersion, affusion and immersion being addressed as alternative methods. Additionally, the nature of the water used for baptism is considered.

Section 3 contains the concluding material of the thesis. Chapter 9 considers the level of theological poverty that was found in this research and proposes some reasons why this paucity may occur. These reasons include the scarceness of liturgical resources, linguistic difficulties that may exist, and the relative shortage of ecclesiological works. Of particular interest is the impact that the Congregational Way of being Church and particularly the polity of the Church Meeting may have on the theological poverty found. Following from the acceptance that I have found a level of poverty of systemic theology, I use Ordinary Theology to look at what is present in its place. The ordinary beliefs that have been articulated by the contributors are examined in more detail separating beliefs about infant baptism, adult baptism, and the method of baptism for further consideration. There is evidence of a measure of commonality between the beliefs of the contributors, but a number of differences are found. Indications of personal beliefs that have been organised into an ordered ordinary theology are identified.

Next, I propose a number of personal beliefs for consideration that will embrace the considered articulations of my contributors. Theologies of love, compassion, Golden Rule and a Second Great Commandment Theology are presented and debated against the articulations collected from the ordinary theologians.

Finally, arising from the results of the thesis and the consideration of potential umbrella theologies, I summarise the contribution and potential impact that this thesis may have. This includes confirming the presence of theological poverty, identifying the existence of alternative organised belief systems and proposing a 'best fit theology' to embrace the utterances from the ordinary believers in this study. The chapter concludes with suggestions for potential further studies involving the use of Ordinary Theology and examining baptism in other traditions; communion, the other Sacrament in the Congregational tradition and beliefs about the role of the Trinity within the Congregational Federation.

SECTION 1: Introductory material

Chapter 1: Initial Considerations

1.1   Context of the research

As I stood on the platform of the Civic Centre in Oldham in 2016 as President of the Congregational Federation, I signed the Accreditation Bibles that were about to be presented to each newly accrediting Minister and read the bookplate in each Bible. I had received my own copy on my accreditation as a tutor with the Congregational Institute for Practical Theology in 2015, and earlier when I was accredited as a Minister, but I had not paid particular attention to the wording.
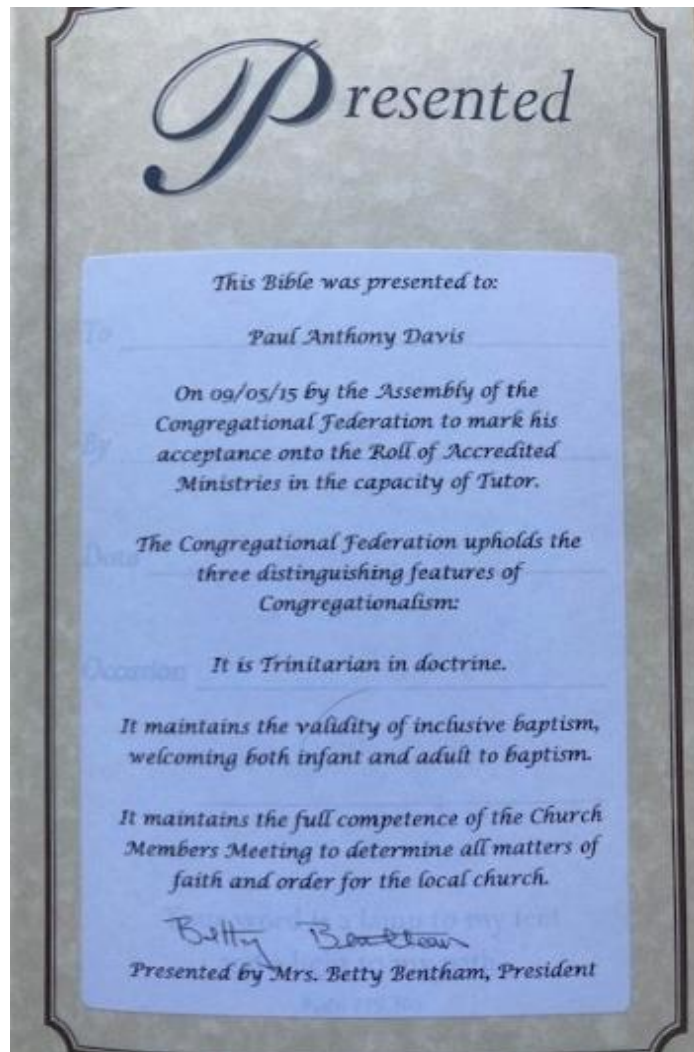
Figure 1 - showing the bookplate from the Accreditation Bibles

I understood the first and third of the three tenets, but it was the second that held my attention.

[The Congregational Federation] maintains the validity of inclusive baptism welcoming both infant and adult to baptism.

I found the specific inclusion and detail of baptism over every other aspect of church life to be intriguing and so began the search for the theology of baptism that had caused it to be specified in every Bible given to new Ministers and Tutors. This detail is clearly sufficiently important to the Congregational Federation that they ensure that every Accreditation Bible given to people who are being added to the Roll of Ministries included this bookplate. Had the importance of this message been carried through to the Ministers and tutors, and so to the everyday members of the congregations in their churches? I became intrigued by this question and started to ask various contacts, both in ministry and in congregations, what their beliefs and practices regarding baptism really were.

Within my presidential year I carried out many visits to Congregational Federation churches and these provided the opportunity to make enquiries and undertake some fieldwork among the churches and the events that I visited. I was able to discuss baptism with the ordinary church members that I met and to gather some initial impressions. The presidential visits took place across a wide spectrum of Congregational churches and introduced me to many ordinary theologians within those churches. The visits were to churches in England, Scotland and Wales and I was able to conduct some national fieldwork regarding baptismal theology.

The fact that this initial work would only be conducted within the confines of the Congregational Federation limited the data that I could collect but I retained the possibility of wider research in the future. My intention was that the research would enable a better understanding of the baptismal theologies that exist in the churches in the Congregational Federation in the early twenty-first century. It could be of use to the Federation and its teaching arm, the Congregational Institute for Practical Theology (CIPT) by describing the state of baptismal theology in the churches.

It would enable them to consider and, if necessary, adjust their appreciation, understanding and teaching regarding baptism. Similarly, this may be of help to Congregational Ministers and leaders across the countries to reflect on the position in their own churches. It may further be of interest to Ministers in other Free Churches and within the congregations of other traditions.

During the various visits to churches and gatherings, I initiated conversations about baptism. These were informal and served to provide me with some basic data on the beliefs and actions that were present in the churches. These informal conversations were with people from a total of 170 churches. They helped me to understand some of the beliefs that exist about baptism and focus my thinking on what was being said. They also drew my attention to areas that were missing from our conversations. Following this, I initiated discussions with members of 46 of the Congregational Federation churches. These remained informal but were in greater depth and enabled me to construct an interview schedule to be used in the process of gathering the main data. For the main project I selected six sample churches to explore in greater detail.

The construct of Ordinary Theology as described by Astley offers a paradigm within which to extend the fieldwork and conduct the research (2002b, p.1). Having previously used this construct for some earlier research, the opportunity to test its robustness as a research tool appealed. This thesis will show that Ordinary Theology is a useful and practical tool within wider areas of church life and as a construct that future researchers can use to investigate other aspects of church life.

The opportunities presented by the presidential visits to a wide spectrum of ordinary theologians provided me with the ability to undertake national fieldwork about baptismal theology. It also offered the prospect of testing Ordinary Theology as a research medium in order to widen awareness of these important issues. My research will provide a better understanding of the impact that the Congregational Way of being Church has on its churches in the twenty-first century. It will also inform the CF and its teaching arm, the CIPT, about the state of theology in the churches, enabling them to consider and, if necessary, adjust their understanding and teaching.

Ordinary Theology can be used in a wide spectrum of situations to encourage others to make use of Ordinary Theology to inform their decision making at church, area and wider levels. The previous work of Astley, ap Siôn, Christie, Armstrong and others provides the foundation for the work that this thesis will build upon. The thesis will make a valuable contribution to understanding, taking forward and developing knowledge about levels of theological awareness within the churches.

As the fieldwork, data collection and analysis developed, a mismatch between the beliefs being expressed by the ordinary theologians within their churches, and the more traditional Systematic Theologies became apparent. For example, there was no discussion of salvation through baptism among the contributors. The disconnect between the ordinary theological beliefs being discussed with me, and the Normative and Formal Systematic Theology of dogma and doctrine of the Church was striking. Areas that I had anticipated being mentioned were missing.

The term theological poverty proposed in the writings of Camroux (2008a), Sell (2006), and Argent (2013) presents itself as a potential and integral part of the research. The actual term 'theological poverty' is explored in Chapter 2 of this thesis but, in essence, it suggests that the ordinary members[2] of the churches are lacking in theological knowledge and understanding and could be described as theologically illiterate. I am using the expression 'ordinary' in the way Astley proposes, for those churchgoers who have not undergone scholarly theological education.

Resulting from the hypothesis of theological poverty and my own observations that certain expected elements of baptismal theology were missing, my research process underwent metamorphosis to ask if my study of baptism provides any evidence of the theological poverty that is proposed by these authors. Do the baptismal beliefs articulated by my contributors display such a paucity of theology or is there some other, previously undiscovered, belief system in existence?

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[2] Church membership in Congregational terms usually refers to a member of the congregation who has been accepted by the Church Meeting into membership of the church. Other churchgoers who have not been voted into membership are usually called adherents. In this way, Church 6 in this study declares that it has 67 members and 90 adherents. Only Church Members may vote at Church Meetings.

The research question that emerges examines the presence of theological poverty and proposes the existence of alternative belief systems about baptism that could be appropriately researched through the means of Ordinary Theology.

Does theological poverty exist within the Churches of the Congregational Federation and, if so, to what extent?

Have alternative, valid belief systems been constructed in place of traditional theologies by the ordinary theologians in these Churches?

1.2   Introduction

The assertion has been made that United Reformed Church (URC) in the United Kingdom is suffering from a lack of significant theological reflection (Camroux 2008a, p.139). Sell (2006, p.166) agrees that the local church at the end of the twentieth century is no longer the 'nursery of theologians' it had been at the century's beginning The term theological poverty is used by David Thompson (2002, p.25) when he asks whether there is 'an underlying theological and intellectual poverty in twentieth-century Congregationalism which played a direct part in its decline'. He bases his observation on Chalmers' case for 'spiritual destitution', but it should be noted that Chalmers was writing nearly two centuries earlier in 1826. This location of spiritual destitution as early as the first half of the nineteenth century brings into question whether spiritual and theological poverty is really a twentieth or twenty-first century phenomenon.

This thesis sets out to investigate the presence or absence of theological poverty in relation to the rite of baptism as it is practiced within the Congregational tradition. The construct of Ordinary Theology is used as the research medium. The aim is to collect evidence for the existence of theological poverty and to test the hypothesis that Ordinary Theology can reveal valid Christian beliefs that cannot be considered to be Systematic Theology. Articulations collected from ordinary church members are analysed looking at the specific areas of infant baptism, adult baptism, and the mode of baptism and these are presented as chapters in this thesis.

The ordinary theological beliefs of the participants are researched and found to be worthy of investigation because of the importance that the believers place on them in their lives. However, little is known about the nature of the beliefs congregants hold and the consequences resulting from these beliefs. The congregants themselves may never have vocalised their beliefs or been invited to share their beliefs. Without an understanding of the theological position of the members of their churches, Ministers may misunderstand or misinterpret the positions their congregants hold. Perception of these beliefs could enable Ministers to undertake their pastoral and teaching roles with more appreciation and effectiveness.

By extension, the academic institutes responsible for the training of the Ministers could, with benefit, consider the appropriateness of the range and direction of their teaching. Similarly, the parent traditions and denominations could examine their awareness of the operant beliefs of their church members.

Such understanding by Ministers, academics, denominations and the ordinary theologians themselves has, at present, not been achieved and hence is important and novel. This research is original and contributes to the understanding of the beliefs of church members and validates the use of Ordinary Theology as a construct and as a research tool.

Ordinary Theology is selected as the paradigm and construct for the research. The research involves fieldwork in a number of the churches of the CF followed by semi-structured interviews of ordinary theologians in six of those churches. Standard qualitative, recording, coding and analytical methods are applied. The research addresses the question of whether theological poverty among ordinary church members is a material entity of consequence that needs attention and action. Additionally, it addresses whether alternative belief patterns of significance exist that supplant Systematic Theology in the Christian lives of the contributors.

It has been necessary to contain the research within realistic limits and the rite of baptism served to encompass the work, as did selecting only churches from the Congregational tradition and in affiliation with the CF.

Baptism is selected as the subject as is described more fully later but, at this stage it is sufficient to explain that it is one of the three main tenets held by the CF.

Having explained the context within which the research has been conducted, the following core chapters in Section 1 provide explanations about the three bases on which the thesis is built, theology, ordinary theology and theological poverty; baptism from an historical perspective, and Congregationalism.

Chapter 2: Theology, Ordinary Theology and theological poverty

2.1   What is theology?

This chapter addresses the term 'theology' and describes the way it is defined and used in this thesis. In order to analyse the qualitative data that I have collected through the lens of Ordinary Theology, it is necessary to be clear about what makes something 'theology', before deciding what makes it 'ordinary'. Ordinary Theology is next explained, both as a concept and construct, and as a research tool or lens through which to observe the beliefs of ordinary theologians. Finally, the proposal is presented that there is evidence of theological poverty in evidence in the churches of the CF.

An historical definition of theology can be traced in Christian terms to Augustine (254-430CE) and Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109CE) as being *'fides quaerens intellectum'* meaning 'faith seeking understanding'. Migliore (2004, p.2) takes this phrase as the title of his book and claims that, for Anselm, the phrase needs to be expanded into: 'faith seeks understanding, and understanding brings joy'. He identifies Barth as contending that theology has the task of reconsidering the faith and practice of the community. Here we can detect the suggestion that it is the faith of the common Christians within their community that should be important to theologians, a foretaste of Ordinary Theology.

A concise definition of theology is provided by Ford who restricts his focus to academic theology:

> Academic theology is a subject which deals with questions of meaning, truth, beauty and practice raised in relation to religions and pursued through a range of academic disciplines … theology is shaped institutionally and intellectually (Ford 1999, p.29).

Farley comments on the enormity of the literature on theology:

> The literature which pursues, interprets, and is entitled 'theology' seems endless. Such a massive and complex articulation clearly indicates that the term *theology* is fundamentally ambiguous. This ambiguity does not simply mean that systematic theologians dispute the nature and method of theology, but rather that the term refers to things of entirely different *genres* (Farley 2001, p.31). (Italics in original)

He continues that this lack of concurrence does not simply mean that systematic theologians dispute the nature and method of theology, but rather that the term refers to things that are completely different in character. He develops this view by explaining that he considers the term to be fundamentally ambiguous with two essentially different pre-modern understandings.

> Firstly, theology is a term for an actual, individual cognition of God and things related to God … secondly that theology is a term for a discipline, usually occurring in some sort of pedagogical setting (Farley 2001, p.31).

Here, Farley is looking at theology, firstly as a personal activity; a mental action or process about God that an individual does when they acquire knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses – essentially through reflection. He does not limit this activity but appears to apply it generally to all individuals. However, he then goes on to define theology as a discipline that takes place in a location of teaching, essentially, as an academic subject or theoretical concept. He moves from theology being an activity available and undertaken by everyone in relation to God, to an academic pursuit conducted only by the learned.

Badham (1996, p.101) states that theology is 'thinking about God' but expands that definition into studying the sources of Christian belief such as the Bible and the creeds and exploring the meaning of Christianity today. A further attempt at a definition is offered by Ogden:

Theology, in the sense explicitly conveyed by the words 'Christian theology' is the fully reflective understanding of the Christian witness of faith as decisive for human existence (Ogden 1986, p.1).

The point made by Ogden is that theology must be 'fully reflective', a requirement that is important and will be examined later in this study. For theology to be theology it essentially must include reflection. He continues by stating that theology involves a single process of reflection but has three distinct 'moments' of interrelated disciplines. He described these as, firstly, historical theology, including exegetical theology, which he says addresses the question: 'What has the Christian witness of faith *already been* as decisive for human existence'. For Systematic Theology, he asks the question '*What is* the Christian witness of faith as decisive for human existence'. For Practical Theology his question is 'What *should* the Christian witness of faith *now become* as decisive for human existence'. (My italics) In this scheme, historical theology looks back, Systematic Theology is of the moment and Practical Theology looks forward to what theology should be (Ogden 1986, pp.8–15). Theology is described by ap Siôn and Edwards (2013, p.924) as an activity lying in the domain of "'qualified' theologians within the Church or Academy", and not a matter of concern for ordinary churchgoers. They note that any dialogue that does take place between qualified theologians and ordinary people will frequently not be conducted as equals but may be controlled by the former. Similarly, Farley, (2001, p.130) who writes about the 'Clerical Paradigm', sees theology as: 'something clergy need to function as leaders of the church community … a theory of practice about those tasks'. These and many other writers present theology as an academic discipline, appropriately housed in the domain of the academy or the Church. Hence, not only is theology an academic and professional activity, but it also serves a purpose which is to set the theologian apart as an academic or as the leader of their congregation of churchgoers. The difference in station is perpetuated, from professional theologian to regular churchgoer with advantage to the clergy.

Taken at its simplest, all theologies contain the same basic principle: 'All Christians do theology all the time, for theology just means thinking about our faith' (Placher 2003, p.1). I prefer to add to this that theology necessitates reflection – thinking *and reflecting* about God. In this way, Ordinary Theology, Systematic Theology and all other religious beliefs and ideas are theological if they involve thinking and reflecting about God. The way in which they do this will vary, in some situations considerably. Each form of theology will have certain other characteristics that are distinctive to that form of theology: words, emphases and traditions but all are entitled to use the term 'theology' including Ordinary Theology.

I have chosen the term Systematic Theology to serve as the counterpoint to Ordinary Theology in the search for theological poverty. As the adjective suggests, Systematic Theology is especially interested in the scope, unity, and coherence of Christian teaching. Systematic Theology is often a preferred term for those accounts of Christian teaching which are especially concerned to coordinate their subject matter with what is held to be true outside the sphere of Christian faith.

Webster offers:

> The subject matter which is engaged in systematic theological inquiry is Christian teaching, that is, Christian claims about reality. Systematic theology attempts a conceptual articulation of Christian claims about God and everything else in relation to God, characterized by comprehensiveness and coherence. It seeks to present Christian teaching as a unified whole (Webster 2007, p.1).

Another of the many attempts to achieve a definition of Systematic Theology, and one of the clearest, is provided by Thomas who unifies it with dogmatic theology:

> Systematic or dogmatic theology is the methodological investigation and interpretation of the content of the Christian faith. It is the orderly clarification and explanation of what is affirmed in the Christian message. Theology is an

activity or function of the Christian Church carried out by the members of the Church. It is the Church reflecting on the basis of its existence and the content of its message (Thomas, O. 1989, p.1).

However, I argue that Systematic Theology is currently housed in academia where it is the responsibility of the theologian to discern what is essential to our faith and to express it in ways that are both comprehensive and comprehensible (King 1982).

Warfield insists that Systematic Theology must use a rational and ordering methodology in order to minimise inconsistencies:

> What is meant by calling this discipline "Systematic Theology" is not that it deals with its material in a systematic or methodical way, and the other disciplines do not; but that it presents its material in the form of a system. Other disciplines may use a chronological, a historical, or some other method: this discipline must needs employ a systematic, that is to say, a philosophical or scientific method (Warfield n.d., p.44).

The definition of Systematic Theology used in this thesis is declared by Thomas that:

> Systematic theology is the methodological investigation and interpretation of the content of the Christian faith involving the orderly clarification and explanation of what is affirmed in the Christian message (Thomas 1989, p.1).

Systematic Theology is, therefore, taken to represent the type of theology that will serve as the counterpoint to Ordinary Theology. However, I contend in this study, that Ordinary Theology will be shown to have its own process of organisation through reflection. This occurs as beliefs that are received are internally critiqued and adjusted with time and personal experience into a coherent whole.

A completely different approach to Systematic Theology is provided by Healy who links it to 'ordinary' theological reflection:

Three types of Systematic Theology are distinguished, each with its own form, function, interests and location: 'official', produced by the institutional Church; 'ordinary' theological reflection, engaged in by virtually all believers; professional-academic systematic theology (Healy 2009, p.24).

Healy's official theology may be compared with the Normative Theological voice identified by Cameron (see below) as including Scripture, creeds, liturgies and official Church teaching.

Secondly, it recognises professional-academic Systematic Theology which may be compared to Cameron's voice of Formal Theology (the theology of theologians and dialogue with other disciplines).

Finally, and most interestingly, Healy identifies ''ordinary' theological reflection, engaged in by virtually all believers'. This may be compared to the two further voices from Cameron; Espoused Theology (the theology embedded within a group's articulation of its beliefs) and Operant Theology (the theology embedded within the actual practices of a group).

NORMATIVE THEOLOGY

Scripture
The creeds
Official Church teaching
Liturgies

FORMAL THEOLOGY

The theology of theologians
Dialogue with other disciplines

ESPOUSED THEOLOGY

The theology embedded within a group's articulation of its beliefs

OPERANT THEOLOGY

The theology embedded within the actual practices of a group
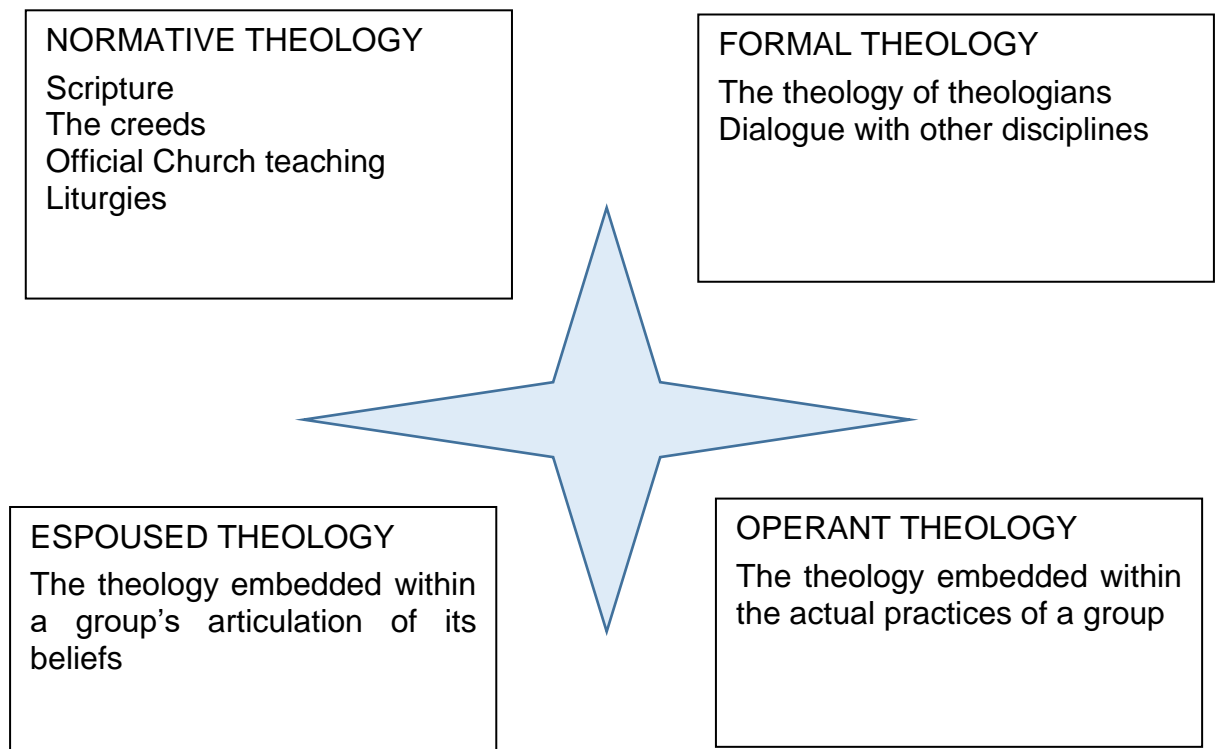
Figure 2 - The four voices of theology (Cameron et al. 2010b, p.54)

Figure 2 from Cameron's book demonstrates the interaction between the four voices of theology. The two upper boxes contain, to the left, a description of Normative Theology as represented by Scripture, the creeds and official Church teaching, and to the right, Formal Theology, that is, the theology of theologians and dialogue with other disciplines.

The two lower boxes represent, on the left, Espoused Theology as the theology embedded within a group's articulation of its beliefs, and on the right, Operant Theology which is the theology embedded within the actual practices of a group.

The lower pair of these boxes require further consideration because of the emphasis that is placed in the diagram on the group nature of the theologies described. Espoused Theology is the group's theology described through articulation; in this case where the group is a church; what the church says its theologies are. Operant Theology is the actual enactment of those theologies in practice; what theologies the churches actually live out in practice. The relationship of these voices to Congregationalism is developed on page 75.

I suggest that it is necessary to create, for this thesis, an extra 'box' for Cameron's diagram of the four voices of theology: a box for the individual voices of the Ordinary Theologies of the contributors. This is not to say that they will never contribute articulations that will represent the Espoused or Operant Theologies of their churches but rather that, because of the way in which the thesis is envisaged and constructed, the data are collected to explore the individual expressions of their own beliefs – their Ordinary Theologies.

There are occasions within the articulations collected where multiple voices are expressed. For example, two contributors say:

> I believe that pouring is more biblical but that is not the way we do it at my church. (Ch2.FG)

> I believe that baptism should be by immersion, but the Minister does sprinkling, but that is not biblical. (Ch5.PA)

In the first articulation, the ordinary theologians in the group initially express their belief in pouring, justifying it by saying that it is 'more biblical'.

They then go into a description, 'that is not the way we do it at my church', but without citing an Espoused Theology to defend their articulation. They then comment on the Operant Theology – that is the way we do it. The second contributor states that she believes that baptism should be by immersion, confirming her belief with the implication that the alternative, sprinkling, 'is not biblical'. The actions of the Minister, by sprinkling, may or may not expose both Espoused and Operant Theologies. The fact is reported but without explanation justifying it as theological.

The recorded articulations will, therefore, need to be examined for evidence of any Espoused or Operant Theologies in order to establish whether any of Cameron's anticipated 'Four Voices of Theology' are evident. They will also need to be examined to establish whether alternative ordinary theological beliefs are present.

Thus far, I have considered theology as a unitary discipline but, in many ways, it is a noun seeking an adjectival description. There are many theologies, all purporting to hold dominance, at least in the eyes of their proponents. Feminist, liberal, natural, practical, systematic and many others, including Ordinary Theology.

Migliore (2004) warns of the excesses of theology, referring to Barth's observations (Barth 1979, p.120):

> In a paraphrase of the prophet Amos, Karl Barth humorously expresses the likely judgement of God on theology that has become pointless and endless talk: 'I hate, I despise your lectures and seminars, your sermons, addresses and Bible studies …When you display your hermeneutic, dogmatic, ethical and pastoral bits of wisdom before one another and before me, I have no pleasure in them …Take away from me your … thick books and your dissertations … your theological magazines, monthlies and quarterlies' (Migliore 2004, p.7).

2.2   *Introducing Ordinary Theology*

Within this study, use is made of Ordinary Theology both as a construct and as the lens through which baptismal theologies and praxes are observed. It is essential, therefore, to be clear what should be identified as Ordinary Theology and its title has been deliberately capitalised as I am using it as a formal and legitimate paradigm within Practical Theology.

The concept of Ordinary Theology is used in this thesis as a research tool and its nature and properties are now considered. Ordinary Theology has established a legitimate place within Practical Theology with a growing list of writers and researchers who have adopted Ordinary Theology as their paradigm since Astley's description.

> Ordinary theology is my term for the theological beliefs and processes of believing that find expression in the God-talk of those believers who have received no scholarly theological education (Astley 2002b, p.1).

Theology has already been described above and ordinariness is discussed by Astley at length (2002b, pp.47–49). He uses multiple dictionary definitions for 'ordinary' and is concerned that the word should not imply anything disparaging about those who are ordinary. I am content to accept Astley's suggestion that what is ordinary can be taken to be regular, normal, usual, and not exceptional and, hence, that Ordinary Theology is normal and unexceptional.

In this study, I consider the ordinary theological beliefs of the contributors to be worthy of investigation because of the importance that the believers themselves place on them in their lives. However, little is known about the nature of the beliefs that congregants do hold and the life-consequences that result from those beliefs. The congregants themselves may never have vocalised their beliefs or been invited to share them with others or with their Minister. Without consideration of the theological beliefs of the members of their churches, it is possible that Ministers may misunderstand or misinterpret the belief positions that ordinary theologians hold.

A closer perception of the beliefs that congregants embrace could enable Ministers to undertake their pastoral and teaching roles more effectively and with more understanding. By extension, the academic institutions responsible for the training of the Ministers could, with benefit, consider the appropriateness of the range and direction of their teaching. Yet further, the parent traditions and denominations could examine their awareness of the operant beliefs of their church members to their mutual advantage.

Astley (2002b, p.97) describes Ordinary Theology as a 'first-order activity of theologising on the part of ordinary believers', comparing it to the 'second-order scholarly study of others'. Here, he is building on the contention of Farley and other authors that theology should be recovered as a fundamental dimension of piety, an inherent part of every Christian's vocation (2002b p.viii). This concurs with the statement from Fraser that:

> The essential nature of theology has to be recovered … it must be seen as the fruit of converted minds … in a world community which enters into partnership with God in his work (Fraser 2005, p.9).

Ordinary theological beliefs and actions are personal, adapted, adopted and internalised through everyday life. They are not book-bound but are dynamic in life and in their transformation of the person and their faith, unconstrained by dogma and doctrine. They are free to develop, mutate and grow as further reflection directs. An example of theological activity is shown by ap Siôn (2013, pp.147–157) in her work on prayer boards in a Cathedral. The participants took the time, thought and reflection to prepare and display their prayer requests in public.

Ordinary Theology, as described by Astley, is a 'theology to live by, and to die for … [it is] how *people* think and what *they* believe' (2002b, p.40). (Italics in original) It is not a neat, well formulated, well-presented theology and it may be hesitant and less articulate. This may be because it has not been subjected to the same level of objective, analytical rigour that is required in academic theology (ap Siôn 2010).

The level of hesitancy experienced may also be because ordinary theologians have never before been asked to articulate their beliefs, possibly because nobody has wanted or been willing to listen.

Astley insists that the 'Ordinary' in Ordinary Theology is not pejorative or derogatory. Ordinary theologians should not be considered with negative or uncomplimentary implications. Pratt (2009, p.116) explains that 'One can be ordinary in some senses yet extraordinary in others'. Ordinary theologians frequently hold strong beliefs and faiths but lack the scholarly education of professional theologians with which to express them. Pratt accepts that, although Astley's Ordinary Theology 'springs from his interest in ordinary believers', it is the ordinary theologians who make up the 'body of Christ' and are worthy to be heard.

There is no uniform nature or content in 'Ordinary' God-talk between ordinary theologians. Every believer's theologies are the product of their contextual and lived experience and, as a result, their ordinary theologies or beliefs will be different from each other in subtle or, perhaps, even major ways. It is shown in this study that ordinary theologians, sometimes, even hold internally dissonant theologies about different subjects. These beliefs may interlink, but, in some instances, may contest with one another or even be mutually exclusive.

Within Systematic Theology, it is probable that theologians will have reconciled many of their contesting beliefs internally, and that there will be a certain measure of conformity or orthodoxy between theologians. Alternatively, any major differences will have been declared, debated and contested. Systematic language will have been used in theological papers to share theological beliefs. In contrast, ordinary theologians lack the means to communicate in this way and may not want or perceive the need to do so. From this it may be inferred that ordinary God-talk is not substantial, and so thought not to be on the same level as theological God-talk and likely to be inferior.

Theologies, traditions, and practices belonging to professional theologians may, at times, be expounded to or discussed with ordinary churchgoers but on an unequal platform. Ordinary God-talk is not uniform.

Just as every believer's theology is derived from their contextual and lived experience, so their ordinary theologies or beliefs are different in subtle or major ways and may remain unexpressed or unarticulated. Ordinary Theology, present in the life of churches through the everyday beliefs of regular churchgoers, offers an opportunity to engage with the convictions of the congregation. 'Upward percolation' of theological beliefs is an important but sometimes missing process which could be addressed through the construct of Ordinary Theology.

Talking to God in prayer, talking about God in conversation and the investigation of God through Bible study and quiet times are all hallmarks of theology. Despite its hesitant, tentative and cautious character, Ordinary Theology demonstrates thought, articulation and adopted faith. Researchers such as Christie, (2005), ap Siôn, (2010), Armstrong (2011), and Francis, (2009) have all successfully used Ordinary Theology as an acceptable construct for research and an entity worthy of study in itself.

For Astley (2002b, p.29), learning the faith is important, and he describes that as a movement from *'believing-that'* to *'believing-in'.* He insists that knowledge *about* God must be distinguished from knowledge *of* God. (Italics in original) For him:

> Theological truth' is … received through, and only through, a process that is … personal and idiosyncratic. And it is this sort of theology that is much more important for most people. Our embracing of faith compels us to speak here of the truth of theology as an 'encountered truth'; it is the sort of truth that we do not just know, but are 'in' (Astley 2002b, p.36).

Ordinary Theology presents as an alternative to the professionalisation of theology. It offers a spectrum of reflection and articulation along which all believers will, at some time, have found themselves journeying. The distinction between ordinary theologians and systematic theologians is not a clear division but rather it is a continuum or a spectrum of beliefs, a blurring of boundaries. Astley considers that the difference between professional and Ordinary Theology is one of degree rather than of kind.

Within each academic theologian, he claims, there will have been, originally, an ordinary theologian and 'Inside the academic the ordinary theologian slumbers' (2002b, p.58). He proposes that 'Academic theology only 'comes alive' spiritually and humanly when ordinary theology finds powerful expression … through the considered language of the scholar' (2014, p.183). Ordinary Theology is present in the life of the churches through the everyday beliefs of regular churchgoers when they are encouraged to share their convictions with other ordinary theologians who form the bulk of every congregation. Ordinary Theology challenges the lack of dialogue between professional and ordinary theologians and the inequitable way in which this is managed, largely by the academy.

An important factor in studying Ordinary Theology is that it delves into the strongly held but sometimes obscure beliefs of regular churchgoers. Listening to, conversing with, and learning from ordinary theologians is beneficial because it is an essential source of information about the people the Church serves. The Church needs to study Ordinary Theology in order to be able to:

> Exercise its ministry of pastoral care, worship, Christian education, apologetics, preaching and evangelism. Without this the Ministers may not be able to understand where those attending the services, Bible studies and prayer meetings are in their beliefs and their journeys of faith (Astley 2002a, p.28).

A disconnection between a Minister and parts of the congregation at this essential and basic level may result in the Minister's efforts being ineffective and harm may be done to the church and those attending it. This is perceptively recognised by Pattison (2008, p.137), who says that anyone who attempts to understand their situation in the light of their faith and in the context of their contemporary world has been undertaking theology. This view is further supported by ap Siôn and Edwards:

> At the heart of ordinary theology is the recognition that personal theological reflection is central to the faith development of all Christians and that this personal theological reflection is bound closely to personal experience.

It is grounded, relevant theology, often tentative, hesitant, inarticulate, and it is "ordinary" because it pertains to the everyday and the architect is the ordinary Christian. It is only through listening to and taking this ordinary theology seriously that the Church is able to interact meaningfully with those whom it serves (ap Siôn and Edwards 2013, p.924).

This reference makes four significant points, firstly that it is *personal* theological reflection that is the essential component for recognition as an individual's theology. It is personal in that it relates only to the Christian concerned and needs no verification or authentication by another: it stands complete in itself. It is possible, even likely in some situations, that it does not fit comfortably, either with some areas of Systematic Theology or, in certain cases, with the Espoused Theology of the church the person attends. It is *reflection* in that it involves awareness, serious thought and consideration, and sometimes, adoption where the person thinks it appropriate. In other words, it is about beliefs that are not simply believed instinctively – 'they are believed because …' where considered reasons are given by my contributors. It is *theological* because it relates or pertains to God. It may be 'tentative, hesitant, inarticulate and ordinary'. The Christian may lack the vocabulary, or the confidence, or the practice of articulating such matters but it is real, important, and life-guiding theology-to-live-by for the person concerned. The necessity for critical reflection is re-enforced by Armstrong who says:

The views and opinions of ordinary theologians are to be regarded as *theology*, then, there must be evidence of reflection on and evaluation of their own beliefs. What ordinary believers say about their faith is of value and potentially important for the wider faith community only if such talk about God is the result of some critical reflection, and not simply idle thoughts or unreflective opinion (Armstrong 2013, p.65). (Italics in original)

The final point that the quotation from ap Siôn and Edwards contains is that theological reflection is bound inextricably to *experience*. It is often an experience that triggers in the mind of an ordinary theologian, a reflection on an event that they have witnessed or in which they have participated. Reflection and experience go hand-in-hand for an ordinary theologian, a point that is developed on page 42.

Ordinary theological beliefs and actions are personal, adopted and internalised by everyday life. Ordinary Theology is not book-bound but is dynamic in life and in its transformation of the person and their faith, unconstrained by dogma and doctrine. It is free to develop, mutate and grow as further reflection directs. Despite its hesitant, tentative and cautious nature, Ordinary Theology demonstrates thought, discussion and adoption.

Ordinary Theology, when used as a tool or lens for use in research and investigation can be represented diagrammatically as is shown below. This diagram uses as its base the representation of the Pastoral Cycle proposed by Laurie Green (2009, p.24). It has been further modified by Michael Armstrong to produce a diagram to describe an Ordinary Theology Pastoral Cycle.

Figure 3 *The Ordinary Theology Pastoral Cycle after Armstrong* (Armstrong 2016)

The Ordinary Theology Pastoral Cycle

New cycle or project

Real-life SITUATION recognised by 'theological listening' or researcher's experience

ANALYSIS: Researcher develops basic questions and issues

REVISED theological thinking and learning

1st stage data collection. Semi-structured interviews. REFLECTION and ANALYSIS.

ANALYSIS CONCLUSIONS ACTIONS

2nd stage data collection. Focus Group meetings. REFLECTION and ANALYSIS. Suggested conclusions emerge

2.3   Identifying Ordinary Theologians

Ordinary theologians are the regular and usual churchgoers who attend our churches on most Sundays. The role of ordinary theologians in this study is of great importance.   Their articulations provide the data used and their identification as contributors is central. Defining ordinary theologians, Astley (2013, p.1) states that they are: 'those believers who have received no scholarly theological education'.

Ordinary believers may feel that theology is a remote activity reserved for trained professionals but Pattison (2008, p.137) claims that theology should be set free from 'dusty academic bondage'.   Theology is often seen to be distant from ordinary people and their modest 'God-talk'. It is seen as a professional and scholarly occupation of little interest to those worshiping God in their own way. However, professional theologians may prefer this situation to persist as it creates a distance and separation between them and the people they serve, a professional safety barrier.

In contrast, there are many writers who expect theology to reside within the domain of the Church, that is, the people of the Church. For example, Sell (2006, p.165) believes that the local church should be a 'nursery of theologians' into which nursery he assigns every church member. The use of the word 'nursery' here is interesting if it is taken to imply a form of kindergarten from which, one day, mature theologians may appear.

The articulation of theological concepts may present difficulties as congregants often lack the specialist language with which to express their thoughts. This reluctance does not undervalue their spirituality but demonstrates the need for 'a conceptual framework through which to hear, analyse and interpret the ordinary … theology of … church-goers' (Neil 2013, p.28). Astley wants "*literally to hear* the theological voice of those who call themselves 'just ordinary'" (2013, p.5). (Italics in the original)

Within any church, there are regular churchgoers who are loyal to that church family, some of whom will be particularly well informed on theological matters but who lack the scholarly education that Astley demands.

Additionally, there are 'fringe members' of the congregation, described as 'adherents' by the Federation.[3] There are also irregular attenders who may still identify with 'their' church without attending it. This is the broader circle of people who could be considered to be ordinary theologians. In this study, ordinary theologians are defined as regular and involved churchgoers. It should be understood that these contributors are not chosen as representative of their churches or of the CF in general.

My contributors are drawn from adult churchgoers who have not received any scholarly theological education and do not have an intellectual disability. Within any church there will be a spectrum of theological experience, tradition and context that will influence the theological views that members hold. Some ordinary theologians will have received many years of pastoral theological and biblical teaching. Others may be new to the faith and the Church and yet others will have experience of more than one denomination. Some will have moved churches and traditions. This variation adds to the richness and diversity of studies in Ordinary Theology. Believers who are ordinary theologians are diverse and provide rich and varied data for consideration.

Ordinary theologians are able to contribute to, as well as critique theology, ensuring the continuing relevance of theology within an ever-changing world. Astley (2002b, p.146) contends that: 'The church needs to know *far more* than on the whole it currently does about the beliefs of those adults to whom it ministers'. (Italics in original)

2.4   Characteristics of Ordinary Theology

Ordinary Theology can be identified in two ways. Firstly, it may be defined formally as given above by Astley. However, in attempting to explain a complex issue that defies easy description such as Ordinary Theology, it is better to define it by describing its characteristics as Astley does in Chapter 3 of his book (Astley 2002b).

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[3] The CF issues an annual Yearbook listing all the Churches, their membership, their children attached and the "adherents" – people in regular attendance but not in membership.

Here, he describes fully the characteristics of Ordinary Theology but points out that the form of Ordinary Theology that he describes is an ideal type, a mental construct derived from observable reality but not conforming to it in detail (2002b, pp.57–86).

Some of these characteristics are, for this study, more important than others and some are more obvious than others. For example, the beliefs of the ordinary theologians are significant and meaningful for them if not for others. They are important and are a part of their lives and their lived-out existence.

They are clearly 'lay' in that they are not clerical but are religious by definition. Similarly, their beliefs come from being onlooking, learned and learning, and are continually being considered in the light of their experiences and attempts to accommodate new events into their existing beliefs. They are contextual and based largely on real life experiences, even if this leads to what Astley calls 'irregular dogmatics'; beliefs that are less orthodox than others. Some of the characteristics may be observed to appear as tentative articulations, hesitant and cautious. They are subterranean in that they remain largely unexpressed and not vocalised, hence they may be 'below the radar' of Systematic and Practical Theology.

That leaves three of Astley's characteristics to be discussed, the three that I consider the most important. The first is a description of Ordinary Theology in action. It has been described as celebratory, but more importantly, a theology that is kneeling and at prayer. Unlike Systematic Theology which may be visualised as a theology that is conducted, sitting at a desk, reading, and writing; ordinary theologians can be envisaged as expressing their theology through prayer, and on their knees. If the systematic theologian is seen as studying books and writing papers, the ordinary theologian can be imagined as being much less inhibited and hindered by convention. I realise that these caricatures are objectively unsubstantiated, but they serve to illustrate some of the articulations that are used to describe 'theologians' as visualised by my contributors.

The second area of importance is of language. Astley makes use of Le Guin's description of mother-tongue and father-tongue language. Ordinary theologians are likely to use vernacular descriptions of their beliefs.

They say in interview that they do not recognise the terms aspersion, affusion and immersion. Instead, I use sprinkling, pouring and dunking, where necessary, to describe the three methods of baptism. This use of non-theological language is both an advantage and a problem. It is an advantage because the terms used are everyday, and so could be understood readily if one listens theologically, separating substantiated beliefs from social opinion. It is a problem in that I was having to sift through the articulations to obtain the real nuggets of value in the expressed beliefs.

Finally, and most importantly, is the matter of critical Christian reflection. Without evidence of this, an articulation cannot be considered to be either a belief or a theology, whichever term is used. 'I believe that … because …' is usually a marker of Ordinary Theology and one that enables me to pursue the belief that is being offered and to open up the deep thoughts that are being signposted.

2.4.1 Reflection

For Ordinary Theology to claim to be theology at all it is essential that reflection is evident. It is essential in order to enable churchgoers to perform the function of organisation of their own beliefs and in order to understand their faith in the context of their lives, however unaware they may be of the need or the process. 'Theology is not merely God-talk but must include some element of reflection' (Astley 2014, p.182).

Central to Astley's construct is the need for reflection in order that Ordinary Theology may be accepted as theology. The significance of the articulated reflections may pass unrecognised by ordinary theologians as they may never have been asked to articulate their beliefs. Encouraging ordinary theologians to verbalise their beliefs to each other within the 'fuzzy-edged' field of ordinary churchgoers may also help towards mutual interpretation and reflection. Ordinary Theology deserves to be taken as a fundamental expression of the faiths, beliefs and experiences of ordinary believers.

There is need of an affective element of any Ordinary Theological research which should allow ordinary theologians room and permission to express their beliefs including affective expressions and emotions that may be uncovered during interviews.

Theology-in-construction that has been reflected upon should always be seen within its context and that context may be found when it is listened for and looked for in the articulations and actions of ordinary believers.

An important factor in studying Ordinary Theology is that it delves into the strongly held but sometimes obscure beliefs of regular churchgoers. Listening to, conversing with, and learning from ordinary theologians is beneficial because it is an essential source of information about the people the church serves. A disconnection between Minister and parts of the congregation at this essential and basic level may result in the Minister's efforts being wasted and harm done to the church and those attending.

Given the many forms and presentations of theology, this raises the question of whether they all share the same characteristics that makes them 'theological' as opposed to some other religious beliefs or ideas. This is especially important when considering Ordinary Theology, which has had to establish its theological credentials. Critical reflection is the most important credential for establishing what is real theology. Reflection is an essential part of theology, whichever branch is being considered, and Ordinary Theology is no exception. Theological reflection is usefully defined by Killen and de Beer as:

> The discipline of exploring our individual and corporate experience in conversation with the wisdom of a religious heritage. The conversation is a genuine dialogue that seeks to hear from our own beliefs, actions, and perspectives, as well as those of the tradition. It respects the integrity of both. Theological reflection, therefore, may confirm, challenge, clarify and expand how we understand our own experience and how we understand the religious tradition. The outcome is new truth and meaning for living (Killen and de Beer 1994, p.51).

The term theological reflection is a portmanteau term that describes the method that enables people, churches and institutions to consider an experience in the context of their faith and beliefs. Experiences are examined internally or in cooperative groups in order to assess them against previously held beliefs.

The theological element requires that we reflect on how the experiences affect our relationship with God. Theological reflection entails paying attention to any changes that might be considered to be desirable.

Reflection is essential to enable churchgoers to organise their beliefs and understand these beliefs in the context of their lives. Reflection is of prime importance in every form of theology, at every level and thus it is necessary in both Systematic and Ordinary Theology. Without this process, theology is not theology, and care is needed in this study to ensure that the articulations recorded are not simply social thought or second-hand opinion.

2.4.2 Listening

This is an essential characteristic of both studying and applying Ordinary Theology. Littler and Francis (2005, p.49) state: 'We do well to listen to the views of ordinary people and can learn much from the ordinary theology they express'. The essential point is that the listening needs to be theological listening, which is personal, respectful and pastoral. Anyone working in the field of Ordinary Theology needs to develop the skill of listening theologically to the articulated God-talk of regular churchgoers. Listening theologically is the essence in this study and, indeed of Ordinary Theology as a paradigm. As Astley puts it (2002b, pp.5–6), Ordinary Theology requires a two-stage process, theological listening and description on one hand, and a separate critical appraisal on the other.

The description of the listening process is developed further by Browning and Waite who add a word of caution concerning the researcher's perspective on what is being articulated:

> Opening one's heart and listening at a deep level does not come easily and is rarely achieved simply by life experience. It takes courage for professionals to set aside their concerns and to be fully present for and attentive to the other (Browning and Waite 2010, p.151).

Developing Astley's work, Christie states (2005, p.27) that it is a necessity for the dialogue and conversation taking place within a theological research project to be seen against the pre-existing 'theological pre-understandings' of the researcher if they are to be able to understand the contributor's theology at all. 'Theological presuppositions are essential for understanding the theology of the other person … the researcher's own theology is a conversation partner in descriptive theological research'. Astley states (2002b, p.109): 'Even in describing your theology, I am implicitly engaged in a conversation between my theology and yours'. However, listening may be difficult because it requires one to cease to be the expert and become a learner again. Professional theologians, as experienced speakers may be less practiced as listeners.

> Ministers and others who are engaged in Christian education, apologetics and evangelism, as well as those involved in the Church's pastoral ministry, need to listen far better to – and know far more than they do about – the beliefs that are held by the adults for whom they exercise this ministry of teaching and care, and the ways in which these ordinary believers think and reason about religious and theological matters (Astley 2002b, p.147).

Theological listening involves attending to the views of ordinary people in order to identify the Ordinary Theology expressed, a task described as 'systematic eaves-dropping' to their 'unselfconscious talk about God' (Littler and Francis 2005, p.50).

However, the listener must do more than merely listen to what the churchgoer is saying. The researcher needs to interrogate what they have heard, searching for evidence of internalised reflection and deeper consideration within the ordinary theologian. Armstrong (2013, p.65) believes that Ordinary Theology must be demonstrably more than a contemporary social opinion if it is to be *theology* at all. (Italics in original) Evidence of reflection, testing, criticism, and revision are demanded for theology and must be taken together with evidence of critical, personal if not

scholarly reflection (Thomas, O, 1989, p.2). Revision of Ordinary Theology is continual and more dynamic than revision in systematic theologies.

It is 'theology-in-construction', evolving as experience and revelation progress. The study of God and a change in affect and effect are anticipated (Armstrong 2013, pp.65–66).

Members of a congregation who look for a theology into which to organise their teaching, healing and prayer may find their personal beliefs do not conform to those promulgated by their Minister. Differences may be problematic if they are unperceived or unrecognised by the Minister and the person concerned. One advantage of vocalisation and listening to Ordinary Theology is that it may make such differences overt and permit understanding. Some ordinary theologians hold views that have similarities to Barth's 'irregular dogmatics (such as its fragmentary, unsystematic nature and the influencing factor of personal life stories)' (ap Siôn 2010, p.18). Unorthodox beliefs may exist within a congregation and pass unresolved for many years. Astley comments about 'surely a strain, if not a paradox … created when theology identifies as 'Christian doctrine' or a 'doctrine of the Church' beliefs that many ordinary Christians do *not* share' (2002b, p.158).

'Empirical study of religion has a general use in holding a mirror up to the Church' (Village 2007, p.162). Ordinary Theology performs that function, revealing and reminding both academics and Ministers of the rooted, lived beliefs of churchgoers. Ministers who do not recognise within their congregations that there are beliefs that do not correspond to either Scripture or the tradition of that church, may find disruption.

Without listening, careful consideration and critiquing of the expressed views of ordinary theologians, the churches will remain uninformed of where people are coming from and will miss a valuable resource.

2.4.3 Articulation

Articulation of their beliefs is a problem that some by ordinary theologians face. Peter Neil (2013, p.28) writes about Ordinary Sacramental Theology in Rural Wales, analysing the three Anglican Sacraments of baptism, confirmation and eucharist. He

undertakes in-depth interviews with thirteen churchgoers and identifies the ways in which they think about and speak about the Sacraments.

He comments that: 'Participants struggle at times to articulate their faith without an extensive vocabulary or syntax to express their deeply felt beliefs and sacramental experiences'.

Borg (2011, p.5) agrees that, even for those who think they speak 'Christian', the faith is distorted and often misunderstood by their lack of a common 'language'. There is no agreed and adopted collection of words and phrases that can serve all regular churchgoers and would facilitate communication. They do not have a clear, explicit, and agreed system of theological language. This is in contrast to the systematic theologians who need and have developed a means of sharing their common working concepts. This is true of any profession or trade. Each has its own 'code' with which to share ideas and 'trade secrets' within its closed grouping. This code facilitates effective communication and provides a form of shorthand on agreed areas whether they are, for example, the types of flour used in baking, or the intricacies of pneumatology.

The effect of using the shorthand is the exclusion of those outside the trade or profession. I suggest that the coded system of technical terms that have acceptance within the academic group of theologians is the very thing that systematises Systematic Theology. The theologians can converse within their group to the exclusion, however unintended, of ordinary churchgoers who lack the 'conceptual framework through which to hear, analyse and interpret … sacramental theology' (Neil 2013, p.28). Those outside the group do not share the common technical language. It may be contended that it is the role of the Ministers in the churches to provide the interpretation of the academics' code to the people but, as this study shows, this does not appear to have been very successful. Perhaps the Ministers are, themselves, insider victims of the academic and clerical paradigm? The articulation of Ordinary Theology enables the avoidance of the technical terms and arguments of professional theology, favouring everyday personal language, images, and metaphors.

Care is needed in this study to ensure that articulations in all their forms are not simply social thought or second-hand opinion but display evidence of critical reflection, even if this is hidden.

The contributors frequently expand on their initial articulations with considered supplementary comments, often in the form 'I believe that … because …'. An example of this is where a question is asked about whether a person would need to be baptized before they could become a member of the church. An answer given is that it is not necessary 'because Jesus welcomed everyone to become one of his followers so the church should welcome everyone who comes whether they are baptized or not'.

The voice of the people is the voice of God, *vox populi, vox Dei,* is quoted by Pratt (2009, p.112). He accepts that ordinary Christians can reveal 'the voice of God and eternal reality'. Ordinary believers can be a source of theological wisdom and divine revelation can be made available by God through the medium of *consensus fidelium*, (the common mind of the Church) which is not the sole prerogative of trained academics and Ministers. Christie (2013, p.42) considers that the 'consensus of the faithful' should be allowed its place alongside Scripture as a source of authority.

The role of Ordinary Theology is enlarged by Christie who states that 'the criteria of orthodoxy should be expanded beyond conformity to the creeds and councils and/or structure, to include conformity to the 'widely held' beliefs of ordinary theologians' (2013, p.41). Again, the voice of ordinary theologians should be heard expressing their faith and beliefs and, where there is a wide measure of concurrence, should be considered, even where they are at variance with measures of orthodoxy. Christie goes further to recommend that the criteria of orthodoxy should not just be challenged but may, at times, be enlarged upon to incorporate them.

The articulation of an ordinary theologian's beliefs is important in order to show that their individual and personalised theological thoughts have been reflected upon. The significance of the reflections may be unperceived by the ordinary theologians as they may never have been asked to articulate their beliefs, but they remain the focus of the developing faith of each Christian. Verbalisation of beliefs by ordinary theologians to each other may also help towards mutual interpretation, and reflection

on these beliefs will move towards the development and systemisation of their theologies.

2.4.4 Context

Alongside experiential learning, context is emphasised by ap Siôn and Edwards, and by Pattison. Theological reflection is bound inextricably to experience which, in turn, is dependent on the context in which the ordinary theologian gains their experiences. Theology that has been reflected upon should always be seen within its context and that context may be found when it is listened for and looked for in the articulations and actions of ordinary believers. Beliefs will continually change, modify and develop as people consider, reflect upon and incorporate new experiences and insights from within their own learning contexts.

Life experiences will be interpreted in the light of a person's internal theology. This is a two-way process; a person's theologies will change according to their changing context, and their life contexts will be influenced by their internal beliefs. This is theology-in-construction, a 'lived' theology, personal, relevant, vibrant, profound, rich and valuable. These theologies deserve to be heard, respected and valued. It is important because theology that is being articulated by a believer who has not received theological training will be influenced by their background and may be technically less eloquent than that of a trained person (Pattison, S. 1987). The context in which an ordinary theologian has been brought up, has absorbed their theology, and has constructed their beliefs, is powerful. Pattison's emphasis on context is important because any theology being articulated by a theologically believer is likely to be less eloquent than that of a trained person. The context in which the churchgoer is placed is affected by the worship he or she experiences. However, it will be influenced later by the tradition and expression of worship into which the churchgoer eventually may move.

For ordinary theologians, their theology is experiential and personally relevant to each believer. It is born from the individual experiences that have formed the ordinary theologian's life up to that point and it will grow as further happenings occur

throughout their life. It is shaped by the context in which each particular ordinary theologian is placed, whether that is within church, work or family life.

An ordinary theologian may never have thought theologically about emergency baptism for a sick child until life places them in a personal contextual situation where such thinking is essential.

Experiential learning within a religious community, such as the Church, in dialogue with personal life experiences and subjected to reflection, leads to a personal theology that continually develops as new circumstances are incorporated. The requirement of testing the views of the ordinary theologian against formal and normative theological standards of their tradition will be more difficult in Congregationalism as described later in this section.

2.4.5 Affect

An additional consideration is affect as it is possible for theology to be 'articulated' non-verbally as well as verbally. For example, a churchgoer may find emotional and moving spiritual sensitivities within a communion service or a believers' baptism displaying their theology without words. These services may also help develop the person's theology through learning via observation.

Ordinary Theology, as God-talk, encompasses speech, action, learning, non-verbal communication, emotion and praxis. It is 'important to have a firm grasp on the theological significance of emotional experience' (Ryan n.d.). Pannenberg (1985, pp.243–265) reports that Augustine described our journey to God as being dependent on the affects which are the feet that either lead us closer to God or carry us farther from him. Without affects, we cannot travel the way at all'.

Affect can be described as touching the feelings of someone or moving them emotionally. In contrast, it may be contended that pure emotion is not theological as it lacks the logos or words. It needs reflection and some degree of rationalisation to qualify as theology. Affect may express theology in the additional box I have proposed for Cameron's voices where emotions, actions and reactions are driven by an underlying theology, unexpressed through articulation. It is not just that the person

lacks the systematic theological words to express their beliefs but that they are unable to find the words to express sufficiently their underlying theological beliefs at all. They may find expression in action, praxis or other ways of operationalising their beliefs.

For Astley, there needs to be an emotional as well as a cognitive element so that religion is tried and tested by those who 'do' it, not by those who merely 'think' it. The affective element of any ordinary theological research should allow ordinary theologians room and permission to express their beliefs including affective expressions and emotions that may be uncovered during interviews.

My own belief is that such feelings of affect may be a movement of the Holy Spirit and, as such, the logos of God is imparted to the person without the need for physical words. Is this another example of the lack of systematic theological words or is it communication with God without the need for words?

2.5   Gaining acceptance for research using Ordinary Theology

Researchers into Ordinary Theology may still have to contend with adherents to other theological paradigms that it is a valid and important form of Practical Theology, but I believe it is sufficiently robust to stand alone. Recognition is important because Ordinary Theology represents the often-unarticulated beliefs of the everyday churchgoer, the ordinary theologian. It is the heart-held, lived-out structure that underpins the beliefs and lives of the majority of people who worship in our churches, week by week and, thus, deserves to be researched and understood. It is not pretentious and often goes unnoticed in church life but, underlying the practices and actions of a church, certainly a Congregational church, are the beliefs of the ordinary theologians of that church. These theologies, or, more properly in ordinary theological language, these beliefs are not conceived *de novo*. They are the product of a lifetime of church services, hymns, Bible studies, sermons, discussion and, above all, experience. Each experience that is significant to a Christian will be heard and seen, considered, thought about critically and reflected upon in the light of the stored mass of experiences and beliefs already accumulated by that person.

These happenings will be reflected upon and compared with previously stored and categorised beliefs and events to see if they 'fit'.

If the fit is poor, the new experience may be rejected in favour of the established. If the fit is good, they can be accommodated within the frameworks of currently held beliefs. If they are questionable, they may be pondered upon and, perhaps, discussed or researched.

The adoption of experiences into beliefs or their rejection will be a process of critical consideration, reflection and consolidation. Ordinary theologians ask themselves whether this new idea is acceptable within their personal belief frameworks or not, and whether it should be accepted, rejected or questioned further. This process is continually dynamic and is healthy within the life of a Christian, but it is rarely overt or articulated, perhaps, not even internally. That does not mean that the beliefs are not real or essential to that person, and perhaps, important to the community of the church. Ordinary Theology provides the vehicle through which these beliefs can be vocalised and shared, contributing to the growth and understanding of the church. It should be noted that I am not calling them theologies because I am using the vernacular language of ordinary theologians rather than the language of the academy. In this study, the focus groups in particular contribute to this type of discussion which continues long after the official session has been completed and will have engendered a new openness of discussion. This is the dynamic of Ordinary Theology and ordinary theologians, a facility and a provision for open discussion between Christians on previously unshared beliefs that is used as the lens to study theological poverty in this thesis.

2.6   *Previous studies* in Ordinary Theology

The use of Ordinary Theology in research is defended by Astley (2002b, p.97) who identifies two valid areas of investigation, 'one empirical and social-scientific, the other philosophical and theological (that is, conceptual)'. The list of such empirical and social-scientific studies is growing, and I now provide a selection of these studies.

Each study has contributed in some way to this thesis in that it has provided a basis on which I build, developing and extending the research into new areas of consideration.

Work from Littler and Francis (2005, p.50) examines the concept of the assessment of holiness of the church which participants were visiting. It makes use of 4879 questionnaires which were assessed on a five-point scale considering the provision of facilities for private prayer; information about church services and the presence of flowers in the church. The researchers are not able to provide evidence that the people surveyed are 'believers' as suggested by Astley's definition of ordinary theologians. This could be described as listening 'at arms-length' to the views being expressed by visitors rather than by ordinary theologian members of the church. My study builds on this quantitative research by taking it into a descriptive qualitative survey and taking it closer to ordinary theology. Secondly, the research is undertaken remotely by questionnaire whereas I have developed this by conducting it at first hand by personal interview in this study.

Similarly, Tania ap Siôn (2013) conducts her research 'at arm's length' by analysing 1067 prayer cards left in one rural church and analysing them for ordinary intercessory and ordinary supplicatory prayers. I have adapted the remoteness of this methodology and the lack of identifying the writers of the cards as ordinary believers to produce a more personal and individual research process.

The Christology of 45 Anglican churchgoers is examined through interview by Christie (2005). This is a much closer approach to the respondents because it permits the interviewer to assess the critical thinking of those taking part, an approach that I develop in this thesis. The soteriology of ordinary churchgoers is examined by Christie and Astley (2009), again through personal interview, listening to beliefs and assessing the participant's thought-through views, thus demonstrating the similar approach that I have adopted and developed. Both of Christie's research topics find a wide divergence from the stance of academic theologians when considering orthodox theology, an aspect that I was able to look for and confirm in this thesis. Further, the ordinary theologians demonstrate some unexpected beliefs and outcomes (2009,

pp.179–196) that I was able to develop. Based on this and similar findings, the importance of maintaining a level of personal detachment in conducting the interviews is made. This is an aspect of my research that I was careful to maintain in order to avoid the introduction of bias from the interviewer's own theology.

Armstrong (2011) in his study of Life after Death demonstrates the value of in-depth interviews when researching reported accounts of 'the final destiny of humankind'. His interviews of 26 Congregationalists were from within his own church and so may have reflected his own beliefs as the Minister of that church. His particular research is of interest in that it is conducted within the Congregational tradition similar to the research for this project. As described in Chapter 4 of this thesis, the individualities of this tradition impact on the contributors and their ordinary beliefs and I sought to develop his work by making enquiries across six churches thereby facilitating comparisons.

The closest report identified here that approximates to my own research is that of Armstong; it involves in-depth in-person interviews set among ordinary theologians from within the Congregational tradition. However, I have developed his work by taking it beyond the researcher's own church so as to widen the variety of articulations. I have included an additional level of data collection by means of the use of focus groups within the churches of the contributors. This provides an additional dimension where discussion encourages the elaboration and reinforcement of the beliefs articulated in the individual interviews. Furthermore, I have included interviews with the Ministers of the churches concerned in order to gather a measure of the Espoused and Operant Theologies of their churches; and with two Congregational academics to provide a level of Formal Theology. These unique extensions add depth and broaden the originality of my research.

These and other studies have provided a sound basis for this investigation and have allowed me to develop both the methodology and the value of its contribution to the body of knowledge in ordinary theology, baptismal beliefs, theological poverty and Congregationalism. I have demonstrated that using Ordinary Theology as a research construct is valid and helps uncover the deeper beliefs and understandings of

churchgoers, often to the surprise of Ministers and academics. Ordinary Theology is accepted as a valid research tool in this thesis.

In summary, Ordinary Theology is 'ordinary' because it is both earthed in the day-to-day lives of the person concerned and because it relates to each 'ordinary' churchgoer themselves. Referring again to Astley's definition of Ordinary Theology given in Chapter 2, and the characteristics given, Ordinary Theology deserves to be accepted as a fundamental expression of the faiths, beliefs and experiences of ordinary believers.

2.7 What is theological poverty?

Camroux (2008a, p.139) uses the term 'Theological Poverty' to describe a 'lack of significant theological reflection', that he perceives within the URC. He notes that the URC tradition has not produced any serious ecclesiology until the late 1990s. Sell (2006, p.166) contributes that 'the local church at the end of the twentieth century was no longer the 'nursery of theologians' it had been at the century's beginning'. Peel (2008, p.151) describes the 'theological illiteracy' of church members. This contrasts with Healy's view (2009) that 'ordinary' theological reflection is engaged in by virtually all believers.

The absence of serious ecclesiological works is noted as evidence of this decline and Argent (2013, p.522) considers that those works that have been produced are treated as 'the preserve of ministers and academics and were neither read nor welcomed by church members'. Additionally, Argent observes that many Ministers 'also shunned theological writings, leaving them to the intellectuals'. This reaches the extent that Peel (2008, p.151) describes it as a 'collusion between pulpit and pew' which takes theology out of local congregational life'.

Falling congregational numbers within the URC contribute to Sell's decision (2006, p.191) to review non-conformist theology in the twentieth century. He is

concerned at the quality of the theology he finds in the churches and is of the opinion that younger candidates for the ministry should 'receive a full and rigorous academic course … doctrinal, systematic and constructive theology'. By 2008, Camroux asks 'Why did the URC fail?'

> The fact that Congregational decline began earlier, proceeded faster, and involved a drift not simply to secularism but, among its most educated, to the Church of England, reflects the lack of belief within the denomination and its theological poverty (Camroux 2008a, p.43).

He refers to Thompson's work which suggests that there is an underlying theological poverty in twentieth century Congregationalism resulting in an intellectual challenge where traditional faith dissolves (Thompson, D. 2002).

In a response to Camroux's article, Peel (2008, p.150) approaches theological poverty by stating that the problem has not been a lack of theology but rather that little of the theology has been owned by church members. 'At best, for them, theology is something others do – clergy, dons, or even both rolled up in one; at worst, it provides evidence to support an anti-intellectualism within the Church'. He notes, anecdotally, that a Congregational deacon once advised an applicant for the vacant church pastorate that 'ministers close churches by degrees'.

The comments from Peel are anchored in Scripture, referring to 1 Peter 3:15, where a large number of church members were incapable of 'accounting for the hope' to like-minded friends, never mind, non-Christians. He comments that:

> For a long time now church members have had difficulty and experienced unease when required to engage in grass roots apologetics. We live with the paradox that the most highly educated congregations ever known to Christianity are, at one and the same time, the most biblically and theologically illiterate (Peel, D. 2008, p.151).

It is questionable whether most ordinary church members would understand or be able to define the word 'apologetics' or would want to do so. Peel concludes that most church members feel deeply guilty about the biblical and theological illiteracy they experience but he offers no evidence for this conclusion. It may be that church members are unaware of the illiteracy he identifies or are unconcerned about it.

The detachment between the theology of the professional theologian and congregation members is considered by Peel who notes that:

:

> There were few available lay people equipped to enable grass-roots theological conversations in churches within which theology had become monopolised by ordained ministers and professional theologians … A collusion between pulpit and pew has often ensued that in effect takes theology out of the local congregational life (Peel, D. 2008, p.151).

The dissemination of theology that is claimed to be important by Peel must speak 'from and to three publics: society, academy and Church'. However, it may, legitimately, be questioned whether the academy and even the Church has been successful in undertaking this dissemination in such ways as to create a meaningful impact on the members of the Church and their beliefs. Peel describes how Sell's 'top down' approach rarely works; a hierarchical construct of a single direction, downward of theological education. He anticipates that theologians should be 'discharging their primary reflective responsibility … to stimulate the churches into action'. 'Thinking' is the province of some while 'action' is the job of others', he claims (2008, p.155). If Peel and Sell are correct in claiming that the downward movement of theological education to congregations is ineffective, it is surprising that it is persistently continued.

The lack of serious theological reflection is considered a major problem by Camroux (2008a, p.139) which he attributes to diminishing theological expertise in the URC and a serious deficit in critical scholarship. He anticipates the lack of theological reflection without clearly demonstrating this and establishing it as the cause of theological poverty. Also, he does not describe the nature and substance of the

theology he is seeking. Further, he states that there is an almost total lack of serious ecclesiology to the point of intellectual poverty as well.

The health of the Church, Peel maintains (2008, p.155), should be measured by testing the ability of church members to give an account of the hope that is in them in word and by deed. This would reflect the success of Ministers in teaching theology to their congregations.

He acknowledges that, despite his commitment to a learned ministry, the concentration of activity on Ministers may have, inadvertently, contributed to a measure of theological illiteracy of many church members. He concedes that 'common experience' plays a crucial role in theology. In this he acknowledges the importance of life and ecclesiastical experience in the formation of church members' beliefs and theologies. He goes on to accept that scriptural interpretation is not the sole prerogative of ecclesiastical or even scholarly authority.

Perceptively, Camroux concedes that church members are important, and quotes from Bellah et al:

> Churches are 'communities of memory' comprised by the stories they tell, the memories they cherish, the myths they share, and the habits they own and recognise. When change is imposed from above … the memories are disrupted in a way that risks a dislocation of identity (Bellah et al. 2008, p.230).

In identifying the essential nature of personal and church memory and anecdote, Camroux acknowledges the presence of something distinctive from the formal, denominational and espoused theologies of a church. His comments suggest a culture which is quite separate from the academy-based, learned theology of the Church. This shared experience of mutual importance to its owners underpins and emphasises the value of the contributions made by ordinary theologians in this study. The beliefs articulated are both individual to a contributor and collective to a group.

They are, in some instances, distinctive from the church memory of common experience. These beliefs construct an important hypothesis in this study that there are two, parallel, but at times overlapping, sets of theologies and beliefs present in members and in the sample churches of the CF relating to baptism.

The proposal of theological poverty is rooted in the URC but is applied, in this study, to Congregationalism in general and to the CF in particular. When the URC came into existence in 1972, the majority of the existing Congregational churches joined the Presbyterian churches to form the United Reformed Church.

About 300 Congregational churches elected not to join the Union and remained separate, most forming the CF of Churches. Given this common history, it is possible to extrapolate the URC findings to its sister 'denomination', the CF. Modern academic research and writing from the Federation is not extensive and, hence, the work of academics from the URC has been examined.

2.8 Ordinary Theology and theological poverty

A dearth of Systematic Theology in the CF may not necessarily imply a poverty of theology generally, especially if Ordinary Theology is given equal status to other types of theology. Theology may be seen to reside in the domain of 'qualified theologians' within the Church or academy. This leads ap Siôn (2010, p.15) to comment that there is a perceived imbalance in any dialogue that exists between 'qualified theologians and ordinary people' as the theologians control the dialogue.

'Theology has become largely associated with the preparation of ordained ministers for the churches', claims Peel (2002, p.9), who then looks for 'quality' theology in everyday churchgoers without defining the criteria of measurement. The search for Systematic Theology in lay people may be unsuccessful but the search for expressions of belief amongst ordinary theologians reveals a richness and depth of belief held and demonstrated in action as well as in word. Astley maintains that Ordinary Theology could be used to restore the proper ownership of theology to general believers. The construct of Ordinary Theology offers the opportunity to

understand the beliefs and faith-directed actions of regular churchgoers and also how these beliefs compare to those of professional theologians.

In summary, theology, ordinary theology and theological poverty are now restated. The definition of Systematic Theology used in this thesis is that 'systematic theology is the methodological investigation and interpretation of the content of the Christian faith involving the orderly clarification and explanation of what is affirmed in the Christian message' (Thomas 1989, p.1).

Ordinary Theology is defined as the theological beliefs and processes of believing that find expression in the God-talk of those believers who have received no scholarly theological education (Astley 2002b, p.1).

Theological poverty is defined as a lack of significant theological reflection (Camroux 2008a, p.139) while theological illiteracy of church members is also described (Peel 2008, p.151).

Ordinary Theology has been explained and justified as 'theology'. It is shown to be a sound concept suitable for use in qualitative research. The attributes of prospective ordinary theologians are explored and explained. Ordinary Theology is now applied to the study of baptismal theology to demonstrate its appropriateness as a specific branch of theology.

Attention will now be turned to the second of the three core Chapters, the Sacrament of baptism and this will be examined through an historical approach.

Chapter 3: An overview of baptismal theologies and praxes

This second of the three core chapters considers baptismal history and practices through the centuries. The chronological review of the theologies and praxes of baptism is used in order to demonstrate how some of the ancient theologies and rituals have persisted, and how others, once common, have been discontinued. It also shows how new rituals have been introduced through time into modern practice. It demonstrates how it is advantageous to explore the history, the wide range of rituals and the development of baptismal theologies and praxes.

3.1 Lustrations, ablutions, cleansings and proselytes

Ritual cleansing in water has been practiced from ancient times where 'certain waters, notably of sacred springs and streams, can be impregnated with the power of deity' (Beasley-Murray 1962, pp.1–2). In the Hebrew Scriptures, lustrations become integrated into a 'God-relationship' establishing the association between God and water (Beasley-Murray 1962, p.8). The community of Essenes inhabited Qumran from the mid-second century BCE to 67CE, and their Community Rule covers preparation for admittance of new members. Community Rule 4 is translated as:

> He will cleanse him from all wicked deeds with the spirit of holiness; like purifying waters He will shed upon him the spirit of truth (to cleanse him) of all abomination and falsehood (Reddish 1995, p.228).

The applicant must appear before the whole community to repent from their wickedness. 'Only thus can it really be sprinkled with the waters of ablution. Only thus can it really be sanctified by waters of purification' (Beasley-Murray 1962, p.17).

It is proposed by Sefa-Dapaah (1995, p.70) that John entered the wilderness, lived in or near Qumran and would have been raised as a priest with the Essenes, receiving the baptism of water which marked his entry into the novitiate.

This potential Essene influence taken together with Jewish lustrations and with proselyte baptism could provide the origins for the baptisms performed by John the Baptist. However, this needs to be seen in the light of Jesus' words in Mark 7:1-8 which appear to criticise some of these lustration rites. In contrast, Spinks (2006a, p.4) remarks that Christian practice may have influenced proselyte baptism rather than vice versa as: 'the main evidence for Jewish proselyte baptism postdates Christian baptism'.

Proselyte baptism was administered by Jews to Gentiles who wished to become Jews as part of a conversion and initiation process involving baptism, circumcision and sacrifice (Kohler and Krauss 2017). In proselyte baptism, the candidate 'descends and bathes' and is accounted an Israelite (Abrahams n.d.). Where tebilah or ritual washing is required, immersion would be necessary.

In contrast to the argument given above, Joachim Jeremias is cited by Smith (1982, p.13) as putting forward a 'most thorough and persuasive argument' that Jewish proselyte baptism is the source of John's baptisms and, therefore, of Christian baptism'. Investigations by Thiering (1980, pp.267–271) into the Qumran texts link the baptism of John with the washing in water performed by the Qumran community. However, I am not convinced that ancient Jewish lustrations, proselyte baptism or the ritual bathings of Qumran can be claimed to provide an unequivocal basis for the baptisms of John, but it is within this cultural mix, coupled with the Hebrew Scripture foundations quoted above that John undertook his baptismal ministry.

Already, by this stage in the history of baptism, several possible purposes for baptism emerge from pre-Christian antecedents that are important in this study. These include cleansing and purification which are still concepts that are articulated. Baptism is frequently seen as an entry into a community and initiation into the Church with conversion and repentance being of significance. The mode of baptism at this stage appears likely to be by immersion particularly where it should take place in the presence of the whole community.

3.2   John the Baptizer

Jesus provides a significance to John and his baptising ministry by himself undergoing John's baptism thus setting its vital importance as the precedent of Christian baptism. In Matthew 11:11–15, Jesus says: 'No one has arisen greater than John the Baptist', and 'he is Elijah who is to come'.

John's baptisms, which are inseparably linked to hearing the word of God, is a ceremony with water concerned with cleansing and is 'a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins' (Mark 1:4). Matthew describes how John said: 'I baptize you with water for repentance' but goes on to foretell of 'One who is more powerful than I is coming after me: … He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire'. (Matthew 3:11).

The view taken by Beasley-Murray (1962, p.34) is that John's baptisms are of repentance or more accurately, turning or conversion. He goes on to cite Lohmeyer who contends that 'John preached not a baptismal repentance but a repentance baptism'. This produces a theology concerning the commencement of new life through the baptism of forgiveness and cleansing from sin. The baptisms conducted by John emphasise the early emerging theologies of cleansing, repentance, and forgiveness.

3.3   The baptism of Jesus by John

> Behold the Lord's mother and brethren said to him, John the Baptist is baptising unto remission of sins: let us go and be baptized by him. Then he said to them, 'What sin have I done that I should go and be baptized by him? – unless perchance this very saying of mine is a sin of ignorance'.   (Jerome from the Gospel according to the Hebrews (Flemington 1948, p.27).

This Deuteronomic reference implies that Jesus understands that remission of sins is a major, if not the major, purpose of baptism. The extent of his commitment is apparent in Luke 12:50 where Jesus says, 'But I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed!' Here Jesus himself unites the concept of baptism with his death on the Cross.

The unique event described in Luke 3:22 that occurs within the baptism of Jesus is the descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove and the voice of God from heaven saying, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with You I am well pleased'.

Baptisms by John are, in essence, baptisms of conversion for the forgiveness of sins so it is difficult to correlate this with the baptism of Jesus where there is no need for either conversion or a request for forgiveness. John continues to baptize with water without further materialisation of the Spirit and Jesus authorizes baptisms in water in Luke 4:1 whilst not conducting the baptisms himself. It is only after Pentecost, Flemington claims (1948, p.31), that 'Baptism took its place as the normal right of entry into the Christian community'.

In the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus gives the formula for baptism. The command is to make disciples of all nations, baptize them in the name of the Trinity and teach them to obey Jesus' commandments. This passage is unique to Matthew and is different to the formula in Acts. Ware (Ferguson and Ware 2009) makes a forceful claim that, in this passage, credobaptism is mandated in that baptism is for 'those who have *believed* in Jesus Christ should be *immersed* in water in obedience to Christ's command'. (Italics in the original) This view is supported by Malone:

> In fact, I believe the Bible authorizes the baptism of disciples alone. This position may also be called credobaptism, from the Latin verb credo, meaning believe or trust. Other designations are believer's baptism, confessor's baptism, or professor's baptism, all synonyms describing the baptism of disciples alone (Malone 2008, Author's preface).

John's baptisms contain four major theologies: purification, repentance, initiation and forgiveness. They also represent preparation because he is only preparing the way for the One who is much greater than he (Kuhrt 1987, pp.57–59). The baptism of Jesus shows the persistence of several specific theologies that include baptismal conversion, the forgiveness of sin, and entry into the community. Baptism also emerges as a Trinitarian event with Father, Son and Holy Spirit identified.

3.4   Baptism among the first Christians

Christian baptism in the New Testament appears in both the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles. Beasley-Murray (1962, p.94) suggests that John's earlier baptisms in water are replaced by post-Pentecostal Christian baptisms in the Holy Spirit.   The baptismal references in Acts may be grouped depending on whether the baptism is, or is not, a baptism with water, and according to the way in which the rite relates to the laying on of hands and the gift of the Spirit (Flemington 1948, p.38). For example, Peter, preaching on the day of Pentecost, demands repentance followed by baptism from his hearers: 'Repent, and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'.[4]

The contrast between John's baptisms with water and post-Pentecostal baptisms with the Holy Spirit can be seen in Jesus' words in Acts 1:5, and Peter's telling of the story of Cornelius to the Apostles in Jerusalem.[5] This supports John's pronouncement 'I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit'.[6] A further contrast is the situation where even baptism in the name of Jesus does not necessarily confirm the gift of the Spirit but that this is given only after prayer and the laying-on of Apostolic hands. Other references to baptism in the Acts of the Apostles include the baptism of Simon Magus;[7] the Ethiopian eunuch;[8] Lydia;[9] the Philippian jailer;[10] and of the believers in Corinth.[11] However, there is little detail to add understanding except that it was an accepted event in New Testament times.

Paul's letter to the Romans, dated about 56CE, suggests that Christian baptism is common at that time because Paul asks the question 'Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?'.[12]

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[4] Acts 2:38
[5] Acts 11:15-16
[6] Mark 1:8
[7] Acts 8:13
[8] Acts 8:27-40
[9] Acts 16:14-15
[10] Acts 16:29-33
[11] Acts 19:1-7
[12] Romans 6:3

Both Paul and the Roman Christians, therefore, had been baptized and, clearly, Paul regards baptism as the normal method of entry into the Church.

From the theologies, beliefs and praxes shown in New Testament accounts of baptism, two new practices emerge. These are baptism as the normal mode of admission as followers of Jesus, and baptism of the Holy Spirit either following or instead of water baptism.

3.5   Church Fathers to godfathers

The four main baptismal theologies that emerge from the Patristic period relate to the recipients of the act of baptism (infants or believers), the mode of baptism (sprinkling or immersion), the role of the Abrahamic covenant and circumcision, and the position of re-baptism.

The Didache (the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles) dates from the first and second century and Didache 7 gives guidance on baptism requiring fasting, prior instruction and testimony.

> CHAPTER VII   And concerning baptism, baptize after this manner: Having first recited all these precepts baptize into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost in living water; but if thou hast not living water, baptize into other water; and if thou canst not in cold water then baptize in warm. But if thou hast neither, pour out water upon the head thrice, into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Before the baptism let the baptizer and the baptized fast, and any others that are able; but thou shalt order the baptized to fast one or two days beforehand. (tr. Allen 1903)

The modes of baptism are ranked in order of preference; firstly, immersion in flowing water; secondly, immersion in a pond or lake; thirdly, immersion in a cistern or *mikveh*; and finally, the pouring of water three time. The use of poured water is a novel introduction while sprinkling is rarely mentioned. The ongoing debate on the three modes of baptism is a major part of this thesis.

Stander and Louw (2004, p.32) comment that there is no preference stated in the Didache relating to the baptism of children. Additionally, baptism is regarded as a prerequisite before membership of a congregation and entitled the believer to participate in the Eucharist (2004, p.34).

By the time of Justin Martyr (100–165CE) baptism develops a highly intricate and complex ritual and sequence of events (White 1997, p.88), but most of these complexities have been abandoned. Baptism as regeneration to God is the understanding of Irenaeus (130–202CE), and in his writing *Against Heresies 2, 22, 4* he mentions being born again to God - 'infants, and children, and boys, and youths, and old men' (Irenaeus from New Advent (Online Content) n.d.). Being born again and rebirth are areas considered in this thesis. (In Chapters 6, 7 and 9)

Two practices are added by Clement of Alexandria, one of which is the giving of milk and honey to those who are baptized, probably in place of the Eucharistic bread and wine and as a symbol of their entry into the new Promised Land (White 1997, p.89). The candidates for baptism also undergo the removal of all their clothing before baptism as a symbol of shedding one's former life with the candidates emerging and robing in white (Stander and Louw 2004, p.58). The symbolism of this can be seen to remain in the wearing of a white baptismal gown in some infant and believers' baptisms.

De Baptismo is the earliest surviving treatise on baptism, written by Tertullian in about 200CE. (Evans tr. 2016) It introduces additional doctrines including disowning the devil, a daybreak ceremony, and triple immersion. The renunciation of the devil is a feature that appears in many versions of the baptismal service today. Triple emersion may still be required in some Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, but daybreak ceremonies are no longer common. Tertullian does not permit infants to be baptized and argues that baptism should follow immediately after repentance.

He comments on the pagan superstition that makes the baby 'born from heathen parents, the prey of the devil', and destined for hell unless they are baptized. For him, any baby 'who has Christian parents, even if only one of them is a Christian, this danger does not exist since he is born 'holy'' (Stander and Louw 2004, p.72).

The absolute necessity he identifies for children to be baptized for protection finds identity with some traditions that regard unbaptized infants as bound for *limbus puerorum*, (the supposed abode of unbaptized infants). Re-baptism is not permitted by Tertullian and the time of Passover is favoured for baptism. Catechumens are required to undertake a complex process by Hippolytus (170–235CE). The water is blessed and, if there is not enough water for immersion, a liberal amount of water is poured onto the candidate to wet them properly. Sprinkling is a much later development. The quantity of water becomes important, but alternatives are found.

Infant baptism is encouraged by Origen (185–245CE) because his theology stated that even children needed to be cleansed from original sin following an Apostolic Tradition he had received to baptize children. Origen takes up Paul's imagery of death and resurrection (Spinks 2006a, p.35).

Cyprian (200–258CE) disagrees with key figures in Rome especially over 'clinical' emergency infant baptism. Cyprian's letter to Fidus deals with the matter of whether infants should be baptized immediately after birth or on the eighth day according to the analogy with circumcision.

The concept of Sacraments is introduced by Ambrose (340–397CE). For Ambrose, the font is a tomb for death rather than a womb for rebirth, and regeneration is linked to new life and resurrection (Spinks 2006a, pp.60–61).

Augustine of Hippo (354–430CE) justifies the practice of infant baptism on the grounds of the doctrine of original sin. He lays great emphasis on the faith of the whole Church and anticipates that baptisms will take place during the main service of the day and in front of the whole church. Augustine introduces the theology of exorcism and the practice of making the sign of the cross on the forehead (Spinks 2006a, p.65).

Conceptualisations from Ambrose of the font representing a tomb for death and rising, and from Origen proposing death and resurrection. Sprinkling and immersion are explored as is rebaptism. Baptism is made to follow repentance, and the theology of original sin gains some acceptance. The introduction of godparents for a spiritual rebirth is important and the debate about the necessity for baptism emerges.

Many theologies and practices from this time are still important today and details will emerge from the data later in this thesis.

The Patristic Period provides many of the theologies and practices, evidence of which may be found in CF churches today while many others have been lost through the ages. For example, both infant and believers' baptisms are encouraged by various Fathers.

3.6 Medieval baptismal theology

From about 840$_{CE}$ onward, movement occurs away from the infant's sponsorship by their parents towards spiritual parents for a spiritual birth. Godparents are the development from this change (Spinks 2006a, p.128). Separation occurs between the baptism of babies early in life and the episcopal prayers, hand-laying and anointing which can only be done when the bishop visits the locality. This separate episcopal rite becomes a service of confirmation. Also about this time, the term 'christening' comes into use from the Old English 'Cristnen' meaning to be named at baptism (Spinks 2006a, p.129). The medieval period sees the formulation of the theology of baptism towards a single Roman Catholic rite. However, there exists considerable individuality between churches and geographical areas. The Theology of Sanctification is developed by Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274$_{CE}$) as being 'the external washing with the prescribed form of words which is the sacramental sign of interior justification' (Spinks 2006a, p.146).

The Council of Trent in 1545 determines that, because baptism impresses a character, it can never be repeated except that the re-baptism of Catholics is accepted. This sets the modern theology that baptism is a unique event in a person's life. The mode is unimportant but, by the 16th century, infant baptism is the norm.

For the children of believers, a service of thanksgiving, parental vows, naming, prayerful dedication and blessing is provided which can be identified as having its modern equivalent in services that are alternatives to infant baptisms.

Baptism itself is administered only to those who earnestly sought it, suggesting the acceptability of adult baptism (Bridge and Phypers 1977, p.93).

From within the theologies, beliefs and actions about baptism present in Medieval times, several new theologies emerge. These include the provision of spiritual parents for a spiritual birth - godparents; the term christening; salvation by faith; and the need for a profession of faith. A new form of rite of thanksgiving, dedication, parental vows, naming and blessing emerges.

3.7   Baptismal Reformation

The Protestant Reformation is identified with a number of significant leaders, notably Martin Luther (1483–1546CE), John Calvin (1509–1564CE) and Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1518CE). Luther, writing in 1529, supports infant baptism and the view that baptism is necessary for salvation:

> Baptism is no human trifle, but instituted by God Himself, moreover, that it is most solemnly and strictly commanded that we must be baptized or we cannot be saved, lest anyone regarded as a trifling matter, like putting on a new red coat (Luther (1529) tr. Bente and Dau, 2014, p.109)

In 1520 Luther writes in The Babylonian Captivity of the Church:

> Baptism then signifies two things, death and resurrection; that is, full and complete justification. When the minister dips the child into the water, this signifies death; when he draws him out again, this signifies life … Thus Paul explains the matter: "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Rom. vi. 4.).   (Luther (1520) tr. OpenSource. 2020)

He then clarifies:

> Thus, it is not baptism which justifies any man, or is of any advantage; but faith in that word of promise to which baptism is added; for this justifies, and fulfils the meaning of baptism. For faith is the submerging of the old man, and the emerging of the new man.

Calvin (1509-1564CE) concurs with Augustine, writing in 1559 that baptism should be an unrepeatable event for the remission of sins and the person conferring the baptism is irrelevant:

> We ought to consider that whatever time we are baptized, we are washed and purified once for the whole of life and that its dignity neither gains nor loses by the administrator (Calvin (1559) tr. Beveridge 1990, p.1452)

He agrees with the Church Fathers and Hippolytus that the mode of baptism is not important:

> Whether the person baptized is to be wholly immersed, and that whether once or thrice, or whether he is only to be sprinkled with water, is not of the least consequence (Calvin (1559) tr. Beveridge 1990, p.1461)

Calvin also agrees with Luther that baptism is neither the cause of salvation, nor is it necessary for salvation:

> We must not deem baptism so necessary as to suppose that everyone who has lost the opportunity of obtaining it has forthwith perished (Calvin (1559) tr. Beveridge 1990, p.1493)

Calvin believes, also, that a public profession of faith, infant baptism, and initiation into the Church of believers are important.

Zwingli takes the view that:

> I leave baptism untouched. I call it neither right nor wrong. If we were to baptize as Christ instituted it, then we would not baptize any person until he reached the age of discretion, for I find infant baptism nowhere written or practiced. But we must practice it now so as not to offend our fellow men… It is better not to preach [adult baptism] until the world is ready to receive it (Bridge and Phypers 1977, p.103).

During the time of the Protestant Revolution, a movement of Christians arose whose most distinct tenet was adult baptism. Members of the movement submitted to a second baptism, a crime in its day, rejecting and repudiating their first baptism. The Anabaptists were determined that they wanted to return their lives and worship to the principles of the early church. They suffered even death in the defence of their credobaptist beliefs. This tenet of adult baptism was held together with the other main tenets of pacifism and the separation of church from state.

In an interesting link, Paul Walker has written a paper entitled; 'Connecting Anabaptism to the Early Church Fathers'. His work inquired 'About the use of the early church fathers and the radical reformers on … baptism' (2015). An early Anabaptist leader, Balthazar Hubmaier was most opposed to Zwingi's view and quoted many of the fathers to support his beliefs. He also referred to Justin Martyr and Tertullian to support his views. It is quite possible that the Anabaptists, while rejecting tradition in favour of the Scriptures, were prepared to accept some non-biblical sources where they supported their views.

The Westminster Confession of 1649 on which many Free Church theologies are based takes up Calvin's and Zwingli's views describing baptism as a Sacrament of the New Testament ordained by Christ.[13]

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[13] Matthew 28:19

It also is a solemn admission to the visible Church,[14] a sign and seal of the covenant of grace,[15] and of ingrafting into Christ.[16] It continues describing regeneration,[17] remission of sins,[18] and a walk in newness of life.[19] The Westminster Confession also states that immersion is not necessary but that baptism by pouring or sprinkling water is adequate. The infants of one or both believing parents should be baptized and that grace and salvation are not so inseparably dependent on baptism that no person can be regenerated or saved without it; or, that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.

An early Baptist, John Smyth (1554-1612), is of the opinion that baptism of the Spirit is required for baptism to be valid: 'Baptism is not washing with water but it is the baptism of the Spirit, the confession of the mouth, and the washing with water' (Jones 1998, p.25). This brings the position of baptism of the Holy Spirit back into a debate that continues.

Further writers, such as Flemington, return to the Bible to find authority for credobaptism.

> There is good reason to believe that this substantial unity of baptismal teaching represents a common tradition of belief and practice, which can be most satisfactorily accounted for on the hypothesis that its main elements derive from Jesus himself … The practice of infant baptism raises considerations which do not find explicit treatment within the New Testament (Flemington 1948, p.130)

He continues:

> But it is obvious that the most characteristic New Testament baptismal teaching, originally formulated with specific reference to the baptism of adults, must undergo some measure of restatement before it can be applied to a situation in which the typical subject of baptism is an infant.

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[14] 1 Corinthians 12:13
[15] Romans 4:11, 1 Colossians 2:11-12
[16] Romans 6:5, Galatians 3:27
[17] Titus 3:5
[18] Mark 1:4
[19] Matthew 28:19-20

A much firmer view regarding both modes of baptism is taken by Beasley-Murray who states:

> A Baptist regards the Paedo-Baptist as unbaptised; the Paedo-Baptist regards a submission to believers baptism after receiving of infant baptism to be an affront to the Word of God nigh to blasphemy. (Beasley-Murray 1962, p.187)

This harsh contrast may have been acceptable in 1997 but most of the participants in this study do not concur, having a much more tolerant view.

3.8   Modern baptismal theologies

The Baptist tradition, now formulated in the United Kingdom as Baptists Together is the modern credobaptist representation of the Reformation Anabaptists. The second basis of the Declaration of Principle states:

> That Christian Baptism is the immersion in water into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, of those who have professed repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ who 'died for our sins according to the Scriptures; was buried, and rose again the third day' (The Baptist Union: Declaration of Principle n.d.).

Modern Baptists base their convictions on Scripture, especially Matthew 28:18-20 which requires Christians to 'make disciples of all nations, baptising them', and on Acts 2:37-38, which requires the candidate to 'be baptised, every one of you … for the forgiveness of your sins'. From these tenets, it can be seen that they believe in credobaptism, that baptism is for adults only and that the appropriate mode is by total immersion. As Wright states, for Baptists, 'The practice of believers' baptism means that faith cannot be inherited – it can only be born anew in every generation' (Wright, N. 2002, p.81).

The Church of England bases its theology of baptism on the 39 Articles of Religion, and the authoritative edition of the Book of Common Prayer (1662) is its liturgical expression. As the Book of Common Prayer Catechism puts it looking back to the definition of sanctification, it is an 'outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace' (Glatiss 2012, p.5). The modern Church of England Common Worship texts include actions such as signing with the Cross; a prayer over the water; a profession of faith and the giving of a lighted candle (CofE n.d., p.8). Further, there is no mention of salvation and little indication of exorcism. The Roman Catholic Church's celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism has many similarities to the pre-Reformation rite (Catholic Doors n.d.).

The United Reformed Church can be taken as an example of a Free Church, and the following theologies are identified:

> Baptism is a Sacrament and a means of grace administered with water in the name of the Trinity, and the means of entry into the Church. It is administered only once to any person for the forgiveness of sins. It is a process of Christian initiation into the family of God and reception into fellowship on a profession of faith or the profession of faith by an infant's parents. The practice of baptism recognizing both infant and believers' baptism is permitted (URC 2021).

There are few modern Congregationalist writers who have written about baptism. Argent (2012) devotes a small appendix in his book to the subject. He supports infant baptism by citing Peter's words to the crowd in Jerusalem[20] 'the promise is to you and to your children', and Jesus' words 'Let the children come to me'[21] and 'to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.[22] He also cites the baptisms of the households of Cornelius[23], Lydia[24], Stephanus[25] and the jailer's family.[26]

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[20] Acts 2:39
[21] Mark 10:14
[22] Luke 18:16
[23] Acts 10:47-48
[24] Acts 16:15
[25] Acts 10:2, 24, 27, 35, 47-8, 16:15, 33
[26] 1 Corinthians 1:16

He states that 'households at this period would have included slaves and servants 'some of whom would have been very young' (Argent 2012, p.82). He makes clear that infant baptism is his preference and that it should be carried out in the presence of the whole church.

He counsels that 'Ministers who hold Baptist views ... on the grounds of conscience … are ill advised to pursue a call to the pastorate of a Congregational church' but defers to the individual Church Meetings for decisions. He states that baptisms in Congregational churches are in the name of the Trinity but that 'the sign of the cross, a pre-reformation custom, is not necessary. Re-baptism 'is not encouraged … on the basis that the promises made on that person's behalf will have been honoured by God'. Although he acknowledges the importance of the Church Meeting, he emphasises that the Pastoral Care Board (PCB) of the CF has a responsibility to ensure that 'all those entering the ministry of Congregational Federation churches understand and respect the tradition of paedo-baptism' (Argent 2012, p.82). These strong statements published in the name of the CF give clarity to the 'official' attitudes and beliefs of the CF and will provide the basis against which the data provided in this thesis may be measured.

Following from the previous core chapters in which I have provided details of the relationship between theology, ordinary theology and theological poverty; and a chronological development and waning of baptism, I now turn to the third core chapter which explains the distinctiveness of Congregationalism and the CF in particular.

Chapter 4: Congregationalism

This final core chapter on Congregationalism provides an insight into the context in which this study is set. It explains the form of ecclesiology of the CF and, hence, the constraints and opportunities that this produces. Going further, it demonstrates the opportunities for individual and personal beliefs that church members may hold.

Congregationalism is described by Argent (2012, p.4) as 'an ideal, a supremely biblical and simple way of being Church. It is what happens when people come to Christ, and seek to serve and witness together, with total trust in God'. This bold statement hides more than it reveals and needs further exploration. This is best achieved by following the growth of Congregationalism through its history.

4.1   The Development of Congregationalism

It is maintained by Wootton (2013, p.91) that: 'Without claiming that the Congregational Way is the only way of being Church that is rooted in Scripture, we can make a very strong case that it is thoroughly scriptural'. She cites the situation where:

> The church, the two or three who meet in Jesus' name, this is the location for the presence of Jesus, and the locus of prayer. There is no external structure here. The church is sufficient for worship and for discipline (Wootton 2013, p.90).

Peay (2010, p.123) agrees stating that 'Congregationalism is an expression of biblical ecclesiology'. This strength of belief in its ecclesiology is woven throughout Congregationalism and has carried it through difficulties and divisions. However, its baptismal practices have been the source of disunity at times.

It is claimed by the CF that the churches of the apostolic age are congregational churches, a 'society of Saints' (Winterslow and Dale 1907, p.3). I suggest that Jewish and biblical foundations provide the tradition for the basis of the Congregational Way that is scriptural. However, this may be an eisegetical approach to the subject of baptism - reading back into scripture a meaning and an inference that does not exist. Pre-Christian, Apostolic and Early Church baptismal practices described in the previous chapter have impacts on baptism within Congregationalism. Claims for the appropriateness of either adult or infant baptism are also described in the relevant chapters.

Considering the period of the Renaissance, Cleaves (2009, p.71) asks the question: 'What prompted our forebears to follow a Congregational Way of being the Church?' He begins to answer this by citing the new availability of the Bible in vernacular translation. William Tyndale (1494-1536) aided this progress through his intention to 'make the Bible available in such an ordinary everyday English that 'even the ploughboy at the plough would understand it' (Cleaves, R. 2009, p.71).[27]

The encouragement of Martin Luther (1483-1546) for the populace to 're-discover the Good News at the heart of the Gospel', and of John Calvin (1509-1564) who 'teased out the heart of the Gospel' excited people, claims Cleaves (2009, p.71). This makes the assumption that the Congregational Way is the natural, inevitable and consequential result of the Reformation and that other routes or outcomes are less plausible. An alternative possibility is that the only forebears being discussed are those who have already made the choice of dissent and independence from the established Church. Hence, I suggest that Tyndale, Luther, Calvin and others prepare the way for the precursors of Vernacular Theology, expressed today by some as Ordinary Theology.

The title 'Father of English Congregationalism' is attributed to Robert Brown by Kennett (2004, p.89). Brown (1582) published a ground-breaking book, '*Reformation without tarying for anie'* in which he set out certain congregational principles, evidence of which still exist.

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[27] Note the dated gender reference

His tenets include upholding the role of each church member rather than that of Church leaders which he derives from a 'priesthood of all believers' (1 Peter 2:9). Luther expounds this belief in his paper, *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520):

> How then if they are forced to admit that we are all equally priests, as many of us as are baptized, and by this way we truly are; while to them is committed only the Ministry (*ministerium*) and consented to by us (*nostro consensu*)? If they recognize this they would know that they have no right to exercise power over us (*ius imperii*, in what has not been committed to them) except insofar as we may have granted it to them, for thus it says in 1 Peter 2, *'You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a priestly kingdom'*. In this way we are all priests, as many of us as are Christians. There are indeed priests whom we call ministers. They are chosen from among us, and who do everything in our name. That is a priesthood which is nothing else than the Ministry. Thus 1 Corinthians 4:1: 'No one should regard us as anything else than ministers of Christ and dispensers of the mysteries of God (Luther, 1520, Trans. Steinhaeuser 2017). (Italics in the original)

Here, Luther identifies baptism as the means of entry into a priesthood of all believers, thereby granting baptism significance in terms of church membership. He also identifies this universal priesthood with the authority and autonomy of the gathered church in that no one has the right to exercise power over the local church. This autonomy to determine who may administer and who may receive baptism is significant because, by applying this model for church polity, he claims, it reflects that of the New Testament Churches where the whole church (the local church) is the ultimate authority (Kennett 2004, p.89).

The role of Browne as 'the first of English writers [who] sets forth the Anabaptist doctrine that the civil ruler has no control over the spiritual affairs of the Church; that Church and state are separate realms' is identified by Walker (1893, p.12). Browne's insistence on the formation of individual 'gathered' churches and the self-government of the separatist churches results in the autonomy of each church and the self-sufficiency of the Church Meeting. Each church is fully competent to make all relevant decisions regarding its conduct including the administration of baptism.

The Church Meeting becomes the decision-making body concerning the conduct of all matters of ecclesiology including the mode, timing and availability of baptism.

The Commonwealth Period draws heavily on Congregational principles forming the political, social and theological thinking of the time but the name 'Congregational' is not used before the 1640s. The Savoy Declaration of 1658 stated that each gathered church has been given 'all that Power and Authority … needful … to observe … Order in Worship and Discipline … so that they receive it from [Christ] (Kennett 2004, p.94). The Savoy Declaration, in connection with baptism, states that 'dipping is not necessary'; infants shall be baptized; the act shall not be salvific in nature and that the Sacrament shall be administered 'but once to any person'. These statements will be developed individually as they arise from the interviews.

Following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, a series of Acts of Parliament were passed in 1662 enforcing the authority of the established Church and forbidding independent congregational worship. That year, over 2,000 dissenting Ministers were ejected from their parishes for refusing to conduct worship according to the *Book of Common Prayer* and to accept episcopacy. 'For a generation after this Great Ejectment, Nonconformity was outlawed' (Winterslow and Dale 1907). This led to the formation of many Congregational churches around Ministers who had been ejected, and some churches still trace their heritage back to that event. Congregationalism grew but its baptismal practices remained those of the established Church.

The Evangelical Revival (1750-1815) saw many people attracted to Congregational worship. In 1806, attempts to form a denomination fail – independence, the autonomy of the church and the authority of the Church Meeting are too important. Peel (1931, p.31) describes these independent churches as a 'disjointed, disorganised aggregation, a mere rope of sand without connexion or continuity'. Far from the cohesive unity that Wootton and Cleaves describe, Congregational churches refute any form of hierarchical structure and are fiercely independent. By 1831, efforts are being made again to draw these 'independents' together.

> It is highly desirable and important to establish a Union of Congregational Churches throughout England and Wales, founded on the broadest recognition of their own distinctive principle, namely, the Scriptural right of every separate church to maintain perfect independence in the government and administration of its own particular affairs (Peel, A. 1931, p.63).

This fiercely defended independence, in tension with a desire for fellowship with other churches and ecumenism, is still present.

In 1832 the Congregational Union of England and Wales was formed. Briggs (2011, p.107) observes that the articles of faith and order represent 'a diluted Calvinism'. This very looseness is seen as a constructive feature by Cleaves (2009, p.74), upholding 'the principles of Congregationalism with its emphasis on the importance of the small unit of people meeting under the guidance of God to make their own decisions'. This looseness is observed in this project, both within churches and between churches relating to baptismal theologies and practices.

The Congregational Union of Churches reformed in 1966 when 'some of the more evangelical congregations left to form An Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches' (Briggs 2011, p.127). This remains as a small, separate group of churches who have increasingly adopted the practice of believers' baptism. The congregations who remained formed the CF. This led to tension between the CF and the Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches and, later, with the United Reformed Church (Argent 2013, p.509).

The United Reformed Church formed in 1972 merging 2,700 Congregational Churches with 300 Presbyterian Churches. The URC does not subscribe to the polity and principle of independency and introduced a Presbyterian hierarchy; nor do they insist on infant baptism. 'The principle of Unity took precedence over the correctness of Baptismal forms' (Argent 2013, p.486). He observed that (2013, p.494): 'The broad coalition of theological views which had united under the name of Congregational was dissolved'.

Cleaves (1977, p.10) takes a more positive view, that the 'small minority, resisting what had become a popular movement', retaining the Congregational Way, would 'reconstitute Congregationalism under the name of the Congregational Federation'. The churches involved in this study are all affiliated to the CF which does not subscribe to the concept of hierarchy. Hansard recorded in 1972, that Tony Benn MP commented, 'Congregationalism is synonymous with the right of people to decide for themselves how they will worship God, organise their affairs and run their affairs'.[28]

4.2 The Congregational Federation

The CF emerges as a coalition of churches; 'division [from the URC] seemed better than compromise', with the gathered church representing essential Christian churchmanship (Argent 2013, p.477).[29]

The Federation exists to 'bring together independent free churches for mutual support and the advancement of the Christian faith' (CF Mission Statement). By 2018, the Federation has reduced in size to 248 churches and 6,282 members. It maintains a central Roll of Accredited Ministers who, having undergone acceptable training, usually at least to Foundation Degree level, are considered for Accreditation. At the Annual Assembly of the Federation each year, the new Ministers are presented with an Accreditation Bible which contains an inscription stating:

> The Congregational Federation upholds the three distinguishing features of Congregationalism: It is Trinitarian in doctrine. It maintains the validity of inclusive baptism, welcoming both infant and adult to baptism. It maintains the full competence of the Church Members' Meeting to determine all matters of faith and order for the local church.

These major tenets of the Federation are so important that they are impressed on all newly accredited Ministers in the gift of this special Bible.

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[28] For the debate on the Report stage of the URC Bill see Hansard (21 June 1972)
[29] Note the dated gender reference in the original

This represents a surprising action for an organisation which emphasises freedom of belief and engagement. The penetration or otherwise of the baptismal aspect of these three precepts is tested in this project.

4.3   *Covenantal relationship*

Unstated in this inscription is that Federation churches are gathered churches entering into a covenantal relationship within the fellowship. Damp (2010, p.141) states that: 'The covenant is central to our faith, but the essence of our Congregationalism must surely be the distinctive practice of our way – the Church Meeting'. Each Federation church has its own Trust Deeds. Many state that this is a Covenant made between the founders of the church, with each other and with God. The Trust Deeds specify the purpose of the church, how and when it will meet, who it may call as its Minister and give directions regarding communion, baptism and church membership. These directions are specific to that church alone and will not have been imposed by the Federation or any other body. The Deeds may be changed by a Special Church Meeting, but church members should be aware of their existence and their contents. The autonomy by which each church is empowered and expected to maintain its individuality is both a strength and a weakness. It allows 'Free association of churches each of which, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is free to order its own life' but insists that 'The local church must always retain this final authority and the onerous responsibility which goes with it' (Cleaves, R.W. 1977, p.15).

However, Osborn (1953, p.124) questions whether congregationalism can adequately express the ecumenical nature of the Church. Kennett (2004, p.85) questions whether autonomy is really biblical, stating that it is not quintessentially Congregational; it is 'strangely absent from the New Testament church and from early Congregationalism'.

This pillar of Congregationalism is challenged by Rushdoony (1998) who considers: 'The logic of autonomy is that every man becomes his own God and universe and no one else has the right to judge him'. [30] The dynamic between autonomy and ecumenism is identified by Wood who suggests that:

> Congregationalism seeks to conclude the quest for community by the achievement of fellowship rather than by use of power … but that the principle of fellowship has been so often neglected in Congregationalism in the over-emphasis of local autonomy (Wood 2006, pp.77–78).

Each church is able, therefore, to decide its own policy and practice in matters of baptism, in agreement with Federation's tenets or otherwise without risk of censure. The autonomy of each individual church within the Federation is strongly protected even to the point of separation. It has been stated, anecdotally, that 'Churches are dying to be independent'.

4.4   The Autonomy of the Church Meeting

The local Church Meeting is fundamental to the life of each Congregational church. 'Christ's will is made known through the Spirit's guidance of the local church meeting' (Argent 2013, p.473). Damp (2010, p.141) asserts that 'the Church Meeting is our expression of the Covenant relationship we enjoy with Christ … Congregationalism is essentially Spirit led'. He continues: 'The Church Meeting is not a debating society where everyone presses their own opinion – but it is rather a vehicle for the mind and will of Christ'. (Damp 2010, p.141).

Cleaves (1977, p.96) considers that 'In our society there is nothing comparable with the Church Meeting. It is not a business meeting … it is not a committee … it truly is a gathered company of men seeking God's will for them'. [31]

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[30] Note the dated gender reference
[31] Note the dated gender reference

The Church Meeting does not look for votes or majorities but rather it seeks a consensus of minds under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This ideal is not infrequently lost when no consensus is found, in which case, decisions are usually deferred, sometimes to the detriment of the church and empowering strong and determined individuals. Despite what Cleaves and Damp state, it is equally true that the Church Meeting is also of importance in decision-making in churches of other traditions, for example, Baptist Churches. It is not unique to the Congregational Way.

The Church Meeting, as the sole arbiter of the actions of the church, has considerable decision-making authority, including over matters of baptism, an aspect that has importance later in this project.

4.5   The polity of Congregational churches

The way in which Congregational churches operate is unusual, in the ways already described and in terms of the freedoms claimed; from tradition; from 'hierarchy'; and from state intervention. Other freedoms relate to the responsibilities of believers; relationships with other churches; and the freedom to be creative, innovative and constantly reforming under the Spirit (Kennett 2004, pp.85–86).

These freedoms present interesting challenges in relation to Cameron's 'Four Voices of Theology: Normative, Formal, Espoused and Operant Theology. (Cameron et al. 2010a, p.54). (See page 27 for the inter-relationships) Normative Theology poses a singular challenge to the Congregational Way. Congregational freedom accepts Scripture but is not bound by creeds, traditions and liturgy. Normative Theologies are not enforced or enforceable within Congregational churches. Scripture is generally accepted as the yardstick against which the beliefs of the ordinary theologians have been developed. Similarly, Congregationalism is not bound by the Formal Theology of academia. Espoused and Operant Theologies are found in the utterances of the ordinary theologian as well as in the preaching and work of 'non-ordinary' members such as ministers.

4.6 The impact of The Congregational Way on baptism

Decisions about baptism in Federation churches involve the appropriateness of infant baptism, adult baptism and the method of baptism. There are churches within this study where baptisms are very rare, and the questions of age and mode are hypothetical. Another church will only accept believers' baptisms and yet others will conduct baptisms only for infants. Finally, there are churches that will undertake baptisms at any age but only by sprinkling or pouring. This range of acceptability of baptisms in this small sample of churches demonstrates a lack of concurrence among the churches of the Federation. The Federation itself, as is shown by the bookplate in the Accreditation Bibles, encourages inclusivity of baptism at all ages but this is shown not to be accepted by all the churches in this survey.

It may be asked where the decisions regarding baptism reside. The answer is that these and all other decisions are properly made by the Church Meeting. In some churches, however, these decisions are delegated to the Minister, or appropriated by them. Hence, it may realistically be said that any age for baptism and any mode of baptism may be found within the churches of the Federation. All the churches in the study have Trust Deeds peculiar to that church that make specific reference to baptism but the ordinary theologians in the study appear not to be aware of or concerned about these specifications. In this study, these decisions are examined and compared to the Espoused and Operant Ordinary beliefs articulated by the ordinary theologians who will also speak about their own personal beliefs.

4.7 Theological poverty in Congregational churches?

Argent (2013, p.522) observes that the numerical decline in membership of Congregational churches leads to a lack of serious theological reflection within the churches of the CF. He states that the main theological influence in the Federation stems from its Training Board (now the CIPT) and claims that it is committed to producing a 'learned ministry' and leads to 'theological illiteracy' among church members.

Sell (2006, p.165) reflects that local churches are no longer the 'nursery of theologians' that they ought to be. This clashes with an aspiration from Schwobel (2005, p.16) who believes that congregations should be encouraged and enabled to develop their own doctrinal reflections from engagement with the Bible. Astley's view (2014, p.187) is that 'If the Church ignores its own ordinary theology it may be cutting itself off from a rich source of religious and moral insights'. This study explores the possibility of theological poverty in some of the churches of the CF in greater depth.

Summary of Section 1

In this part of the thesis, 'The Congregational Way', its development and the basic principles of Congregationalism and the CF are described. The peculiarities of the Federation are explained, especially the three distinguishing features, including baptism, that are important enough to be impressed on newly accredited Ministers through the gift of their Accreditation Bible.

The covenant relationships within the CF are shown, especially the role of Trust Deeds where they are applicable to baptism for each individual church. The individuality and independency of each church is explored, again as it influences baptism, as is the autonomy of the Members' Church Meeting, entitling them to define the role and practice of baptism in their own church. The polity of Congregational churches is clarified together with the influence that this will have through the paucity of the Normative and Formal voices in Congregationalism.

These three core chapters have provided the bases on which I have built this research. Theology, ordinary theology and theological poverty have been explored in Chapter 1, baptismal theology and praxis an Chapter 2 and Congregationalism and the CF in particular in Chapter 3. I will now use these foundational chapters to give meaning to the Empirical Section that follows.

SECTION 2: Empirical Material

Chapter 5: Methodology and method

The three previous core chapters have provided an insight into the theological, baptismal, and Congregational foundations on which this thesis relies. This section describes how the data used in this study were collected and analysed. The methodology and method of data collection are presented first, and this is followed by a thematic reporting of the results. The methods used in this study are not unfamiliar in qualitative analysis but there are some unusual aspects for consideration. For example, as the researcher I am both an 'insider' in that I am a Congregational Minister and a past president of the CF. However, I am an 'outsider' because I am not a member of any of the sample churches and this aspect of the work is reflected upon in this Section. Further, the mixed method of coding I use may be unusual in that I have sorted the material using a computer but analysed it in more detail manually to achieve maximum specificity and awareness of the material.

My choice of the three main topics for the results chapters emerges from the data. There are many more themes and utterances that I could have chosen to use but it was necessary to be selective. The three topics relate to infant baptism, adult baptism and the mode or method of baptism. The first two come from the bookplate already described and the third develops from the question of believers' baptism raised by the contributors.

An investigation of this nature falls within the discipline of Practical Theology and must employ an empirical and a theological perspective, be rooted in the actual experiences of people, and address the situation of the Church and society within a hermeneutical framework (Christie 2005, p.21). Within the remit of Practical Theology, Neiman (2014, p.135) is of the opinion that 'If this is how faithful people assemble, then practical theologians naturally have great interest in the field that attends directly to such gatherings'. It is relevant to note that: 'Congregations remain intentional, potent, formative channels through which significant religious work is done, from participating to belonging, and from orienting to interpreting to norming' (Neiman 2014, p.135).

Heitink (1999, p.221) requires that those who undertake studies into Practical Theology must take empirical data seriously and:

> If Practical Theology really wants to be theology, it cannot be content with only an empirical approach, as is common with religious studies. It must also deal with the normative claims embedded in the Christian faith tradition … an empirically orientated Practical Theology (Heitink 1999, p.221).

ap Siôn is concerned that: 'Whichever methodology is employed in the study of ordinary theology, there is often a common concern that the research is relevant' (ap Siôn 2013, p.147). Here, ap Siôn's reference is a development of Christie and Astley's statement, emphasising the relevance of studying Ordinary Theology.

> From a pragmatic perspective, those who are engaged in Christian communication, pastoral care and worship need to know about the beliefs of those in their care, and their patterns and modes of thinking and believing. They need, therefore, to *listen* to them. Listening, of course, is routinely acknowledged (in theory at least) as a mark of respect and a deeply pastoral act. We would add, however, that our listening should include a dimension of *theological listening* that acknowledges that people's often halting, unsystematic and poorly-expressed words about their faith constitute a form of theology (Christie and Astley 2009, p.178). (Italics in the original)

This study employs a qualitative research approach using fieldwork, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups to gather the data. The coding and thematic analysis of the data uses both computerised and manual resources allowing the data to inform the emergence of the outcomes. The study combines elements of both a descriptive-exploratory and a hypothesis-testing exercise.

The thesis concentrates on the beliefs, practices and behaviours of members of congregations viewed through the lens of Ordinary Theology and demonstrated through baptismal values. It also looks for evidence of theological poverty within the utterances and articulations of some ordinary theologians. My hypothesis is that there is a richness of ordinary theological belief regarding baptism that goes otherwise unnoticed in our churches.

This study allows the hypothesis to emerge from the data rather than being imposed upon it by myself as the researcher (Swinton and Mowat 2006) and tests it in a non-directional way as described by Cresswell and Cresswell (2014a). It examines the theologies and beliefs relating to baptism, both describing and critiquing the articulated convictions of ordinary theologians.

The interviews in this study form 'ordinary theological research' which Hopewell (2006, p.90) describes as 'an essentially theological discussion with parishioners not given to that sort of talk'. The study contributors are, by definition, ordinary theologians who may not be used to 'that sort of talk'. It is necessary, in this study, to explore and, in places, to adopt the vocabulary of the contributors in order to appreciate fully the theology and beliefs that are being articulated. Hopewell (2006, p.91) further offers the view that: 'So accustomed are members [of congregations] to being told what they *should* believe that to be asked what they in fact *do* believe may prompt unprecedented communication'. (Italics in the original)

Considering the nature of the data collected, the term 'thick' is used by Geertz and Darnton (1973, p.28) to describe a multi-dimensional, nuanced and complex description of a situation within its context. 'The body of thick-description' aims to 'draw large conclusions from small'. However, in this study, the term 'rich data' is preferred as it contrasts against the concept of theological 'poverty' that is being explored. Rich data describes the concept that qualitative data and their representation in text form should reveal the complexities and the richness of the material being studied.

It is from the richness of the research data that credibility emerges with its ability to resonate with others who have undergone similar experiences. It must be able to 'capture the essence of a phenomenon in a way that communicates it in all its fullness – rich, vivid and faithful', and as a 'thick, rich and recognisable description of the subject matter' (Swinton and Mowat 2006, pp.122–123). The freedom of the interview format allows varied and distinctive material to emerge, and the data uncovered in this study is rich in that the contributors are encouraged to provide answers in depth that were personally considered and firmly held.

Research into Ordinary Theology with the help of contributors who have not undergone scholastic theological training produces its own particular problems. It may be claimed that asking contributors who have not undergone such training to comment on what are sometimes complex theological issues, such as regeneration for example, may be expecting them to answer questions that they have never consciously considered before. This situation is described by Astley (2002b, p.103) who is thinking about people being asked a religious question that they have never articulated previously:

> [This] often evokes a deep, but hitherto unarticulated conviction that they *already* hold, rather than some superficial non-answer that masquerades as an answer. Many people will find themselves, whether in public discussion or private reflection, saying in effect, 'Now that I think about it, I realize that I do believe *a* and *b*, and I don't believe *c* and *d*' (Astley 2002b, p.103). (Italics in the original)

One objection to the presence of such 'deep convictions' is that answers to such questions are no more than the spontaneous formation of religious ideas. Ordinary theologians may never have structured or articulated their beliefs on certain subjects, but this does not compellingly imply that their answers are formulated *de novo* without a considered basis, reasoned thought or reflection. As this study shows, participants *do* hold complicated, contemplated and critiqued beliefs that they have never been invited to share. Bailey supports this contention:

> The first principle … was to ask general questions which would enable such apparently long-standing beliefs to be expressed, provided that they were both long-standing and available to consciousness. Respondents commented that: 'no one has ever asked me for my views before' (Bailey 1997, p.52).

Kate Hunt (2003), speaking about her research conversations, reports that interviews frequently force people to look at their own lives in such a way that they may discover what they actually hold as their underlying beliefs.

However, she states that 'The problem seems to be that people have no language with which to describe their experiences of the sacred or their beliefs' (2003, p.163). This question of the lack of a language with which to express theological ideas will be returned to frequently in this thesis. In turn, Christie (2005, p.45) reports that there would be an evolution of thought with beliefs being modified or changed during some of her interviews. This accords with my findings in this study that there is a linguistic discord between the vernacular language that ordinary theologians use and the systematic theological words that professional theologians adopt.

This matter is essential to the findings of this study because I will seek to demonstrate that the vernacular language with which the ordinary theologians describe the beliefs that they hold is fundamentally different from the professional language with which systematic theologians describe their theologies. The question then is whether this is simply a linguistic matter where different words are used to describe the same things or whether the words are being used to describe completely different entities. For example, an ordinary theologian might speak of being saved through baptism where the systematic theologian might write of the salvific nature of baptism as being 'rooted in the redemptive action of God in Christ' (Beasley-Murray 1962, p.214). Both are describing the same events but in completely different terms.

Alternatively, are the ordinary theologians describing different concepts to the theological statements of the professional theologian? Taking the concept of salvation further, an ordinary theologian might hold the belief that salvation means being saved from your sins in order to go to heaven. In contrast, a systematic theologian might express the theology that salvation involves the 'twofold transformation of ourselves and the world' (Borg 2011, p.54). The word used is the same, but the beliefs and the theologies are completely different. I accept that this is a generalisation and simplification, but it serves the purpose for the point I am making. Words may be vernacular or professional: they may describe similar things or completely different entities. The very words 'theology' and 'belief' are used freely in this thesis, but a relatively simple distinction is given in an online dictionary. (Oxford Online)

A belief is a religious conviction. Theology concerns religious beliefs and theory when systematically developed. I have accepted these definitions because it is beliefs that ordinary theologians hold and live by, while theology necessitates systematic development. Beliefs and theologies may be describing the same thing in different words or may be describing different things. I look to the context to provide the distinction.

In the previous description of the four voices of theology, note is taken of the difference within a group (or within an individual) between the Espoused and Operant Theologies. Gareth Moore (1989, p.131) makes the point that 'religious language, like all language, gets its meaning from being embedded in what people do'. In other words, the beliefs that people hold are demonstrated more fully by examination of their individual personal beliefs than by the Espoused Theology of the group (their church). This is seen particularly where contributors comment with phrases like, 'At this church, [baptism] is done by sprinkling but my children were baptized by pouring. The ultimate is going through the waters'. (Ch1.AD) The Espoused Theology of the church relating to the method of baptism is of sprinkling, the person's family experience is one of pouring, but the contributor's own personal beliefs move towards immersion. To understand these deeper and richer beliefs it is necessary to explore the individual's own personal beliefs. The challenge is to identify the true meanings of the contributor's beliefs and record them faithfully, identifying the often implicit, theological ideas that shape their particular articulations and practices.

5.1   Contextualising the researcher and the contributors

An understanding of the researcher's positionality is an integral element of the research process. Jafar (2018, p.1) observes that, without contextualising the researcher in their research environment: 'often the meaning of any research is lost … it defines the boundaries within which the research was produced'. It is recognised that the researcher's own subjectivity will come to bear on this and every other research project and of their findings. 'Our own biases shape the research process' (Bourke 2014, p.1).

Indeed, it is through my own lens as a longstanding Free Church member and Minister that I will be considering, conversing with, and recording the articulations of my contributors.

Astley (2002, p.151) identifies the importance of the reciprocity of understanding that needs to be achieved between researchers and their contributors. Initially, he identifies that it is the contexts and perspectives with which researchers approach their work that allows 'our biases or legitimate prejudices' to be acceptable'. Here he is building on the work of Gadamer (1982) and states that our understanding of our Christian past and its classic texts through a process of socialisation is a condition of understanding. He also builds on the work of Thiselton who speaks of 'horizons of expectation' that 'represents our practical behavioural and pre-conceptual background'. Our preliminary understandings are conditioned by our context, our praxis, our religious praxis and the theological assumptions within the tradition in which we live, think and act (Thiselton 1992, pp.44–45). The same process must be expected and respected within the contributors. Their life experiences in their socio-cultural and ecclesial contexts inform, in part, their beliefs and actions and must be accommodated in the same way as must those of the researcher. They are also the product of their contexts and practices in their own lives and their ecclesial lives. The research is a conversation, not just about the baptismal beliefs of the contributors, seen in the situation of their 'horizons', but also received and recorded against my contexts, praxes and the situation of my tradition. 'The process of understanding another's theology will involve people in a new self-awareness of their own' (Astley 2002b, p.152). He continues that ordinary theology represents a fusion of conversations of three outlooks: the participants, the texts and traditions of the Church, and your own as researcher.

5.2   Here I stand

I am a white, middle-class, older English male. Initially, I trained in hospital administration but rapidly transferred to medicine as my life career.

Following training, I worked as a General Practitioner for over 30 years, firstly as a partner and then forming my own practice as senior partner. I also became a tutor for GPs-in-training and worked as an Area Sub-Dean for the University of London. I was elected Vice-Chair of Council for the Royal College of General Practitioners and was awarded the Fellowship of the College by Assessment which is a rare honour.

Alongside my work as a General Practitioner, I worked as a Consultant in the Accident and Emergency Department at my local hospital and established their first Out of Hours Unit. This appointment carried with it the position of Senior Lecturer at Barts and the Royal London Hospitals.

Medical training and teaching medicine helped form my science-based view on life. Medicine is, in many ways, taught as an exact science with fixed and often unquestionable and unquestioned facts to be learned. Textbooks and the Professors are taken as incontestable except by those entering fields of research. The research that is undertaken is frequently quantitative. I am a scientist and I view Christianity and science as fully compatible. However, the tendency that I have from medicine to regard answers as possessing a clarity and precision may persuade me to introduce a certainty into the responses that I receive which my contributors may not have intended.

I took early retirement from medicine on health grounds and made the move into theological training, initially with Spurgeons College (Baptist). This necessitated a change of stance that has not always been easy. It is against a long career in science that I find myself working in a humanity subject. I was now working in an area where opinions and arguments are expected and anticipated. This experience must colour the approach I bring to qualitative, theological research where arguments are made and defended. I feel that, in some ways, this makes me react and think more like an ordinary theologian than a systematic theologian. I am hesitant, tentative, and reluctant to voice my opinions and beliefs too strongly. However, regarding the data with which I am now working, it may give me more confidence in the rightness of the data than may be entirely appropriate.

My ecclesial history is that I was christened as a baby and was brought up as an Anglican. After a break in church attendance during university studies and my early career in medicine, I became a Baptist church member for some thirty years including a time as Church Secretary and as a Deacon. This period of time has been influential in the formation of my Christian beliefs, especially relating to baptism. During this time, I was baptized by immersion and assisted with the baptism of others.

As a result of these experiences, it has required a conscious effort on my part to be aware of and to attempt to minimise any bias I have in favour of believers' baptism as I conduct and report this study.

In 2008 I joined a Congregational Church which is affiliated to the CF and commenced a training course with the CIPT, transferring some credits from Spurgeons College. This course led to an Honours Degree in Practical Theology. For me, the most influential modules in the course involved a research project in Ordinary Theology, and the study of the intertestamental years. The former experience contributed to my decision to pursue the construct of Ordinary Theology and undertake research to doctoral level, examining an aspect of Church life from the position of ordinary theologians.

In 2010, I was ordained into Ministry as Assistant Minister at my local church where I served for seven years, retiring in 2017. I have since served as a peripatetic Minister in Congregational, Baptist, Methodist and other Church traditions.

As an Anglican I had witnessed infant baptism; as a Baptist, it was believers' baptism and as a Congregational Minister, it was a blend of the two. Therefore, my own beliefs have been formed in a variety of Christian traditions and are a very personal collection, but it must be accepted that Baptist and Congregational influences are strong. I have personally conducted and assisted with several believers' baptisms bringing that influence to bear on my approach to this research. I have also conducted several infant dedications but never an infant baptism and this must influence my thoughts and beliefs. My contributors bring to the interviews their own preconceptions and experiences about baptisms, some in the distant past and vague, and others more recent and more easily remembered.

The interviews involve the dialogue between the God-talk of the contributors and the mindset that I bring to the event. Both are equally important and equally valid. 'We simply have to take others as seriously as we take ourselves' (Pattison, G. 1998, p.43).

As previously described by Astley, this 'conversation' exemplifies the interplay that is taking place in this research between my contributors and their baptismal beliefs, and my beliefs, born from my tradition, context, experience, and praxis. If I am to understand fully the contributions I receive, not only must I attempt to place myself in the situation of each ordinary theologian in conversation, but I must go further. I must attempt to see the articulations through the lens of my own baptismal experiences, beliefs and praxes. I have been both christened and baptized. These very words speak of my understanding of the words 'christened' and 'baptized' and carry the potential for an influenced perception of the responses I receive from the contributors. This use of these words is considered later in this thesis in Chapter 6. My appreciation and my reflexivity on these situations is important to the research.

In 2015 I was elected President of the Congregational Federation of Churches which involved a three-year term of office as President Elect, President and Past President. My role was partly to represent the Federation officially at events, but mainly to visit churches to offer encouragement and support. It also involved making the voices of the churches heard in Council and other committees of the Federation and beyond. This position enabled me to travel across the countries of the United Kingdom, visiting many churches. It was during my presidency and travels to churches that I started to discuss baptismal theology with people I met at national and regional Assemblies, during visits to churches, and at youth and other gatherings. This was, in part, driven by my concern about the importance given by the Federation to baptism over and above other theological matters. By the time I started collecting the data for this study, my time as President had ended but it may be considered that I had been in a position of influence although this is not the intention of the Presidency.

The role of President required me to preside at the Annual National Assembly. During the Assembly, every newly accrediting Minister of the CF was presented with an Accreditation Bible bearing a book plate (as already noted on page 16) that identified the three distinguishing features of Congregationalism as:

It is Trinitarian in doctrine.

It maintains the validity of inclusive baptism

welcoming both infant and adult to baptism.

It maintains the full competence of the Church Members Meeting

to determine all matters of faith and order for the local Church.

This concentration on baptism over all other aspects of church theology and life caused me to start enquiring at the churches I visited about their attitudes to baptism and its importance. When I arranged to visit the six churches for the research, I was not introduced to the contributors as a Past President, but rather as a friend of the Minister, but it is inevitable that some of the contributors may have been aware of my history and been influenced by this situation. This brings into question the role of being an insider or an outsider in my relationship with the contributors.

One of the few modern Congregational authors notes that: 'We who are insiders don't always notice how things are heard by outsiders … Those of us who are insiders don't always notice when our terminology *creates* outsiders' (Adams, G. 2022, p.5). (Italics in the original)

To an extent I could be seen as an insider by my contributors – a fellow Christian, a Congregationalist and a co-worker in the research. However, I could also be seen as an outsider – someone from outside the particular church concerned, someone from the Federation, or someone who might challenge the contributor's beliefs and those of their church. I made every effort to set the contributors at their ease and took the pace of the interviews from the participants, aiming to neutralise any insider/outsider influence, but acknowledging that I felt more of an outsider in the church settings involved.

Conducting the majority of the interviews by telephone adds an additional degree of separation from those positions but it is possible that there may have been some perception of 'importance' as I may have been seen as someone 'from the Federation'. This unintentional influence does not appear to be significant in the interviews or the face-to-face focus groups, but its possibility must be acknowledged. Listening with care assists with avoiding any inadvertent bias from my position.

Takacs (2003, p.29) questions how ones positionality biases ones epistemology concluding that 'Only by listening to others can I become aware of the conceptual shackles imposed by my own identity and experiences'. Listening carefully and theologically is central to this research and I attempt to consider every stage of this project reflexively.

5.3   Managing the process

This section describes the process by which the data were collected, assembled, sorted, transcribed and analysed. Initially, I describe and explore the articulated nature of the theologies and beliefs of ordinary theologians relating to baptism within the sample churches. I then move on to test whether there is a measure of theological poverty demonstrated by the contributors or whether there is evidence of another phenomenon in play.

The interviews are mainly but not exclusively conducted by telephone. The use and problems of telephone interviews are explored by Gupta (2014). He identifies the loss of body-language, facial expressions and other non-verbal communications as drawbacks but is of the opinion that the advantages include the fact that the interviewer has the opportunity to concentrate on the voice, the answers and the convictions that the interviewee's answers carry. The benefits in terms of time, travel and other costs are considerable and are deemed to outweigh the potential losses of non-verbal communications in this project. There is no detectable significant difference in the conduct of the interviews, the willingness of the contributors to take part or the outcomes between those conducted in person or by telephone.

Any loss of in-person contact in the initial interviews is mitigated by personally conducted focus groups that are held after the completion of the personal interviews for a church.

The focus groups involve face-to-face contact and are conducted at the relevant churches. The use of focus groups is described by Putchta and Potter (2004) who praise such groups for their relaxed informality, permitting spontaneous expressions of opinion: 'Focus groups allow people to give their views in their own ways and in their own words' (2004, p.47). As Barbour (2018, p.87) observes, 'Focus groups are well placed to explore people's perspectives or issues to which they have previously given little thought'. In doing so they produce 'Lively and rich data as contributors reformulate their views, engage in debate and express and explore shared cultural understanding' (2018, p.113). However, focus groups are not without their limitations as some contributors may dominate the discussions constraining the more hesitant members of the group. The responses are not independent of each other which may restrict the generalisability of the results and the group may try to achieve answers that are seen to be desirable in order to achieve group consensus. In this study, the benefits in terms of active contribution and debate in the groups, augmenting the data from the personal interviews, is considerable and useful articulations are collected.

The focus group for a particular church takes place after the interviews for that church are complete. In this way, the individual interviews provide the personal aspect of the beliefs articulated and the focus groups develop that debate. About two weeks is allowed between interviews and focus groups to permit thought, discussion, and reflection before the meeting of the group takes place. In this study, the individuality of the interviews is supplemented by the interactivity of the focus groups. With all contributors present, but without the church's minister attending, the considered areas of interest are debated, developing the individual beliefs. In this way, the focus groups serve as an extension of the individual interviews. The discussions that take place in the focus groups are based on the same interview schedule prompts, and extend and develop the articulations, both of the individual members and with them working together as a group. The effect is cumulative and beneficial to the study.

During my visits to churches and other church gatherings as President of the CF, I met with people from many different churches. This presented the opportunity for face-to-face fieldwork, asking people I met about their beliefs regarding baptism. These were informal and unstructured opportunities, often taking place in relaxed situations over coffee and at many locations and formed the primary conversations. The material obtained during my later visits to the churches was at greater depth and constituted the secondary discussions. The experience of gathering both the primary material from conversations and the secondary material from discussions forms the groundwork that inform my thinking, and the preparation of the interview schedule. However, valuable as it is, this material is not included in the formal data that is submitted in this study.

The first conversations were opportunities to talk with people I met casually, but it was important to be able to identify the churches which each of them regarded as their 'home church'. There are 170 churches represented in the primary conversations constituting 70% of the CF churches. (See Appendix 1 for details of the churches involved). This represents a broad spectrum of the churches and includes young people attending various events. Contacts were simply invited to respond to an open question: 'If I said the word 'baptism' to you, what would you think of?'. From that point, I encouraged free-ranging conversations to take place. Notes of the main comments made were recorded after each visit.

The second piece of fieldwork involved more detailed, but still informal, discussions at each of the 46 churches I visited personally - 18% of all CF churches. (See Appendix 2 for details of the churches involved). Additionally, I attended three larger gatherings including the Welsh Church Leaders' Assembly, a training weekend for students of CIPT, and the CF XTRA youth camp. This camp of about 30 older teenagers produced the most lively and challenging discussions and the camp leaders acted as responsible adults.

These visits and events produced some follow-up questions that arose spontaneously, and I allowed the contributors to lead the discussions. The discussions took place, again, in informal situations.

See Appendix 3 for details of the questions that emerged. There was no pressure on people to take part in the study and, at this stage, I was basically interested in churchgoers' views. I gave no indication of my own beliefs and was simply an enquiring observer. I wrote fieldwork notes after each visit, the purpose of which was to record the essence of the beliefs that people held. These notes were, of necessity, not verbatim, and an element of selectivity over what to record did occur. None of the people involved in these conversations and discussions were subsequently used as contributors in the main body of the study.

Some common themes emerge from the fieldwork, both the initial informal conversations and the more structured discussions. The significant points that were raised in conversations were noted and I identified 26 major themes from these articulations. I also noted which source churches the people attended that raised the themes in conversation (See Appendix 4). I searched for the presence of these same themes in the literature on baptism (See Appendix 5). The 26 major themes arising from the fieldwork conversations and discussions were used later to construct an interview schedule for the semi-structured interviews that I conducted as the main source of data.

I identified six English churches to be sample churches for the research and six interviewees were identified by their Ministers to be representatives from each of the churches, thus producing thirty-six individual interviews from contributors. Only English churches were used because of potential differences in the traditions of the Welsh and Scottish churches and because of geographical accessibility. In addition to the interviews, I arranged a focus group at each of the churches in order to encourage interaction between the interviewees, to develop discussions in more depth, and to allow theology to emerge. The Ministers of the six sample churches and two academic theologians from the CIPT were also recruited for interview and the same schedules were used in each case. This resulted in a total of 50 interviews for coding and analysis.

	Church 1	Church 2	Church 3	Church 4	Church 5	Church 6	Totals
Ordinary Theologians	6	6	6	6	6	6	36
Focus Groups	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Church Ministers	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Academic Theologians							2
	8	8	8	8	8	8	50

Table 1 showing the numbers of interviews conducted at each church

5.4   Identifying the thematic statements

At the same time that I conducted the conversations and discussions, I also reviewed some of the literature on baptism and baptismal theology. This literature is massive and only those items I judge to be the most relevant and useful are chosen for consideration, especially where they relate to baptism in the Congregational tradition. From the literature, certain thematic statements emerged as pertinent to the study, and these were marked for future reference (See Appendix 6). These themes from the literature are considered alongside the themes that arose from the fieldwork for comparison.

5.5   Comparing themes from discussions with those from literature

I compared the themes that emerged from the fieldwork with those that arose from the literature and noted that some themes only occurred in the discussions and not in the literature that I have accessed (See Appendix 7 for details). An example of this is the question of the appropriate age for baptism which was present in discussions but is relatively sparce in detail in the literature. Other themes appeared only in the literature, for example regarding baptismal regeneration (See Appendix 8 for details). I consider that some of the themes that appear only in the literature contain sufficiently important theological concerns that their absence in the discussions is significant and could constitute theological poverty.

As a result, I decided to supplement the interview schedule with some of these important theological topics. In this way, I am able to search for the theological themes in the interviews and consider, if they are absent, whether a measure of theological poverty is demonstrated. The interview schedule is constructed based on the themes that emerged from the fieldwork with the addition of selected theologies from the literature. This schedule of interview prompts contains 17 major headings, each with a series of secondary, exploratory questions (See Appendix 9). An interview schedule was prepared, piloted by a volunteer and considered fit for purpose.

5.6   Recruiting churches, Ministers, academics and ordinary theologians

I identified and approached the Ministers of six sample churches that are affiliated to the CF, considering this to be a sufficient number to provide adequate information while still making the quantity of data obtained manageable. They were chosen to be a cross-sectional sample of the churches of the CF but should not be taken as representative of all the churches. I know the Ministers of these churches personally and was able to approach them informally to request their participation. Each Minister took my request to the relevant Church Meeting for agreement. The Ministers of the identified churches are all white males aged between 30 and 75. The gender and ethnicity of the Ministers is dictated by the choice of the selected churches.

According to the CF Yearbook 2018, there are approximately equal numbers of male and female Ministers within the Federation. Hence, the gender demographic of the sample Ministers is not representative of the whole Federation. However, the vast majority of the Ministers in the Federation are white, demonstrating that the sample is representative on ethnicity.

Church 1 (Ch.1)	A large church in a market town with a Minister who has been in post for 20 years and was trained by CIPT. Holds MA, BD.	115 members 91 adherents 12 children
Church 2 (Ch.2)	A small chapel in a rural setting where the Minister has been in post for 40 years and was trained outside CIPT. Holds MTh.	27 members 18 adherents 30 children
Church 3 (Ch.3)	A large church in a market town with an experienced Minister who has been in post for five years and was trained by CIPT. Holds BA, MA	87 members 18 adherents 76 children
Church 4 (Ch.4)	A medium size Church in a small town with a Minister who has been in post for 10 years and was trained by CIPT. Holds BTh	29 members 30 adherents 28 children
Church 5 (Ch.5)	A small, rural chapel with a non-stipendiary Minister who has been in post for eight years and was trained by CIPT. Holds BA	23 members 8 adherents 4 children
Church 6 (Ch.6)	A large suburban church with a Minister who has been in post for five years and who was trained at an interdenominational evangelical college.	63 members 65 adherents 67 children

Table 2 showing a description of each of the sample churches

Information from the Congregational Federation Yearbook 2018

It should be noted that not all the Ministers selected for interview were trained internally within the tradition by the CIPT, but it is the theologies of the Ministers that is being investigated in this study, not their training. The eventual responses to the interview schedule that are received from the Ministers are taken to indicate a measure of the Espoused Theology of the church concerned, but I consider this to be a weak linkage.

The Ministers each received a Minister's invitation letter explaining the support I was seeking from them (See Appendix 10). They were also sent a Minister's agreement form which included a section where they consented to act as a gatekeeper for recruiting contributors from within their churches (See Appendix 11).

Further, they were sent a research participant information sheet as they would themselves be contributors to the study (See Appendix 12); and a participant's consent form to agree to take part (See Appendix 13). I also spoke to them personally on the telephone explaining the project and their involvement.

The Ministers were asked to act as gatekeepers for the selection of the contributors to this study. The role of gatekeeper is described by Cresswell and Cresswell (2014a, p.185) as 'individuals at the site who provide access to the site and allow or permit the research to be done'. They were each requested to identify six regular church attenders. The stipulations were that each contributor should fulfil the requirements for designation as 'ordinary theologians' and also be willing without coercion to give about an hour to the study to discuss their beliefs about baptism with a further hour for a focus group meeting.

Two academics from the CIPT were invited to participate in the study. The purpose of this input is to record the theologies of two tutors from the CIPT, and from their responses, to infer a measure of Formal Theology for the research. It should not be taken that the views expressed by these two academics are representative of the views of the CF or CIPT, but rather that they are acting as senior academics from within the Congregational tradition providing a potential source of Congregational Formal Theology. They are both serving Ministers at churches within the CF but are not at any of the six sample churches used. Both academics were provided with participant information sheets (Appendix 12) and participant consent forms (Appendix 13).

The Ministers identified the ordinary theologian contributors during November and December 2017. I sent an explanation of the study (See Appendix 12) and an invitation to each contributor to telephone me for any further explanations if they wished. They were each asked to sign and return a consent form (See Appendix 13).

The contributors were given information about the research objectives and methods and were assured that there were no right or wrong answers and that it was only their own answers and beliefs that were needed. Details of the interview schedule were not shared in advance in order to ensure that the comments that were offered were spontaneous and not pre-prepared. Care was taken in ordering the questions and the way in which they were asked in an attempt to avoid "leading" the contributors.

Opportunities for periods of silence were planned that could be used, if necessary, if it appeared that the contributor was thinking and considering their responses. The interview schedule did not serve as a rigid template so that the threads of areas raised spontaneously by contributors could be followed as they occurred in conversation. Every question was used in each interview but not necessarily in the same order, according to the flow and direction of the conversation. In this way, every interview is unique to the contributor concerned.

I arranged to visit each church to take part in a focus group about two weeks after the completion of their six interviews. These gatherings consisted of the six contributors from each church without the presence of the Minister, and I conducted them in person. The focus group meetings were completed in early summer of 2018.

5.7   *Conducting the interviews*

The ordinary theologian interviews were conducted, church by church, during the first half of 2018. The majority of the interviews took place by telephone (75%) while the rest were face-to-face interviews (25%). Each interview took between 55 and 75 minutes and the articulations were recorded on a small data voice recorder. Additionally, I took concurrent hand-written aide memoire notes to help me to clarify some of the less clear recorded comments.

There were some instances where the contributors asked for explanations about the vocabulary of the questions and there were many situations where beliefs and views were clarified and refined within an interview.

These developments offer evidence of the value of semi-structured interviews rather than a defined format of questions or completion of a questionnaire. Reflection and development within the interview are important in providing richness about the beliefs offered by the contributors. The slight hesitancy that occurs in some of the interviews demonstrates that contributors are exploring the questions within themselves, reflecting, thinking, critiquing, rationalising, and systematising their previously unarticulated beliefs. Some contributors expressed their surprise at the depth and range of the beliefs that they articulated and the explanations that they were offering. Time was left at the end of each interview for a period of more general discussion and pastoral care if necessary.

The contributors are aged between 20 and 90 years old and there are 14 males and 22 females taking part. This male/female ratio of 40%/60% is similar to the gender ratio usually found in UK churches given as 46%/54% across all Christian denominations (Government 2019). All the contributors are white, reflecting closely the ethnic mix of five of the six churches, but one of the churches is very mixed ethnically. As the Ministers are the gatekeepers, the choice of contributors rested with them. All the recorded interviews were transferred onto a password protected computer for safe storage prior to transcription.

Following completion of the ordinary theologians' interviews for each church, I visited the church to undertake a focus group meeting of the six contributors from that church. I consider that face-to-face attendance is essential in order to capture the essence of the meeting, and because the interactive nature of a focus group necessitates personal notetaking in addition to the data recorder. The Ministers did not attend the focus groups so that the ordinary theologians could speak freely. The time between the individual interviews and the focus group is to permit discussion between contributors before the focus group meeting, and to allow the contributors time to reflect on their own beliefs. The time interval allowed stimulation and opening up of deeper and previously unarticulated thoughts and beliefs. As Astley describes it, 'Being provoked to think about a subject for the first time often evokes a deep but hitherto unarticulated conviction that they already hold' (2002, p.103).

The focus group questions are the same as for the individual interviews but the discussions that ensued were allowed to diversify a little and, in this way, some lively debates developed. The articulations were recorded, and notes taken as before. The utterances of the people attending the focus groups are mainly taken collectively and not routinely attributed to any one speaker. In this way, the collective views of the group of ordinary theologians emerge and they are used in the results as indicative of the focus group as a whole rather than as separate entities. The exception to this is where there are important distinctive and personal differences, and these are noted for individual reference. The groups were valuable in stimulating debate, developing extemporaneous theologies, and clarifying reasons for the held beliefs. The final focus group took place in June 2018.

I arranged a telephone interview with each of the Ministers of the churches soon after the appropriate focus group meeting. Interviewing the Ministers enabled me to consider the extent to which the beliefs articulated by members of their congregations were in agreement with those expressed by their Ministers. They also provided a potential source of Espoused Theology for each church. The same interview schedule was used for the Ministers. I also arranged to undertake a telephone interview with the two academic theologians who served as a potential source of Formal Theology. These interviews were conducted after all the other interviews had been completed, again using the same process and schedule.

5.8   *Transcription and encoding*

The recorded articulations from each contributor were transcribed as soon as reasonably possible after the interview and were supplemented with aide-memoire notes taken contemporaneously in order to complement the recording if it became unclear. The quantity of data produced from fifty interviews and focus groups is considerable with each generating at least eight pages of typescript. Each interview lasted between 55 and 75 minutes and each took about a day to be transcribed.

Transcription is a vital step in the analysis of qualitative research data, but it is a subjective one. As Ochs describes it, 'transcription is a selective process reflecting theoretical goals and definitions' (1979, p.44). Duranti (2009)emphasises 'the selective nature of transcription' and proposes a complementary approach in which 'transcripts are evaluated with respect to what they can (or cannot) reveal within a particular domain of inquiry'. Transcription is selective, interpretive and subjective however hard the researcher may try to avoid these partialities. The degree to which these problems exist in a research paper will depend to some extent on the method of transcription used.

A commercial source of transcription services proposes three transcription methods in comprehensible and useful terms (Walker, S. 2020). Edited, Intelligent and Verbatim Transcription are described:

> Edited transcription is a form of transcribing that focuses on delivering quality documents. It involves the omission of some sentences or phrases that are deemed unnecessary, excessive or are grammatically incorrect … the essence and the whole idea of the text is still maintained.

> The crucial factor in intelligent transcription is the ability to determine the gist of the message and preserve it in the transcribed document. Accuracy is a crucial factor in intelligent transcriptions … this means that fillers expressed by the speaker, such as 'ums', 'om's, 'err', along with pauses in between discussions are omitted from the transcribed document.

> Verbatim transcription captures both the verbal and non-verbal components of the discussion being transcribed. This means that fillers, slangs, stammers, and all the details omitted in intelligent transcription is retained.

Given these definitions, I chose the Edited Transcription method for this project where an edited version of the articulations is used, omitting irrelevant fillers and sentences which did not contribute to the meaning of the story. In this way, the essence of the text is maintained without unnecessary detail. Given the freedom to talk about their experiences and beliefs about baptism, sometimes, personal information was given that was not relevant to the project. For example, one contributor described at length the making of her son's baptismal gown by his great-grandmother.

Other than the fact that a white gown is produced, the details of the needlework are not useful. Such irrelevant sentences are not included in the transcription. However, in some instances, where pauses for thought or emotion were important, these are noted. I consider this method of transcription to be more readable and more relevant for this study than Verbatim or Intelligent transcription.

I transcribed the articulations personally and by hand, allowing me to appreciate them in greater depth and to search for the underlying beliefs that they contain but this did create the potential for personal bias. I used the computer software programme Nvivo (Version 11 – 2015) to organise the unstructured text from the transcriptions into content-driven themes. The basic themes identified from the fieldwork and the literature review were used to compile the interview schedule and provided the initial sorting nodes. The individual utterances from the interviews were allocated to an Nvivo node manually. This allowed me, again, to consider each articulation in turn and to code each separately. Some contained material that was allocated to more than one node depending on the content of the utterances. Some articulations arose that did not fit to the existing nodes initially and new nodes were created to accommodate these articulations as necessary.

The nodes were sorted and printed by theme and sub-theme, firstly across all the churches, allowing the full range of utterances on a given node to be considered. They were also sorted and printed church by church to allow the beliefs held by each church to be examined. Finally, they were printed by contributor and focus group to allow review against the original transcriptions. Undertaking the coding personally served as a means of understanding details of the articulations in greater depth.

Although some studies use teams who code independently and then compare and discuss coding, this was impossible for this study, and I had to rely on my own coding skills and the system I chose to use. By allowing the fieldwork-derived themes and the articulations of the contributors to lead the coding, I was able to mitigate some of the difficulties of this process. Each theme and sub-theme were examined for the articulations they contained. An element of filtering was essential at this point and subjectivity is to be expected.

Unhelpful articulations that wandered too far from the point were disregarded, for example, 'I remember that the last christening I attended, they had a DJ at the party afterwards'. Relevant comments were marked for further consideration and coding.

The data were examined using the construct and lens of Ordinary Theology and the mother-tongue nature of the articulations was accepted. Contributors rarely used theological language but instead spoke in a vernacular style. For example, they did not offer 'My theology of baptism is …' but spoke of their beliefs – 'I believe that baptism is … because … '. I was looking for theologies expressed in contributors' own language and attempted to filter out opinions from theological beliefs. I also used the hypothesis of theological poverty, looking for the absence of theology and beliefs that Camroux (2016) expects to be evident. The volume of data was reduced manually and the valuable articulations that remain were extracted and reprinted by contributor, by church and by theme. The utterances from the ordinary theologians, the focus groups, the Ministers and the academics are all treated in the same way but kept separate for future analysis.

Throughout the data analysis, the task is of data reduction from the full recorded interview through to the material included within the final thesis. Information is examined, included if it is considered relevant, and then organised, or discarded. The analysis of qualitative data is, inevitably, a very personal matter for the researcher with McLeod (2003, p.84) claiming that 'no two researchers approach the task of qualitative data analysis in quite the same way'.

The process of coding enabled common themes, topics and phrases to be identified as well as contrasting beliefs to be recorded. The analysis of the coded themes was undertaken manually and, while this may have taken longer, it did allow a greater depth of understanding of the data to be achieved. The twin threads that emerge from the data address the judgement proposed by Camroux (2016) that churches are impoverished in their baptismal theology, and the hypothesis that there is evidence of another thread, one of beliefs that have, in the main, previously been unarticulated. These beliefs initially appear unsophisticated and uncomplicated but, as the analysis advanced, are revealed to be complex and, at times, convoluted.

It should be noted that I have adopted a very strong thematic approach in considering the information contained in this thesis. From the outset, the conversations and discussions in the fieldwork initiated the identification of themes that were important to my early ordinary theologians. This is developed by means of the documentation of baptismal themes through the centuries.

The interview schedule is thematic, a combination of fieldwork and literature inputs and so the articulations are encouraged in this way. The transcription and coding are thematic with the study articulations analysed into nodes. The results follow the themes discovered from the data. The contrast to this would have been to have encouraged my contributors to tell their personal stories about baptisms. This would have led to a study of different beliefs within each contributor and between contributors. In a few situations, where intra-personal and inter-personal areas of interest have been uncovered, these have been featured in this study. For example, where a contributor holds that believers' baptism is important but wishes sick babies to receive emergency baptism, the internal tension is noted. However, the emphasis, remains thematic and the study is on how the same beliefs are articulated by different people.

5.9   Theological reflection

The process of theological reflection follows from the data analysis and is undertaken as a two-stage activity. The first involves an examination of the beliefs presented relating to baptism. The second requires a process of theological construction. This necessitates identifying and relating what has been determined in the first process to the theology present in the various Christian traditions and, in this study, to Congregationalism in particular.

As this study is conducted using Ordinary Theology, the theological reflection is undertaken with this in mind. Christie (2005, p.42) notes that 'To count as theological activity, ordinary theology must critique as well as describe religious beliefs, thereby differentiating it from socio-religious research'.

Critiquing the findings about baptismal beliefs is, therefore, as important as describing the findings. It is important that the analysis and critique must be subjected to:

> The language and forms of argument that people use when speaking of God and religion … it must also embrace the evaluation of theological beliefs from the standpoint, and using the resources, of the normative theological criteria derived from Christian scripture, doctrine and ethics (Astley 2002b, p.104).

It is here that a linguistic, semantic, and vocabularic problem occurs. The ordinary theologian contributors to this study may not have been using words that are recognised as 'Normative', 'theological' or 'religious' but, nonetheless, they were using their version of God-talk through which they expressed their beliefs.

The search in the transcripts and in the process of coding, is to identify the religious linguistic, semantic or vernacular language that is spoken as the contributor's mother-tongue; not learned or imposed as a second, theological language by another. The question of mother-tongue expressions of beliefs is fundamental to this research. Testing the articulated beliefs of the contributors against Normative and Formal theological voices is described in the chapter on Theology and Ordinary Theology but its importance is noted again here.

In this study, the majority of the theological reflection is addressed, theme by theme, in the body of the results chapters where the articulations are compared to the Systematic Theology from the literature, theme by theme.

This chapter describes the methodology and methods used in this thesis. It has provided an account of the way in which the sample churches and contributors have been recruited, the data have been collected, and the articulations of the ordinary theologians have been analysed, allowing themes to arise from the articulations. The resulting material will now be used to consider the beliefs expressed, initially regarding infant baptism.

5.10 Ethical considerations

There are three general ethical principles when undertaking research; to avoid harm to participants; to obtain the specific consent of the participants including adequate information about the project; and to protect the confidentiality of the participants. In addition, in theological research, it is necessary to provide pastoral care to those taking part if needed. In this project, emotional memories are discussed, and I allow time and space if needed, offering to pause or discontinue the interview at any time. None of the contributors requested to withdraw from the research.

The project does not include contributions from people under the age of 18 or vulnerable adults. Contributors' explanation sheets, consent forms and documentation were prepared and tested on one pilot contributor (Appendices 12 and 13). The research is conducted under the guidance of the Research Ethics and Integrity process at York St John University and the application to the School Research Ethics Committee was approved on 6 November 2017. (171102_Davis_159097089_HRP)

Chapter 6: Infant baptism

In this chapter I make use of the data collected as described in Chapter 5 to explore five different facets of infant baptism, firstly whether infant baptism is the norm today in Congregational churches, and then whether there is a difference between a baptism and a christening. Following this, I will discuss whether there are any alternative services to baptism that are acceptable in its place and whether indiscriminate baptism is satisfactory. Finally, I will consider how a request for an emergency baptism should be received and addressed. In each case I will summarise briefly what has been written about that particular aspect of baptism before reporting the data from the contributors. Each aspect for consideration has emerged from the fieldwork that informed the interview schedule, and, additionally, from the literature about various features of baptism. There is, inevitably, a measure of personal selection regarding the inclusion of the aspects.

Where there is little interest from the ordinary theologians in offering their articulations on a facet or where they are opinions rather than beliefs, I chose to omit them. An example of this is where the contributors were asked about where they believed that the responsibility for making decisions regarding baptism rested. In the Congregational tradition, the decisions do not rest with the Minister but with the Church Meeting. There was little interest in this question and where an answer was provided, it revealed no beliefs or theologies. The inclusion of this area was not profitable.

6.1   Infant baptism: is this the modern Congregational norm?

> Throughout the history of Christianity, baptism has been a topic of strong debate both theologically and practically. There are two major sections of debate that are currently fought in Christian circles. The first is the question of for whom is baptism intended? The second question is how should one be baptized? (Taylor, 2013, p. 1)

The normal form of infant baptism in the mid twentieth century is described by Baillie:

> In all our churches except those which are in the Baptist tradition, the baptism of adults is the exception, and we normally think of baptism as a rite administered to infant children of Christian parents at an age when they are quite unconscious of it themselves (Baillie 1961, p.75).

This is the tradition that many Congregational church members have experienced in churches where baptisms are primarily for infants, and therefore, infant baptism will be explored first.

6.1.1 Infant baptism from the literature

The sources used in Chapter 3 on the history and theological basis of Baptism demonstrate a range of baptismal theologies including biblical evidence, Gospel accounts and Apostolic practice. These are summarised briefly here for convenience and to recapitulate them in the context of the responses received from my contributors.

Considering the biblical evidence in favour of infant baptism, Bridge and Phypers (1977, p.34) argue that it was 'obviously' practiced in the Bible, citing whole families being baptized, for example, Lydia[32] the Philippian jailer[33] and Stephanas[34]. In agreement, Beasley-Murray writes (1962, p.306): 'The Church has received a tradition from the Apostles to give baptism even to little children'. He continues:

> Even today the majority of the baptized in Europe have never heard any other opinion concerning the origin of the rite, and of those that do know that some dissent from it, most assume that such people must be sectaries outside the orthodox Church of Christ (Beasley-Murray 1962, p.306).

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[32] Acts 16:11-15
[33] Acts 16:29-33
[34] 1 Corinthians 1:16

However, an opposing view is taken by Barth (1948, p.41) that infant baptism is wrong. Beliefs about the appropriateness of infant baptism that have been articulated in this study are discussed below in this chapter. Beasley-Murray's quotation continues with a text that is of importance in this thesis:

> That, however, illustrates the cleavage that can exist between biblical scholarship and ecclesiastical belief and behaviour, for the rise of the critical study of the Bible has transformed the scene to such an extent that the upholders of the traditional view are now compelled to struggle hard in their endeavour to recall the Churches to the old paths. (Beasley-Murray 1962, pp.306–307).

This quotation highlights what he perceives as a 'cleavage' between biblical scholarship (Formal Theology) and church beliefs and behaviour (Espoused and Operant theologies). The separation that Beasley-Murray describes supports my contention that theology in academia forms a different entity that is apart from the beliefs and practices of ordinary theologians.

As is seen in Chapter 3, from the time of Augustine, Origen and Tertulian, the doctrine of original sin emerges and biblical support for it,[35] is proposed by Bridge and Phypers (1977, p.37). This doctrine resulted in the necessity of baptism for salvation making baptism the dividing line between babies who die lost to *limbus puerorum*, and those who die with salvation. Some systematic theologies include the contention that baptism has value within itself because it brings salvation by its administration without any human response in faith. Baptism saves *ex opere operato* – by the work being worked. This theology is evident in the teaching of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches:

> The first and most practical effect of Baptism is to remove the guilt of original sin [which] means that all the guilt of all the sin a person may have on his soul is taken away (Hardon 1998).

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[35] Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22

Many Christians today do not accept this view as it places greater emphasis, not on the grace of God through baptism as envisaged in the Westminster Confession, but rather on a human act – the performance of a ceremony. This division of views appears in the articulations of some of my contributors. The need for the evidence of faith in infant baptism is debated but Migliore summarises the situation:

> Baptism and faith are inseparably related. The question is simply one of time. Must the response of faith on the part of the baptized be simultaneous with or immediately follow the event of baptism? … In the meantime, there is a faith that is already responding to the enacted grace of God in the baptism of the infant. It is the faith of the parents and the community in whose midst the child is baptized (Migliore 2004, p.286).

This matter is considered important by some of my contributors because faith is clearly not present in an infant, but it is deemed to be demonstrated by the faith of others, parents, godparents and the Church (Bridge and Phypers 1977, p.53). The theology of faith in infant baptism has been questioned. If faith is necessary for baptism, how can babies exercise that faith, and without faith, how can it be right to baptize them? Luther's response, cited by Bridge and Phypers (1977, p.52) , was that faith is 'infused into the life of the infant' through baptism. Thus, it is proposed that infant baptism depends upon the faith of parents and godparents on behalf of the child. A counterargument is that the Church baptizes children in anticipation of their growing in faith as they mature. The congregation witnesses, welcomes and makes promises to pray for the child, and support and discipline the child in faith as necessary. The importance of faith is also raised in interview regarding infants who may have been made members of the Church by baptism and yet have no faith into adulthood. Bridge and Phypers conclude that:

> Carried to its extreme, paedobaptism teaches that every child who is baptized is safe for eternity just because he has been baptized …and that, carried to its equally logical extreme the theology of believer's baptism denies any special status to the children of Christian parents (Bridge and Phypers 1977, p.184).[36]

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[36] Note the dated gender reference

A further question is raised by Thompson (2006, p.113) among others regarding for whom is baptism available? Should it only be administered to the children of believers so that they will grow in a context of Christian faith and discipline or is it a Sacrament that should be available to all. The question is raised in the Congregational tradition by Kennedy (2016) who asks whether it is a 'Parents' right or Church's rite?'. The matter of grace and faith is of interest to my contributors and they discussed it.

Another important theological stance in the literature is the Covenant of Grace. This theology is essential for some Christians who insist that grace comes from God and does not depend on any human act including baptism. Linking faith with grace, Beasley-Murray writes:

> The stress on the objectivity of grace in baptism is qualified by an emphasis on the faith of the infant receiving baptism, on the faith of the sponsors, or on the faith of the church present at the baptism (Beasley-Murray 1962, p.347).

From a Congregational perspective, Dale concentrates on the part played by God:

> [Baptism's] deepest significance lies in the fact that it does not, in the case of an adult, express the faith or feeling of the baptized person, or in the case of a child, the faith or feeling of its parents; but, in both cases, it is a revelation of the authority and grace of Christ. The significance of the ordinance is, if possible, more obvious when administered to a child than when administered to an adult (Dale 1996, p.126).

Dale is more concerned about the nature and understanding of the rite than about the age of the candidate and discusses the concept of dedication and consecration of the child to God.

> [When] the child is baptized it is because *someone else* wishes to dedicate the child to God. When an adult is baptized, who is the 'someone else' on whom the significance of the ceremony depends?

> If the dedication of a child to God by its parents were the primary meaning of the ceremony of infant baptism, it would be more natural that the parents themselves should administer the rite. There is absolutely nothing in the N.T. to indicate that Christ intended baptism to be the expression of the desire and intention of the parents to consecrate his child to God's service (Dale 1996, pp.131–2).[37]

A Congregational view from Argent (2012) shows his assumption of infant baptism:

> Congregationalists have always practiced infant baptism and have differed from Baptists in this regard. Indeed, the trust deeds of Congregational churches often make it clear that provision must be made for the baptism of the children of believing parents and the CF expects this provision to be respected and upheld (Argent 2012, p.83).

Recently, Kennedy comments: By the beginning of the twentieth century, baptism in the Congregational churches had lost much of its significance' (2016, p.8). A traditional, compassionate summary is offered by Lusk:

> Paedobaptists are often quick to point out the benefits received by parents when their children are brought for baptism. They are assured that God loves their children and has adopted them into Covenant relation with himself. This much is usually not disputed (Lusk n.d.).

The theologies around infant baptism are strongly debated by systematic theologians and many of the theologies outlined have not found consensus in a unified agreement across traditions and within traditions.

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[37] Note the dated gender reference

The Formal Theology of the Church lacks cohesion. The question may, therefore, legitimately be asked how individual churches, particularly within the Congregational tradition, can be expected to own an Espoused baptismal theology where they have neither a liturgy to encapsulate such a theology nor, in many cases, the experience of baptisms around which to formulate a theology of their own.

From this, ordinary theologians may, understandably, have needed to construct their own beliefs and practices. Finally, in 1995, Kline notes:

> For almost 375 years, discussion and dialogue of Infant Baptism has sometimes raged on within the [Congregational] tradition and, on occasion, even brought an annual meeting to a halt while delegates argued the topic on the meeting room floor … but still no central focal statement or policy has been made or even decided (Kline 1995).[38]

The literature provides a very wide range of theologies and opinions on infant baptism each holding to the correctness of its own beliefs. In the search for theological poverty within the utterances of the ordinary theologians interviewed, it will not be surprising to find a full range of beliefs mirroring those found in the literature, the absence of any one of which could not be concluded as poverty of Systematic Theology. The range is too wide and varied and the opportunity for ordinary theologians to have been exposed to the scope of Espoused Theologies within Congregationalism is too limitted for conformity.

Having identified some of the significant theologies regarding infant baptism, we can search for evidence of these matters in the utterances obtained from the interviews.

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[38] This paper has been retrieved from the internet. The quality of the material cannot be verified but I consider that the essence is sufficiently important for inclusion.

6.1.2   What do ordinary theologians say about infant baptism?

Evidence is obtained from thirty-six ordinary theologians concerning their beliefs about infant baptism. The majority attend churches where baptisms have not been conducted for years or even decades. Half the contributors believe that baptism is appropriate for babies and infants and the other half believe that infant baptism is wrong with a variety of reasons for their beliefs. Reasons based on tradition are common, but the contributors offer little supporting theology. Endorsement of infant baptism as soon as possible is strongest where the baby's life is in danger, relating back to a time when many babies had died early. (Ch1.AD)

This immediacy of baptism is supported among Ministers:

> It should be really quite soon after birth, as soon as it can be organised. If it is important, do it soon. (Ch3.M)

> The early months of a child's life is the most likely time for a child to be presented. (Ch2,M)

However, one of the Ministers is unwavering in his belief that infant baptism is wrong: 'It is infant sprinkling for no apparent purpose'. (Ch6.M) He relates his reasoning to Romans 2 and 4 but does not expand further on the reasons for his beliefs.

Tradition and biblical support are the main claims for the appropriateness of infant baptism for the ordinary theologians. They offer little more than: 'Let the little children come to me' (Ch1.JB) & (Ch4.FG) and Jesus' presentation in the Temple in accordance with Old Testament Law. (Ch6.JT) Views are offered based on the inerrancy of the Bible:

> It is not mandated in the Bible, and we should rely on Scripture alone so we should not do infant baptisms. (Ch2.TB)

> Infant baptism is not biblical, and I hold a very strong view. If it is not in the Bible, it is not right. Rules added on top of the Lord's rules … just confuse people. (Ch4.SW)

> Baptising a baby is biblically wrong. (Ch4.JD)

The theology of original sin is unfamiliar or is not understood by the ordinary theologians and salvation from original sin through baptism of infants is rejected.

They believe instead that: 'If they died as an infant they would not go to hell'. (Ch2.TB), and 'Some people have a fear that the child might go to hell without a christening'. (Ch3.FG) This aspect of the theology of the need for infant baptism provoked animated debate in two of the focus groups where beliefs are developed through discussion. A common theme is, 'Lots of parents regard baptism as a protection and not really a part of church life'. (Ch4.FG) However, the consensus of the majority of the ordinary theologians is that all children would go to heaven without the necessity for baptism. These statements suggest that whatever a person's view of infant or adult baptism, there is an underlying assumption of God's love and compassion which over-rides their views on baptism.

Substantial beliefs are offered against infant baptism based on the necessity for candidates to have faith and understanding:

> I don't think infants should be baptized at all – not a baby or soon after birth, not at eight days either. They need a maturity in the faith. We need to be sure of the faith of the child and that should be tested to be eligible – is there enough faith there – a core, and only then can they be baptized, probably into their teens. (Ch3.JS)

> Baptism can be at any age up to the end of life, whenever you want to do it but not babies and infants. They are not of an age to understand. It should be when the person becomes a Christian and they may need guidance to get it right. A certain level of understanding is needed. (Ch3.LF)

> It should be for the child to decide for themselves whether they want to be baptized. Infant baptism is more for the parents than for the baby anyway. How can it make any difference to a baby? (Ch2.AB)

This group of ordinary theologians believe that it is necessary for the baptismal candidate to have a depth of personal faith enabling them to understand the meaning of baptism. These beliefs challenge traditional Lutheran views that it is the faith of parents, godparents and the Church that is imperative. For these ordinary theologians, experience-based beliefs are more important than traditionally held values. Personal, experiential beliefs are adopted in place of Espoused or Operant Theologies.

Beliefs about the importance of parental Christian commitment are articulated:

> Either parent should have come to God if they want their baby done. (Ch5.JW)

> It's good for the parents to make a commitment to bring up their child in the faith. (Ch5.PA)

> If people want their babies christened that's all right but it often doesn't mean a lot. (Ch4.JD)

This rather dismissive comment seems to imply that people outside the contributor's own Christian community would like to have their babies christened for whatever reason they may hold, but that it is really not very important either to the 'outsiders' or to their view of the church. The word 'christening' is used here rather than 'baptism' and the implications of this distinction are discussed in Chapter 9.

The future of the child and their family is important to the ordinary theologians:

> We would pray that the infant would become a follower of Jesus. I would allow infant baptism even though I believe it is wrong. (Ch4.DR)

> Christenings go on and we never see them again. (Ch5.KS)

The first of these articulations shows dissonance between the ordinary theologian's personal beliefs and their permissive approach of inclusion. This demonstrates the way in which the espoused and operant beliefs of this contributor are being driven by different ideas, the first tolerating baptism and the second accepting that it may be just a ceremony to some families. Personal beliefs are eclipsed by the espoused and operant theologies of the church.

More concerned approaches are offered by two of the focus groups:

> Turning people away is a risk. (Ch5.FG)

> We should agree to compromise and hold an infant baptism to accommodate the family. (Ch4.FG)

In these two instances the concerns of the focus groups relate to the external, public images of the churches concerned and their possible future relationships with the families rather than to theological matters.

There is little evidence from the ordinary theologians that they embrace a Reformed theology and regard baptism as a Sacrament signifying the baptized person's union with Christ. There is no mention of the reception of grace through baptism and no awareness of the involvement of the Holy Spirit as mediator. Finally, the need for faith for baptism to be beneficial is missing. The absence of sacramental or covenantal concern demonstrates the theological poverty of the contributors relating to these doctrines and does not reveal in this situation, any substituted beliefs of substance. There is no apparent awareness or use of phrases such as covenant or Sacrament, or any substitution of vernacular alternatives.

Overall, the ordinary theologian contributors fall into three groups. About half accept infant baptism rather passively as a rare event that just happens. They tend to call these events christenings and are held because they are something outsiders want. The second group, mainly from one church, also report infant baptisms to be a very rare event but that believers' baptisms are frequent occurring two or three times a year. The remaining group consists of those who believe that a believers' baptism is the right service but who worship in a church which offers infant baptisms only or where no baptisms have taken place at all recently. This last group are prepared to supress their beliefs about the correctness of believers' baptism in favour of their church's Espoused and Operant Theologies of infant baptism.

Turning to the responses from the Ministers, two of them agree:

> Baptism does not make you a Christian and is not part of salvation. Faith and baptism lead to justification. (Ch6.M)

> People put themselves forward in faith, but for children it is the faith of their godparents and parents. (Ch5.M)

In contrast to the divided and worldly beliefs of the ordinary theologians, the Ministers are mainly in favour of infant baptism and speak of a covenantal relationship:

> I am a paedobaptist and being a child of the Covenant is normative. (Ch1.M)

> Families bring their children to baptism and covenant with God to bring the child up in faith. Baptism is complete in itself. (CH1.M)

> I am a paedobaptist by conviction in an increasingly secular society, therefore people may be baptized at any age they appear. (Ch2.M)

> My understanding of the Gospel is fairly Calvinistic – the grace comes from God, not what I can do. Baptism is about covenantal initiation. (Ch2.M)

The covenantal views expressed by these two Ministers contrast significantly from the concerns of ordinary theologians that are more pragmatic and look to deal with the requests of the parents. It is relevant to note the different use of language in the Ministers' responses. Words such as paedobaptism, Calvinistic and covenant are used freely demonstrating the use of the 'shorthand' method of communicating between professionals that is not found among the ordinary theologians.

I turn to the academic contributors in search of a Formal input. Academic One comments, with some reservation:

> Baptism is what Jesus commanded us to do. It is a Sacrament of grace, undeserved grace. It is for you and your children and God's grace reaches out to all children. Under God's grace the children will grow up and make promises of their own. (Ac.1)

> Baptismal services are 'wishy-washy', lacking substance and meaning. I did do one baptism in the middle of a family party. I felt compelled to do it. There was a bouncy castle and a guitar. But I suppose it was an opportunity to declare the Gospel. (Ac.1)

Academic Two draws attention to Psalm 89 and is concerned about modern baptisms: She comments that: 'Baptism is a symbol of new creation, an order of creation, instituted by God. Have a look at Psalm 89'. (Ac.2) The comment about Psalm 89 is not developed but it may be presumed that the reference is to verse three[39] and the theme of faithfulness is implied. In summary, there is no consensus or appearance of a normative theological perspective. The two academics express opposing views, one holding to the baptism of infants only and the other offering both infant and believers' baptism as requested.

Little of the traditional Congregational position on infant baptism appears in the contributors' articulations but it is mentioned and misunderstood by one focus group who decide, after debate, that:

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[39] Psalm 89:3 You said "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to my servant David". NRSV

Christening is for infants. In the Church of England, babies are christened, and confirmation will follow. In the Congregational Church it is dedication followed by baptism as an adult after a confession of faith. (Ch2.FG)

(The most common Congregational situation is that infant baptism is encouraged, dedication is not common and adult baptism is unusual.)

Two Ministers offer comments about the Congregational view of baptism.

I think I am thoroughly Congregational in a traditional and Reformed stream and my own view is the traditional Congregationalist view. (Ch2.M)

Within the Federation at the moment, people do not have a theology of baptism. (Ch1.M)

There is no uniformity of theology within the articulations of the ordinary theologians, the Ministers and the academics, making it difficult to determine whether theological poverty is present.

6.2 Baptism or christening: a theological or a linguistic distinction?

The language used by the ordinary theologians in interview is different from systematic theological language, did not include overtly theological terminology and is vernacular in content. In order to understand the richness of the utterances from the ordinary theologians it is important to appreciate their situation and to accommodate their language. The ordinary theologians are asked what the word 'baptism' means to them, and this produces a variety of reactions and beliefs, many containing recognisable theological thoughts but expressed in non-theological phrases.

6.2.1 The difference between baptism and christening in the literature

The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'christening' as the act of admission to a Christian Church by baptism, thereby using the words interchangeably. Some ordinary theologians also want to use the words in this way, while others articulate a difference between a christening and a baptism that is important to them.

Martin Percy provides an interesting view on the changes that have taken place with 'christenings' and 'baptisms' between the early 1940s and 2010.

If one compares the practice of Tomkins to that of today's parish priests, one sees some considerable differences. First, the term 'Christening' is almost never used by the clergy, who uniformly prefer the term 'baptism'. Second, baptisms generally take place in the context of a normal act of worship on a Sunday morning. Third, there is little sense in which today's clergy would simply allow baptismal parties to turn up with relatively little preparation and allow the child to be baptized virtually on demand. Fourth, there can be no question that Tomkins baptized many more children with his 'open' policy, than have any of his successors with their more restricted policies (Percy 2010, p.21).

This quotation brings attention to four areas where my contributors have views if not beliefs and I will address them but not in the same order as they appear. The matter of the timing of baptisms where Percy implies that, in Tomkins' day, the service would have been a separate event whereas today's Minister would expect that they would occur in the setting of a normal service. My contributors from within the Congregational tradition state that baptisms are almost always part of the main service of the day and some of them insist that it is important that the baptism should take place in the main body of the Church and in the presence of the whole congregation. Contributors from one church even report that the Minister has conducted a believers' baptism with the candidate standing in a child's paddling pool and a bucket of water poured over him because that meant that it would take place in the body of the church. He declined to use the existing baptistry because it was located in the church hall.

The third point made by Percy is about the need for preparation for the candidates and this will be addressed more fully later. My contributors agree that some form of preparation for both infant and believers' baptism should take place. The fourth point questions the position of 'open font' baptisms for infants from outside the church.

Finally, Percy's comment about the word 'christening' hardly ever being used by the clergy supports the point made earlier that clergy and lay people use the words, 'baptism' and 'christening' to speak of the same event but using the terms that are customarily used in their own worlds. They are both using their own descriptive words for an event at a mundane level, when they are both describing an event with water and a candidate.

An alternative interpretation is that they are describing an event that holds a special theological significance for them. The differences that each group of contributors own only become clear by listening to the articulations of the ordinary theologians, the Ministers and the academics.

In her PhD, Sarah Lawrence reports that 'christening' has roots in Old English citing Bede in 890$_{CE}$. 'Baptism' appears in Middle English around 1377$_{CE,}$ and 'baptism' and 'christening' are interchangeable from 1500-1710. 'Just one word was used for both, the ideas were inseparable' (2016, p.5). In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, 'baptism' is used in theological discussions and Bible translations. Lawrence concludes that:

> Women, people from lower ranks of society and those without a university education used 'christening' much more than 'baptism'. Conversely, men, people from higher social ranks and those with a university education used 'baptism' more' (Lawrence 2016, p.5).

The male/female usage resonates with 'mother-tongue' theologies identified as an Ordinary Theology characteristic as opposed to the father-tongue of academia (Astley 2002b, pp.77–78). As stated earlier, Astley's usage of this language came from Le Guin (1989) who wrote of the 'mother-tongue' of the home and of relationships, compared to the 'father-tongue' which seeks analysis and objectivity.[40] Lawrence suggests that 'baptism' might feel more biblical to Christians today as it is used by Tyndale in his translation of the Bible and because it also appears later in the King James Bible. In contrast, Wycliffe speaks of Jesus being 'christened' by John in the Jordan (2016, p.5). The CF's equivalent of a 'Liturgical Handbook' *(my phrase)* uses 'baptism' exclusively (Cleaves, R. and Durber 1998).

A Church of England's Archbishops' Council says: 'Many, particularly clergy, … objected to the term 'christenings' as dumbing down a theological truth' (Millar nd, p.4).

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[40] Ursula Le Guin's writing (1989) is based on her strongly held feminist beliefs which, although dated and gender stereotypical, do provide a dimension of language that is relevant to this thesis.

It continues that 'christening' is not in the liturgical rites of the Church of England, but it does appear in the Prayer Book of 1662.

'‘Christening' is not just a popular cultural word, but it also has an established liturgical use and a depth of theological meaning', Millar claims, without describing how this differentiates 'christening' from 'baptism'. The two words may have a culturally based differentiation for some people. However, there is insufficient evidence of Formal or Normative Theology in the literature to distinguish between these words or to direct the search for theological poverty in the churches.

6.2.2 Beliefs about baptism and christening from the interviews

'Christening' is used in interview by ten of the ordinary theologians; it is dismissed by nine and is not mentioned by seventeen. Interchangeability is demonstrated by eight of the ordinary theologians, for example:

Baptism and christening mean the same. Just the name is different. (Ch3, JH)

Both identify with Christianity, so it doesn't really matter. (Ch3.LF)

Christening is what lay people call baptism. Like lay people say a bone is broken, professionals say it is fractured. (Ch5.FG)

Culture says christening but theology says baptism. Baptism is the proper word. (Ch3.FG)

There is no difference in Congregationalism. (Ch1.BS)

Eight respondents comment that the words mean different things, three introducing baptisms as appropriate for adults, christening being reserved for children.

Baptism and christening are not interchangeable words. I use baptism. (Ch3.MN)

Baptism is of two types, infant baptism is otherwise called christening, but baptism is for adults. (Ch1.AD)

Baptism is really for people who truly put their faith in Jesus and are then baptized. Therefore, baptism is for adults. (Ch3.TB)

Baptism is for adults; christening is for babies. (Ch6.FU)

The biblical justification of the use of 'baptism' suggested by Lawrence is represented in some of the ordinary theologians' observations. The following two articulations base their beliefs in a Normative biblical tradition.

> Christening is not in the Bible, so I don't use it. (Ch4.FG)

> Baptism is for Christian use. It is used in the Bible and used by people who go to church. (CH5.MJ)

The differentiation is important to half the ordinary theologians, many of whom speak disparagingly about christenings, possibly speaking from a poor previous experience.

> A christening involves a church full of badly-behaved, badly dressed people who have no idea what is happening. (Ch3.JS)

> They have the child christened as an insurance protection. (Ch6.HU)

This contrasts with the articulations given earlier in favour of welcoming people who do not attend church, and treating them with love and compassion, whatever their inclinations and intentions. Without a sense of being made welcome by the church during their short contact for the service of baptism for their child, people may choose to reject the church.

Two of the focus groups in debate agree that:

> A christening is no more than a good luck charm to some people. (Ch4.FG)

> Christenings are different from baptisms because you make the baby cry and that is 'crying out the devil'. (Ch1.FG)

In contrast, the Ministers only use the word 'baptism' and reject 'christening' completely without justifying this choice as being either theological or linguistic:

> I don't use the word christening at all in any official circumstances. (Ch1.M)

> The difference between christening and baptism? Only baptism is in my vocabulary. (Ch2.M)

> Christening – I don't believe in it or practice it. Baptism means believers' baptism by immersion following a confession of faith. (Ch6.M)

One Minister makes an interesting comment using both words but with differing meanings:

> There are semantic differences between the word baptism and the word christening, but baptism is something that occurs within a christening service. Christening is a service; baptism is an action. (Ch5.M)

The remaining five Ministers use 'baptism' and dismiss 'christening', supporting Lawrence's proposal that 'those with a university education and of higher social ranks use 'baptism' more frequently'.

An alternative view is that Ministers could be supporting Le Guin's work that the father-tongue is one of objective analysis. The Ministers agree between themselves and with their congregations about the behaviour of parents requesting a christening:

> I have moved christenings to the end of the service rather than the midpoint. The fragile routine of the service can be fractured by the larger assembly of the family. (Ch3.M)

> There is a constant state of tension between me and the congregation when the person concerned is not a member because of their non-churched behaviour. My first such event has set up bad expectations. (Ch5.M)

> The New Year brings a rash of requests – New Year resolutions. (Ch3.M)

The academic theologians differ but one states: 'I do not use the term 'christening'. That is something that comes from popular folk culture and is not biblical'. (Ac.1) The other academic disagrees: 'Christening is the commitment to the Christian community. I would use them interchangeably'. (Ac.2)

Overall, there was little consensus or theology about the titles 'baptism' and 'christening', but the general feelings among the ordinary theologians are that christening is a term used mainly by non-churchgoers and baptism is used by churchgoers. Ministers almost exclusively call the rite 'baptism'; christening is for babies and baptism is for adults. Little theology is forthcoming from any of the contributors but whether this is due to the presence of theological poverty or lack of concern is difficult to ascertain.

6.3   A role for alternative services in place of baptisms?

A suggestion is made by some contributors that, in many Congregational churches, christenings are considered to be relatively unimportant and are occasionally requested by people from outside the church. This results in infant baptisms being observed infrequently, partly because they may be restricted only to church children and partly due to the aging demographic of congregations. As a result of this, the ordinary theologians are asked to consider whether any alternatives to baptism should be made available to parents who request some form of ceremony but where restrictions are placed on undertaking infant baptisms. This could be due to a 'closed' font policy or because the Espoused Theology of the church favours believers' baptism.

The question then becomes, should churches offer any alternatives to infant baptism if their Espoused Theology precludes the rite for the people requesting it?

6.3.1 Alternatives to infant baptism from the literature

The World Council of Churches identifies that:

> Some … churches who [exclusively practice the baptism of believers] encourage infants or children to be presented and blessed in a service which usually involves thanksgiving for the gift of the child and also the commitment of the mother and father to Christian parenthood (WCC 1982).[41]

If requests for infant baptism are declined, pastoral concern might suggest that something else could be offered. I served as an Assistant Minister at a church where infant baptism was only offered twice in twenty years and that was to accede to the cultural needs of a Nigerian Deacon. Otherwise, alternatives of Thanksgiving, Blessing or Dedication were made available.

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[41] This document from the World Council of Churches in 1982, while typical of its style and date, fails to recognise the changes that have occurred in the last forty years around the shapes, genders and formats of families. It does not consider the matter of the 'Open Font' dilemma addressed on page 123.

The need for comfort through infant baptism which some 'pious parents' experienced is identified by Barth. However, he comments that this need could just as well be expressed in some form of public presentation and blessing of the new-born child instead of baptism (1948, p.50). White concurs that many people feel the need to mark the birth of their child with a religious ritual without requesting Christian baptism (1997, pp.157–8). A different attitude is taken by Taylor who equates baptism with dedication: 'There is nothing in Scripture that would prohibit a child from being baptized as a sign of promise or dedication. This type of baptism would be similar to a baby dedication' (2013, p.7). Indifference rather than contempt for baptism in Free Churches is claimed by Forsyth who considers that it reduces baptism to an interesting act of dedication: 'To treat baptism as a mere ceremony of reception into the church and of addition to its roll … destroys it as a Sacrament' (1917, pp.80–81).

The debate is continued by Francis et al in their research among clergy in the Church in Wales. They find that nearly half the participating clergy are prepared to offer a service of thanksgiving as an alternative where parents request a service of baptism, while a third would never offer such a service (Francis, Littler and Thomas, H. 2000, p.82).

A Congregational view is presented by Dale, a nineteenth century theologian, who asks whether baptism is truly a dedication of children to God. He comments:

> If the dedication of a child to God by its parents were the primary meaning of the ceremony of infant baptism, it would seem more natural that the parents themselves should administer the rite (Dale 1996, p.131).

A further Congregational authority, Argent (2012), completely ignores any possibility of an alternative service in his advice to the CF.

The authority of literature is divided therefore, on the acceptability of an alternative to baptism and, if so, what form that should take.

Hence, it is difficult to identify theological poverty from the literature on alternatives to baptism against which to compare the articulations from the contributors.

6.3.2 Alternatives to baptism from the interviews

More than one-third of the ordinary theologians interviewed consider that a dedication is an acceptable alternative to infant baptism.

> I like dedications. They are similar to christenings but without water. (Ch1.MM)

> I prefer dedications. They are not so formal. There is no water, but the same promises are made. (Ch3.LF)

Two further ordinary theologians base their beliefs about dedications on the Bible. One compares Jesus' presentation in the temple to a dedication of a baby to God,[42] while another likens a dedication to the consecration of every firstborn to God.[43]

A quarter of the ordinary theologians favour a blessing: 'A service of blessing is a good alternative – good for the family', (Ch6.EM) but, 'not quite a baptism', (Ch1.AD) Two contributors and a focus group comment on services of thanksgiving:

> Give thanks for that child. Pray the Lord will use them for his glory; (Ch2.TB)

> A drop of water doesn't make a difference. It is how you stand with God that matters. (Ch6.JT)

> You give thanks to God for the child and give them back to God. (Ch1.FG)

One focus group offers: 'These are not alternatives; they are the way forward'. (Ch4.FG)

Turning to the contributions from the Ministers, one Minister shares that 'Baptism and dedication are universal, but I offer a dedication and the parents make the decision. It shows the diversity of the Church'. (Ch4.M) Another Minister agrees: 'I offer both baptisms and blessings, but non-church people always choose baptisms. It is my responsibility to make the decision to offer whichever I see fit'. (Ch3.M)

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[42] Luke 2:21
[43] Exodus 13:2

One of the Ministers offers a choice of alternatives to parents; firstly, an act of dedication for the children of church people and secondly, a service of blessing offered to people who are not church goers but who want a religious service. A third choice he offers is a ceremony of thanksgiving for parents who want to mark the occasion but who do not want a Christian element, raising the question why they want a service..

A more traditional view is expressed by another Minister; 'I don't offer alternatives. They are not things I would use but I could just go along with a naming ceremony'. (Ch5.M)

Two Ministers offer:

> If they ask for a christening, I explain that I don't do them, but I combine a blessing and a thanksgiving in a similar kind of service for non-church members. I don't ask people to make promises they have no intention of keeping. (Ch6.M)

> Two old ladies refused to stand at infant baptisms but will stand for dedications. (Ch5.M)

These two comments are quite revealing. The Minister from church six expresses his own and the church's Espoused Theology of believers' baptism, of thanksgiving for a new life and blessing the child, and, finally, his reasoning, that he does not make demands of the parents that he does not believe will be fulfilled. The two old ladies demonstrate silently, their Ordinary Theology of resistance to the Operant Theology of the church, imposing their own beliefs.

The contributions of the academic theologians are divergent, one insisting on water for baptism and avoiding alternatives, and the other happy to accommodate parental and personal requests, drawing on a theology of equivalence between baptism and thanksgiving.

> I do not offer blessings because, for me, there is a presumption of water. (Ac.1)

> I am absolutely fine with alternatives to baptism. People come with a request, I talk with them about all the possibilities, and I go with whatever they request. A thanksgiving service is as theologically important as a baptism. People from Ghana really want dunking and my role is not to destroy their expectations and traditions. I am totally OK with any practice. (Ac.2)

In summary, one third of the ordinary theologians are open to any of the alternatives to infant baptism, most of those favouring a service of blessing for non-church people. No biblical or theological authority is voiced for this. Two of the professional theologians have firm views, one basing his theology of immersion baptism from the Bible, and the other only conducting infant baptism by pouring, relating the pouring of the water to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The literature on alternative services in place of infant baptisms is based on the rightness of the baptisms themselves rather than on any direct theology and, hence, is little further help in establishing a Formal Theology of alternatives to baptism.

6.4   Is indiscriminate (open font) baptism theological?

The Lima Text of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (1982) identifies that:

> In many large European and North American majority churches infant baptism is often practised in an apparently indiscriminate way.
>
> Those who practice infant baptism … must guard themselves against the practice of apparently indiscriminate baptism and take more seriously their responsibility for the nurture of baptized children to mature commitment to Christ (WCC 1982).

Within these statements lies the problem of which infants should be baptized. Should it be only the children of the church, or those who are known more remotely to the church, or to all who request baptism for their infants? In some situations, the term 'open font' is used to describe an indiscriminate form of baptism.

In interview, the ordinary theologians do not have either term in their vocabulary, but they express their views with conviction when it is explained.

Two opposing scenarios are presented to the contributors by way of explanation. In one, the Minister only agrees to conduct infant baptisms if the parents are church members, while in the other, the Minister baptizes everyone who asks - an 'open font' attitude.

6.4.1 Indiscriminate (open font) baptism from the literature

Most academic literature considers that indiscriminate baptism should be avoided wherever possible.   Spinks (2006b, p.165) identifies a Church of England report in 1939 which condemns 'indiscriminate baptism'. He describes this as an 'Anglican' problem' where parents applying for their child's baptism should be encouraged to attend church and where 'the Sacrament be deferred in families whose older children were not going to church'. It is also held that godparents should be vetted, parents should undergo instruction, and that the baptism of infants should be restricted to those whose parents are active members of the church. Forsyth (1917, p.209) pleads that baptism should not be given where there is no prospect of Christian nurture, and Buchanan emphasises:

> The only case that can be made from the Bible is for the baptism of the children of believers. That case is not overturned by an inherited unbiblical practice in many parishes of accepting for baptism infants whose parents are wholly distanced from the Christian faith. We need to reform indiscriminate practice; and a side-benefit of doing so is to make infant baptism more credible to those who waver towards rejecting it simply because of the actual practice they have encountered (Buchanan 2009, p.25).

The New Testament and historical legitimacy of infant baptism is considered by Searle who states that the Augustinian formulation of original sin necessitating baptism for salvation has been 'considerably diluted in the course of the nineteenth century … The indiscriminate practice of baptising any child presented at the font is agreed by all to be detrimental' (1995, p.379). He submits that indiscriminate baptism is harmful to the Church and to the Gospel.

This warning is continued in the Lima Text where the Church is encouraged to guard against indiscriminate baptism (WCC 1982, p.5).

These beliefs contrast sharply with the 2020 Church of England website:

> You can always have your child christened in your local church, and it's good to make a connection locally so your child's church family is close by. When you call the church, you may be able to book a date straightaway or someone may call back. You'll meet the vicar with your child to talk through the service and to help answer any questions you may have (Contacting the church for a christening n.d.).

Considering Congregational authors, dated views come from Dale who identifies three classes of Christian baptism. Firstly, there are those who 'travel furthest from the letter of the term 'all nations'' in the Great Commission. 'These people only baptize those who make a credible confession of their faith'. An intermediate group baptize 'supposed believers and their families'. The final group baptize 'all applicants whatsoever, providing the application does not appear to be made scoffingly and profanely', interpreting the Commission in its widest sense. He concludes in 1884 that 'Till within recent years, it is probable that a majority of English Congregationalists held the second or intermediate position; but the reasons for the third seem decisive' (Dale 1996, p.129). Even in Dale's Day, dissonance is demonstrated between the Espoused Theology of the church and his own, personal beliefs. He continues that, 'In the Commission itself there is no restriction of baptism either to believers in Christ or to believers and their children'; and that 'no qualification for baptism is prescribed in Scripture'.

More recently, Argent considers that the CF requires the second of Dale's classes, that is that baptism should only be made available to children of Christian parents, a 'closed' attitude.

Congregationalists demand of those parents who present their children for baptism that they solemnly affirm their own Christian faith and promise that they will nurture their children in that faith (Argent 2012, p.83).

A heart-felt experience is described by Kennedy, a Congregational Minister who reported that he had 'inherited a pattern of indiscriminate baptism, coupled with a much stricter baptismal policy at the local Anglican parish church. The result was a constant stream of enquiries for "baptism on demand"' (2016, p.1). He feels taken for granted and his beliefs regarding indiscriminate baptism hardened:

> I profoundly disagree with Dale as I find his interpretation of Scripture flawed and out of step with classical Reformed thought on this subject. The only plausible reason for indiscriminate baptism would surely be that it was necessary for salvation and that view taken to its logical conclusion leads to 'emergency baptisms' conducted by lay people (Kennedy 2016, p.7).

The question of indiscriminate baptisms generates a range of Congregational beliefs in the literature.

Dale promotes an open font position; Argent for the Federation is firm that baptism should be for church families only, and Kennedy is decisively against open baptism. Given this background, it is not surprising that the beliefs of the ordinary theologians are also divided, and it is difficult to establish whether theological poverty is displayed.

6.4.2   Beliefs about indiscriminate baptisms from the interviews

The majority of the ordinary theologians favour an 'open font' attitude for baptism:

> I am for open baptism. God is there for us all. If it is an outsider, a non-church member, we should say 'Thank you, God, for sending them to us. (Ch1.JB)

> We baptize anyone who comes into the church. Infants are all the same, whether a church member or not. For families who enter the church, it may be the start of their journey. We don't want to refuse anyone. (Ch1.MM)

> Open baptism is for everybody. We don't turn anybody away but there may be less commitment from some people. In later life they may become a Christian; many have a loose connection already. We follow them all up and we don't know what will happen – we may never see them again. (Ch1.BS)

These embracing views show a traditional, Espoused Theology of openness coming from one paedobaptist church and are supported in their focus group. 'We do open baptism; God is there for us all. Everyone must feel welcome with no conditions from the church'. (Ch1.FG) Similar liberal views are found across all the participant churches demonstrating the hope that, through infant baptism, the sharing of the love of God may become evident even if this is delayed:

> We have an open font, open door policy and we will welcome anybody into the Christian family without making them jump through hoops. God came for sinners and the needy. He would want the door to be open to anybody. (Ch4.DE)

> We always need to be positive about baptism and invite outsiders. 'Why not come along and see what church is all about?' (Ch3.LF)

> We never turn anyone away. We can preach the word to everybody. You never know what might touch someone. (Ch3.JH)

The Espoused and Operant Theologies are of openness, love and compassion.

A firmer attitude is found in some ordinary theologians requiring applicants to demonstrate an understanding of baptism, not merely a desire for the act:

> Open baptism is OK as long as they have shown a willingness to start on a journey of faith. That is the Congregational tradition. (Ch5.MJ)

> We should be open to everybody. To exclude anybody from church is wrong but a time of reflection is important about what they are doing. (Ch4.PC)

One focus group concurs:

> We do open baptism, but there is a line. Why do they want to be baptized? It is not just an open door, but Jesus welcomes all'. (Ch2.FG)

In these churches, caring and openness are moderated by an insistence that there must be a willingness to consider a Christian journey of faith.

A concept of limitation is expressed by one contributor:

> I think we are in danger of being too open. We are open but there is a line. You have to cross over that line. You can't sidle your way into heaven. Being a Christian, you have to make a choice. All may come in, but you need to come over that line. But we want to be inclusive. (Ch5.PA)

A still firmer belief is expressed: 'We should allow people with church connections only. But you must never turn a child away. We never refuse a christening but something more is needed prior to a baptism'. (Ch5.KaW) The contributor did not develop what the 'something' is that is needed and why there is a difference between a christening and a baptism. Here, a dissonance in belief is demonstrated: baptisms should only be allowed for people with church connections, but a child must never be refused. This ordinary theologian demonstrates that they have no problem with holding both beliefs at the same time; a restriction through tradition and a compassionate welcoming.

Other utterances include:

> Ideally, people should have a connection with the church. Ideally it should follow a spiritual discussion, but I would err on the side of indiscriminate baptism. (Ch2.RS)

> It is OK if either parent has come to God if the baby has not been baptized before and they want the baby done, but not immediate baptism. (Ch5.JW)

There is tension between open, compassionate attitudes and closed traditional belief. More limiting beliefs are articulated:

> People asking for baptism should be part of the church family. If they only come for a month that is not good. They should have a connection with the church. The child deserves to be baptized even if the parents don't. (Ch2.MS)

> It should be for church members only. They should have made a commitment to be part of that congregation. They should be longing to be a part of that life of being in Jesus. It is not just a naming ceremony, a nice thing to do. What follows on from baptism is important. Seeds may be sown, and it may be the start of a new life. (Ch2.MN)

> It is pointless unless they attend church. OK as long as they understand what they are doing. They are often not church people but going to church may help. People need to understand. (Ch6.HU)

Even here, with a firm theology in the operant voice saying that church participation is essential, there is a hope that permitting baptism may trigger a response.

A visible trend becomes apparent across the churches. One church, strongly paedobaptist, holds the most open-font beliefs, followed by two further churches where infant baptism is more frequently practiced. Two other churches hold less open beliefs and the final church has the most 'closed' attitudes, practicing exclusively believers' baptism. 'It is only for church members' (Ch6.EM) and 'I would still want to know why people want it'. (Ch6.ML) The Minister of this church provides a service of blessing for children on request. This unsurprising correlation between open font beliefs and the dominance of infant baptism is marked. The more open the church is for baptisms, the stronger the paedobaptist theology. Infant baptism is associated with more transient applicants whereas the personal commitment of preparation for believers' baptism is associated with a closed approach. In all six churches, the ordinary theologians express the desire that the church should be seen to be inviting and welcoming. The church should be compassionate, open and never turn anybody away.

The Ministers, similarly, cover the full range of beliefs. Two 'open' views are expressed:

> We are available to everyone, and we do say 'It would be lovely to see you at church', but I do try to get to meet them beforehand and get to know them. I try to get them to realise the gravity of the promises they are making about bringing up the child in the Christian faith. (Ch5.M)

> We are very open, but I do ask them to come and get a feel for the church. I also offer dedications, but it is the parents who make the decisions. (Ch4.M)

Two Ministers occupy a central position, wanting to be open but expressing reservations saying:

> This is the most difficult bit to me. Congregational churches should provide it for anyone who asks but I do say 'no' sometimes if there is not a parent who has a desire to ongoing worship. (Ch3.M)

> This is difficult and, traditionally we restrict baptism to church members and close attendees. But we do consider anyone who comes and believe that there must be some tentative searching for them to approach the church. They must have some underlying faith. We don't turn anyone away from any expression of church. We have lost one family by refusing. (Ch1.M)

This second articulation is complex. The Espoused Theology is expressed by 'we restrict baptism' tempered by 'we consider anyone' and 'there must be tentative searching'. The phrase 'They must have some underlying faith' might be a restrictive part of church policy or may be a simple hope in faith. Finally, the Operant Theology emerges 'We don't turn anyone away'. It is possible that Espoused and Operant Theologies are being moulded by the regret of losing a family after a rejection. This regret may be seen in an articulation from another Minister who comments:

> We are having to fit in with the context of our society because we are residually a Christian society. There is an expectation of the Church. However, an ecclesiastical context informs our approach, and my experience is that they do come to us with, no matter how ill-informed, a belief. (Ch1.M)

These comments come from the Minister of the church that favours paedobaptism, but his beliefs are more open than those of his congregation. He feels that his theology has been replaced by a contextual, modern theology of which he does not approve.

The final Minister declines to offer his views, considering the open font question to be inappropriate. All his baptisms are for believers, so that an open font policy is irrelevant. However, he would offer a service of blessing or dedication. I pursued the possibility of spontaneous believers' baptisms, and his comments are reported later. The beliefs of the Ministers cover the full range of theologies but largely correlate with the views of their congregations and their practices.

Experience of open-font baptism within each church tends to form the Espoused Theology of that church and guide the operant beliefs that ordinary theologians articulate.

The academics have views that occupy a central position.

> I am mixed in my thinking. If anyone wants a baptism service, I will do it. We have a few approaches, and I will baptize all who ask. I have moved considerably in response to a changed world. I would prefer it if they were already part of our church family and I always include a prayer that the child will make the faith their own. (Ac.1)

This academic contributor prefers a practice of a more 'closed' approach to baptism.

He really wants to insist on a church connection, but he feels that he must 'move with the times' and has adjusted his theology towards a more open approach. He expresses regret that he feels he must compromise on his beliefs but lives in hope.

The second academic is much more open in her approach:

> Everyone is entertained and I have done it at a week's notice, but I still have a conversation with them. It is not for me to put any conditions on baptism – that is theologically clear - but I am more comfortable with the Chapel's open approach. (Ac.2)

This academic states that the Chapel has an open Espoused Theology with which she concurs. She makes the statement that her 'clear' theological position is that she must not hinder any applicant family for baptism for their baby, but she does not develop her position despite being invited to do so.

From these interviews, the ordinary theologians, Ministers and academic theologians present the full range of theologies about an indiscriminate approach to baptism but without defining their theologies. Although there is no consensus between churches, Ministers or academics, there does appear to be some agreement within church congregations and with their Ministers.

Within the articulations of the contributors there is an underlying care and concern for the families and their infants. They wish to show the love of Jesus and of the church to all in the hope that they would feel that love and respond to it. In doing so, the 'love your neighbour as yourself' of the Second Great Commandment can be considered as their theology and practice.

6.5 Emergency infant baptism

From time to time, Ministers may be faced with a request for the baptism of a child who is very unwell and is unlikely to survive. The request for an emergency baptism for a dying child may result in a challenge to their personal theologies. Ordinary theologians are unlikely to have experienced this situation unless it is within their family, and they may never have been asked to articulate their thoughts about it.

Nevertheless, some may hold deep, hidden beliefs and, through articulating them, they may become aware of their beliefs. The scenario of a baby at risk of dying imminently is presented to my contributors and verbal reactions are collected.

6.5.1 Emergency baptism from the literature

Ministers may face the situation at some time where a baby is born very prematurely, or severely disabled, and likely to die imminently. Whitehead and Whitehead (1998, p.21) discuss the situation where, although baptism is no longer seen in some traditions as a prerequisite for entry into heaven, many parents will still want an emergency baptism for their unwell baby.

There is very little literature on the theology of emergency baptism specifically, and what is written appears mainly in nursing and midwifery journals. For example, Eich (1987) has written a guide for nurses. There are example liturgies for most traditions, but they lack a specific theological basis for the form they propose.

A further example is that of the Church of England which provides a liturgy with rubrics that state:

> In an emergency, a lay person may be the minister of baptism, and should subsequently inform those who have the pastoral responsibility for the person so baptized. Parents are responsible for requesting emergency baptism for an infant. They should be assured that questions of ultimate salvation or of the provision of a Christian funeral for an infant who dies do not depend upon whether or not the child has been baptized. (CofE n.d.)

This does make it clear that baptism by a lay person, perhaps a midwife in a hospital, is permissible but that it must be reported to the appropriate person. More importantly, it states clearly that salvation does not depend on baptism and neither does a Christian funeral (Archbishops' Council 2005).

The Roman Catholic tradition is very different stating that:

Catholic teaching is uncompromising on this point, that all who depart this life without baptism, be it of water, or blood, or desire, are perpetually excluded from the vision of God. This teaching is grounded … on Scripture and tradition, and the decrees of the Church. … Many Catholic theologians have declared that infants dying without baptism are excluded from the beatific vision; but as to the exact state of these souls in the next world they are not agreed (Fanning n.d.).

Within the Congregational tradition, nothing is written specifically either about emergency baptisms or the necessity of baptism for salvation except by Argent:

Christ's unique authority and his claim upon our persons are set out in baptism. It is his wills and saving actions which have pride of place rather than our own inadequate measure of faith. In baptising children we acknowledge that we can do nothing to save ourselves and that only Christ has the power to do so (Argent 2012, p.83).

The only further reference relating to Congregational tradition and emergency baptism comes from Kennedy who links it with indiscriminate baptism.

The only plausible reason for indiscriminate baptism would surely be that it was necessary for salvation and that view taken to its logical conclusion leads to "emergency baptisms" conducted by lay people (Kennedy 2016, p.7).

The concept of the necessity for emergency baptism is mainly based on Augustinian concepts of baptism for the remission of original sin.

Thompson comments from Augustine in the *ex opere operato* conviction:

What conveyed the Spirit was not the substance of the blessed water, but the action of baptising, whereby the Spirit stamped the seal of Christ on the believers' soul. In emergency, a layperson could baptize so long as it was with water in the name of the Trinity (Thompson, R. 2006, p.93).

Describing Lutheran times and, again, following the Augustinian lead, Stanford comments:

> Church teaching was explicit that any child not christened (and therefore not cleansed of the stain of original sin that all humans carry because of the misdeeds of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden) would be denied salvation and consigned to *limbus puerorum* (Limbo of the Infants) (Stanford 2017, p.32).

Against the historical background, Searle identifies the loss of the significance of infant baptism and blames it on the use of emergency baptism:

> Drastically impoverished understanding of the wealth and wonder of the baptismal life … there is sometimes a tendency to blame this impoverishment on infant baptism, though it would probably be more accurate to say that it is the result of the institutionalisation of *emergency* baptism (Searle 1995, p.402).

Ideas about emergency baptism in the literature appear to be more linked to the historical time in which they are written rather than an orthodox theology. Augustine and Luther saw emergency baptism as normal and essential given both the high infant death rate and the necessity of baptism for salvation. The need for baptism for admission to heaven emerges and is linked with indiscriminate baptism. The rite of emergency baptism has become acceptable to fulfil the needs of grieving parents and the permissibility for the rite to be conducted by lay people has been generally agreed. With a fluctuating historical range of theologies on emergency baptism, and a dependence on beliefs regarding the salvific nature of baptism, no clear Formal Theology emerges and, hence, there is little guidance against which theological poverty can be measured.

6.5.2 Emergency baptism from the interviews

The ordinary theologians all agree that the request for emergency baptism should be accepted but the reasons given for this are varied, the most common reason being for the comfort and support of the parents. (Ch1.AD), (Ch2.LH) (Ch5.KS) Concern is expressed that help should be provided to ease the trauma of losing the baby. (Ch1.TB) One contributor confesses that she would want to have her baby baptized under such circumstances. (Ch5.JW) The ordinary theologians in the church that favoured believers' baptism still accept emergency baptism as appropriate; 'unusual but acceptable' (Ch6.HU); 'OK but may not be for the right reasons' (Ch6.JT) and 'a lovely thing for the parents'. (Ch6.EM) Reservations are expressed: 'It is non-believers who are more likely to want their babies baptized' (Ch6.ML) and 'It really would not make any difference for the baby'. (Ch2.FG)

Common comments are:

> Baptism would not make any difference to the way God feels about their child or their going to heaven. (Ch4.LS)

> The baby will go straight into the arms of Jesus. (Ch4.SW)

> It might help them to place their baby in the hands of God. (Ch5.JW)

Alternative comments are:

> No babies will go to hell. (Ch6.FU)

> There is no hell for unbaptized babies. (Ch6.HU)

> If they died as an infant, they would not go to hell. (Ch2.RS)

This almost universalist belief about babies being 'safe' emerges from all the churches, whatever their Espoused Theologies.

Positive beliefs include the opportunity to:

> Put the life of the child in Christ's hands – he will care. (Ch2.LH)

> However long the child's life is likely to be, the baptism will last for the life of the baby. (Ch2.LH)

> Give them to the Lord before they arrive to be with him. (Ch1.JB)

> The Bible says that God would mercifully and gracefully accept the child into heaven. (Ch2.TB)

Prayer is considered important by some contributors:

> Prayer is more important than ritual and water. (Ch2.FG)

> A prayer or blessing over the child is enough. (Ch2.JC)

> Prayers might be helpful to the parents. (Ch3.LF)

Most of the ordinary theologians believe that baptism is not necessary for salvation.

> Babies go sinless to heaven; there is no such thing as original sin and no need to expunge. (Ch3.JS)

> Baptism is not necessary; it is just done for superstitious reasons. (Ch4.DR)

> Baptism does not save the baby. (Ch5.PA)

Ongoing compassionate comfort to the parents is advocated:

> When their faith is at rock bottom, they will know that the congregation is there to help and nurture them and this might be an opportunity to explain what a 'proper' baptism is, explaining that God is merciful and just and does not need any ceremony. (Ch4.FG)

Compassion is extended to the parents and grieving relatives.

Formal Theology and espoused beliefs regarding infant or believers' baptism are disregarded when immediate baptism is requested, and an operant belief is substituted. Assurances are given that parents would see their babies again in heaven; (Ch6.BG) and questions about baptism and salvation are abandoned. Comfort and compassion-in-action for the parents overtakes all doctrine and dogma by permitting baptism in the emergency situation.

All six Ministers agree that they would be prepared to undertake an emergency infant baptism even if their personal theology opposed this, but with different levels of enthusiasm and conviction. One Minister says he would 'Grab a Deacon and do it at the hospital. I would prefer at least one member of the body of Christ to be present, but I would do it alone'. (Ch1.M).

Another Minister is less enthusiastic: 'I would be willing based on sympathy for the parents'. (Ch3.M) and the least enthusiastic Minister says that he would consider it if requested for the parents' sake and for comfort. Compassion overwhelms the Formal and Espoused Theologies and even the usual Operant Theologies of the Ministers concerned.

Two Ministers want to substitute an alternative for baptism:

> This is one of the situations to consider a dedication rather than a baptism. One of the baptismal promises is to bring up the child in the faith and this cannot be promised. I would prefer to work with the parents. (Ch5.M)

> I would be ready to do it, but I would call that a dedication of the child into God's hands. If it meant sprinkling a little water over the baby, if the parents want this, then I would be flexible. We would be looking to show God's grace to the family. (Ch4.M)

The final Minister says that he has no problem with conducting the baptism but:

> I do have a problem with the concept behind it that the infant would not enter through the pearly gates if I didn't do it. I am persuaded of the rightness of the baptism of infants, but these circumstances are different. Here it is convenient to baptize and that is what I am supposed to do. (Ch2.M)

The Ministers are willing to undertake emergency baptisms for the sake of the parents but are reluctant to express the details of their beliefs about the underlying theology of immediate baptism and its connection to baptismal salvation.

The academics are more enthusiastic:

> I feel very strongly about emergency baptisms. In *extremis* I would baptize without water but there is a presumption of water – the water of life. Not just babies about to die but babies in the womb. If the baby is not going to survive in the womb, I would be prepared to do it pre-birth or if they are so damaged that they need to be aborted. (Ac.2)

> I took the advice of the Chaplain and did an emergency baptism for a still-birth. This is the Sacrament of Grace and God's love reaching out. (AC.1)

There is no evidence of reluctance for emergency baptisms, but some Ministers may hold conflicting personal theological beliefs.

The question of emergency baptism for adults has not been explored as it did not arise in the initial fieldwork, but it does raise the question of deathbed baptisms which is considered on pages 164 and 165.

An emergency baptism may be a rare event and Ministers may never have been faced with this dilemma. Ordinary theologians may never have had need to think about it before. However, the question of emergency baptism is included in the project because it serves several purposes and reveals some interesting insights into the beliefs that people hold. Firstly, it explores theologies and beliefs that are very personal. It provides an opportunity to investigate what theologies people hold personally and what happens when their beliefs encounter a situation where their baptismal theologies and their compassions clash. There is evidence in the articulations of the ordinary theologians, the Ministers and the academics that love and compassion theologies triumph every time over more dogmatic approaches. This also appears in other areas of the thesis but perhaps in more nuanced ways. Secondly, asking questions of my contributors for which they have had no notice and probably no experience could be regarded as precipitating opinion rather than theology.

I believe that it is valid to ask people to search within themselves, to explore their inner, previously unarticulated beliefs and to produce explanations for the beliefs they hold. This is certainly true in this area of the study where contributors are able to articulate their beliefs and reasoning. An example of this occurs in one focus group where they want the parents to know that the church is there to help them because 'God is merciful and just and does not need any ceremony'. (Ch4.FG) Their awareness and compassion has a belief based on the merciful nature of God. Particularly in the case of the ordinary theologians, this area of the study provides evidence of how the contributors develop their theologies-on-the-hoof on this subject and, arguably, on other theological areas.

The ordinary theologians have developed their own beliefs that are fairly uniform across all the churches. Their operant beliefs are of love and compassion, and they are prepared to use biblical references to authenticate their beliefs.

There may be a poverty of Systematic Theology, but strong and substantiated beliefs are displayed to be present in their place.

Having examined the responses of the contributors to questions relating to infant baptism, I will now return to the analysed data from Chapter 5 and give consideration to the articulations expressed by my contributor relating to adult and believers' baptism.

Chapter 7: Baptism for adults

This chapter explores the articulations regarding baptism for adults including age and understanding, any limitations on baptism, and the question of rebaptism.

7.1   Adult baptism or believers' baptism – is there a difference?

In the previous chapter on infant baptisms, a number of the contributors are shown not to have a clear and consistent agreement about the use and understanding of the terms 'baptism' and 'christening' when considering infant baptism. Similar perplexity became evident about the phrases 'adult baptism' and 'believers' baptism'. In order to understand the meanings that ordinary theologians attach to these terms, it is important to appreciate the language they are using.

Believers' baptisms are rare or unknown in all but one of the churches, some congregations never having witnessed such a service. Five of the churches have fonts, two of which are small and stored in a cupboard through lack of use. Only two churches have adult baptismal pools, one not having been used in decades. None of the churches have what might be considered to be traditional stone or wooden fonts. Where contributors have witnessed an adult baptism, it is often a novel experience held in a neighbouring church with little theological explanation offered and not providing a sound basis for their beliefs.

7.1.1 Adult and believers' baptisms from the literature

The WCC uses the terms adult and believers' baptism interchangeably, preferring to use a confession of faith and age as the distinction:

> When the expressions 'infant baptism' and 'believers' baptism' are used, it is necessary to keep in mind that the real distinction is between those who baptize people at any age and those who baptize only those able to make a confession of faith for themselves. The differences between infant and believers' baptism become less sharp when it is recognised that both forms of baptism embody God's own initiative in Christ and express a response of faith, made within the believing community (WCC, 1982).

The WCC equates 'believers' baptism' with candidates making a confession of faith as envisaged by Calvin, and roots the distinction, not in age, but in the expectation of a response in faith, presumably from the parents in the case of a child, and the candidate for an older person. Hence it blurs not only any difference between adult and believers' baptism but also between infant and believers' baptism.

A convincing differentiation between adult and believers' baptism theology is not made in the literature without which it is difficult to set a level below which theological poverty might become a reality.

7.1.2 Ordinary theologians' views on adult baptisms and believers' baptisms

Half the ordinary theologians are unclear about the term 'believers' baptism':

> Never come across the term. (Ch4.PC)
>
> Believers' baptism. Has the term been used? (Ch1.FG)
>
> Not sure what it is. It probably needs to be adult. (Ch3.LF)
>
> Not a term I know. (Ch3.MN)

For these ordinary theologians, adult baptism is infant baptism administered to an older person. One contributor identifies her own baptism as an adult version of infant baptism administered by sprinkling: 'I made a decision to follow Christ. For me it was a way of showing that I had taken this step'. (Ch5.PA) Other ordinary theologians want to discuss believers' baptism which is defined by one contributor: 'Believers' baptism is an individual statement of faith with baptism by full immersion'. (Ch1.AD)

A number of ordinary theologians speak about their own baptisms as adults:

> For believers' baptism you must understand what you're believing and what you're doing. (Ch1.BS)
>
> When I received baptism by immersion, I became a born-again Christian. (Ch4.DE)
>
> I wanted to be near Jesus and be more like him. (Ch6.EM)

The debate about believers' baptism becomes particularly active in the focus groups:

> Believers' baptism is accurate and scriptural. Believers' baptism means immersion. (Ch4.FG)

> This is more the thing I would call baptism. I believe in God, and I wanted to be baptized into the Church. (Ch5.KS & Ch5.FG)

> Believers' baptism means belief in the Lord as my Saviour, and it would fulfil my journey with him. I would be giving myself to him. (Ch6.FU & Ch6.FG)

Again, the beliefs are strong and reasoned but stated in the contributors' own language. Salvation is replaced by 'my Saviour'; reception into the Church by 'baptized into the Church'; and commitment by 'give myself to him'. These statements articulate a wide range of beliefs, not deeply systematised but rich in detail. They include being born again; being more like Jesus and being baptized into the Church.

Other beliefs include believing in Jesus as Saviour; giving yourself to him; understanding what you are doing; making a statement of faith and having Scripture as the basis for baptism. Lively discussions occur in the focus group at one church where comments reveal strongly held beliefs about believers' baptism on one side and somewhat weaker beliefs on infant baptism on the other. Ordinary theologians holding the different beliefs are not grouped along church lines nor according to the practice of their Ministers and churches. It is a personal matter, often depending on their own experiences of believers' baptisms. Ordinary theologians articulate their own beliefs which, at times, are different from the Espoused Theologies of their home churches. The dissonance apparently causes them and their Ministers, little discomfort or even awareness of the discord.

Ministers and academics are also divided over the difference between adult and believers' baptisms. One Minister describes it as a tautology: 'Baptism is only done to believing adults so how is it distinctive from 'non-believers' baptism'. (Ch5.M) Another is clear: 'Baptism means believers' baptism by immersion following a confession of faith. It has a clear sense of repentance and confession of faith and a decision to live as a follower of Jesus'. (Ch6.M)

However, one Minister conducts both infant and adult baptisms in the same way.

> I make no difference in the style of service, but some differences may be determined by other factors. People may be baptized at all stages of their life, and I do this by sprinkling or pouring. Age is immaterial to the service or its meaning. (Ch2.M)

Another Minister demonstrates reluctant acceptance with demand taking precedence over Espoused Theology: 'Lots of people in their teens and twenties are asking for believers' baptism. That is the practical stance of many who are round about me, however much I may disagree'. (Ch2.M) A different Minister asks whether believers' baptism had to mean immersion or whether it can be done by sprinkling. (Ch3.M)

One academic baptizes by pouring for both adults and infants using the same form of service, not accepting the alternative form of believers' baptism by immersion:

> I do not use the term 'believers' baptism' because it creates a false distinction. Believers speak of it against infant baptism and a strong theology of believers' baptism has influenced a lot of churches detrimentally'. (Ac.1)

It appears that the term 'believers' baptism' is meaningful and important to some of the ordinary theologians particularly where they have witnessed or participated in a service where it is taking place. Given this, it is reasonable to suggest that they have firmly held beliefs. However, many of the contributors are vague about believers' baptisms and theological poverty does exist.

7.2   Age, understanding, preparation and professions of faith as factors

Most of the ordinary theologians want to discuss a minimum age of candidates for adult baptism but others are concerned about the candidates' level of understanding. Some contributors want candidates to undergo a time of preparation, but more people are concerned that they should make a profession of faith before baptism. These limiting factors will now be considered.

7.2.1 Concerning factors in the literature

Age related written material comes to no clear conclusions, but some Formal Theology is available. Taylor comments that:

> They do not list an age that a child would suddenly be able to become aware of their sin and make this profession of faith. Therefore, one cannot determine who should or should not be baptized based upon age but rather based on whether or not they have made a profession of faith in Christ (Taylor 2013, p.5).

The matter is not clarified by Baillie:

> What difference does [baptism] make at the time … to the child who is quite incapable of anything we could call 'the faith of the recipient'? In facing that question we must ask: When *does* the child become capable of the beginning of faith? … At what age does this possibility begin? How far back can we go? And where shall we draw the line? (Baillie 1961, p.85).

Some writers link the age for baptism to that for confirmation and communion.

Calvin considers that understanding is necessary for admission to communion and, by inference, for adult baptism.

> The Passover, for which the Supper is substituted did not admit guests promiscuously but was duly eaten only by those who were of an age to ask the meaning of it (Calvin, 1990, p. 550)

Kung (1975, p.39) uses confirmation to identify an 'age of reason' but notes that different ages have been considered appropriate through the centuries. 'With all this, it is impossible to say what the normal age for confirmation is'. Hence, the literature is not clear on the Formal or Normative Theology of an age at which adult baptism might be appropriate.

With a lack of agreed theology, it is difficult to determine a standard age from the literature against which any potential candidate for baptism can be measured, and there is no boundary against which theological poverty can be quantified.

Different levels of preparations are required including elaborate actions in the Patristic period with Tertullian asserting in De Baptismo 20 that such preparations are essential before baptism can be conducted including fasting and night vigil (Kline 1995). Sinless infants have no need of such preparations or baptism. The Hellenistic phase sees liturgy become the central expression of Christian discipleship. This includes the development of the catechumenate and a forty-day period of preparation ending in the Easter vigil (Spencer, 2013, p. 8).

Christian initiation changes significantly in the fourth century when the rigour of preparation drives people to postpone baptism. Ambrose, Augustine and Chrysostom are not baptized until adulthood and a set of very elaborate ceremonies develops, not as preparation for baptism but for enrolment into the Christian community. The elaborate procedures become less important as infant baptism becomes the church's normal practice. The period of preparation before baptism disappears with teaching moving from preparation for baptism to preparation for a new rite of confirmation (White S. , 1997, pp. 95-96).

Lutheran approaches involve a sequence of preparation, presentation, thanksgiving, renunciation of evil, and profession of faith leading to Triune baptism. Instruction continues for both preparation and post-baptismal discipleship (Burns, 2006, p. 150).

More recently, Ellis (2004) notes that some churches baptize immediately those who present for baptism, while others baptize them on a future occasion after due preparation. A study of the clergy in the Church in Wales offers insight into the Espoused Theology about preparation. Half the respondents recommend preparation courses for adult baptism with clergy running these courses. Two thirds of participants believe that churches should require parents to attend a preparation course when presenting infants for baptism.

Most of the Welsh clergy are also concerned with the pastoral aftercare of those they have baptized (Francis, Littler and Thomas, H. 2000, pp.82–83).

There is little literature about preparation within the Congregational tradition, but Dale (1996) appeals to Scripture:

> We have, according to the letter of the commission, no more right to limit the command to baptize to those who are taught than we have to limit the command to teach to those who are baptized. There is no case in the New Testament in which baptism is refused to any applicant until he has made a satisfactory profession of faith in Christ (Dale 1996, p.128).[44]

This call is taken up by Adams (1994, p.6) who identifies the 'Congregational sequence of events … where an acknowledgement of the grace of God by Christian parents leads to a personal confession of faith'. Congregational baptism is said to be restricted in this way to the children of church parents and therefore, preparation is not needed. This presumption is open to challenge with today's mobile populations and changes in church tradition. Given the variations of requirements for preparation for baptism from the literature, both historically and Congregationally, there is a lack of clarity about which preparations are needed. Hence, there is no clear standard against which theological poverty can be assessed.

The WCC, in their document on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM) (1982, p.3) states that baptism on a personal confession of faith is 'the most clearly attested pattern in the New Testament' and is evident in the baptism of believers. They identify those churches who practice exclusively the baptism of believers following a personal confession of faith. BEM also recognises churches who baptize infants, expecting that parents who present their children will make a profession themselves and: 'the [child's] personal response will be offered at a later moment in life', anticipating that a form of confirmation will follow.

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[44] Note the dated gender reference

Confirmation is also believed by Myers (2001) to be an opportunity for individuals to make a profession of faith for themselves to replace those previously made on their behalf by others.

Historically, Calvin believes that the primary goals of baptism are to make a public profession of faith, and to join the Universal Church of Believers (Jones 2010, p.19). Barth (1948, p.47) quotes from Schleiermacher that, as a 'simple truth … Infant baptism is a complete baptism only when the profession of faith which comes after further instruction is regarded as the act which consummates it'.

From the Congregational perspective, the CF's publication 'Patterns of Worship', one of the sources of guidance does not suggest a service of confirmation, linking a profession of faith to church membership (Cleaves & Durber, 1998, p. 311).

There is little explicit theology requiring a profession of faith before baptism except from Calvin and the Westminster Confession, but there is an anticipation from some writers that a profession would occur. In some churches, baptism is confined to the infants of church members and the faith of the family is anticipated. In other churches where an 'indiscriminate' policy is adopted, the faith of families is unknown. Some churches 'confirm' this baptismal faith at a later date, but this is unusual in Congregational churches. The position presented by Argent (2012) is that Congregationalists ask of those parents who present their children for baptism that they solemnly affirm their own Christian faith and promise that they will nurture their children in that faith. Adults who present for baptism for the first time will be required to affirm their faith. Hence, a confession of faith is important, in parents for their infants and by personal commitment by adults.

Overall, the theological literature varies in its recommendations from requiring a full profession of faith through to a complete absence of the action with systematic theologians holding very differing views. Formal Theology, the theology of theologians, does not present a cohesion of opinion as a unified standard.

There is no evidence that my contributors are aware of this lack of a unified theology. They provide no evidence of concern for any controversies, or understanding of why theologians disagree, the reasons behind that divergence or the resulting consequences. Such unawareness may be considered to constitute theological poverty However, there is evidence that the ordinary theologians have constructed their own beliefs about the need for professions of faith despite the lack of an agreed Formal Theology and are content with these personal beliefs.

7.2.2 Concerning factors from the interviews

Some articulations expose depths of belief about age that are held with conviction:

> Baptism should be after an intelligent decision because it is telling the world about this commitment. (Ch4.KS)

> I would probably not give a specific age for an adult baptism, but it has to be beyond the age of understanding, the age of knowing God. (Ch4.JD)

> When they are old enough to make decisions for themselves. (CH4.DR)

The majority of the ordinary theologians prevaricate when pressed about a specific age, but some did venture suggestions: 'I think it should be a young adult, eleven. They should make the decision and carry it forward', (CH5.KS) and 'Twelve at least, well into the teens, twelve is not too young and late juniors – those who know'. (Ch4.FG) Others offer: 'younger children, about ten, not three but eight is OK'. (Ch5.FG) One focus group note that spiritual maturity is different to physical maturity. (Ch2.FG) The only firm age offered is linked to Judaism: 'We should be guided by Jewish tradition, the coming of age at thirteen'. (Ch4.DR) A perceptive comment is: 'Old enough to ask for pocket money'. (Ch6.FG)

Ordinary Theologies emerge about adult baptism, with age and understanding as limiting factors. One contributor says: 'You can get redemption at any step before judgement without baptism'. (Ch2.LH) Her theology of salvation does not depend on a preceding baptism. She cites the dying thief on the cross and Jesus' statement: 'Today you will be with me in Paradise'. (Luke 23:43) Baptism is not a requirement for admission into heaven.

The academics are not concerned about the age of candidates: 'Age? I go with the flow of what people want to do. I will baptize an eight-year-old and, if requested, I will baptize on the deathbed; I would not hesitate'. (Ac.1) Both academics hold a theology of inclusion of young and old wherever they are on their Christian journey but agree that they would test the level of understanding of candidates personally before proceeding.

A particular concern raised by ordinary theologians involves baptism in later life:

> Delaying baptism until late in life shows a fundamental misunderstanding of Scripture and baptism. When we are saved, we are saved from all our old sins … and the death bed may be too late for baptism. (Ch2.TB)

> We can't get away with all the things we have done. We have to face all the bad things we did. We can't do anything about it and we have to have help to get through it … We are clutching at straws. (Ch3.LF)

This first comment relies on a Normative, scripturally based theology of baptism producing an operant belief that separates salvation from baptism. Against this is offered: 'Sin, past, present and future will be absolved in baptism by the blessed blood of Christ' (Ch4.DR) and, 'We cannot make the judgement about people's hearts – only God knows whether they are saved through baptism'. (CH4.DE) This first belief holds that absolution and forgiveness are obtained through baptism while the second avoids the question. Two father-tongue phrases are included here – 'absolved in baptism' and 'the blessed blood of Christ'. 'Absolution' is not a concept offered by any other ordinary theologian. The phrase 'blood of Christ' is not 'mother-tongue' and may have been absorbed from a Minister or other Normative theological source. Its use is not developed in conversation. These operant beliefs are individual, expressed freely and with conviction but are not present in most ordinary theologians and churches.

There is no consensus in the interviews about an appropriate age for baptism despite there being some theologies being expressed to support the contributors' beliefs. This does not suggest theological poverty but rather, theological variance. It is not confusion but is divergence.

Overall, contributors are more concerned that candidates should have a good understanding of baptism, what they are doing and why they are seeking baptism rather than at a specific age or time of life:

> You need adult understanding and commitment. (Ch3.MS)

> They need to understand the reasons for what they are doing. (Ch6.FU)

> You should be old enough to be saved and to know what that means. (Ch4.SW)

The articulated theologies of the Ministers are more consistent, but no age for baptism is proposed: 'Age is less important than understanding and preparation. They need a clear understanding of the need for forgiveness and new life'. (Ch6.M)

This comment does not explain whether the act of baptism affords forgiveness or whether forgiveness springs from an action at some other time and place. One Minister baptizes everyone whenever requested, even quite young. (Ch1.M) Another Minister (Ch5.M) starts to comment that candidates for baptism need to be old enough to understand Triune baptism but then, thoughtfully, qualifies his concerns: 'But …. am I really going to ask them to explain the Trinity?' (Ch5.M) His theology is being internally critiqued and adapted as necessary. Discussing deathbed baptisms, he cites the parable of workers in the vineyard receiving full measure, not having laboured all day and comments that baptism is baptism whenever it is administered.[45]

The only understanding one Minister expects from candidates is: 'I love Jesus, he loves me, and I follow him', (Ch6.M) anticipating a very basic understanding of the need for forgiveness and new life. On death-bed baptism, he comments that this is a very silly idea, but, as an afterthought, admits that he would not refuse to perform the baptism. Deathbed baptisms are questioned as they could be seen as 'insurance policies for salvation' but none of the Ministers say that they would refuse.

The Ministers agree that they would baptize candidates of any age but do not agree on whether it should be conducted in the same way for both adults and infants.

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[45] Matthew 20: 1-16

Understanding of baptism is considered important but minimum standards are not offered.

One Minister states that he has no rule about offering baptism but that he would perform 'an assessment on the applicant' and would judge, not only by their understanding but also whether 'it is the right moment in the person's life'. (Ch3.M)

A minority of paedobaptist ordinary theologians do not recognise the term 'Profession of Faith'. This expression causes difficulty to others until it is suggested that the words 'testimony', 'story', 'witness', or 'journey' could be used. Semantics are hiding personal beliefs. Some ordinary theologians expect a profession of faith to be made in the baptismal waters just before the act. One contributor comments:

> It is helpful to communicate faith to friends, family and Christians and share where they are on their journey. The Lord knows where they are, but it is helpful for others to know. (Ch5.MJ)

Another ordinary theologian says: 'It is standing up before God, standing up before fellow Christians and standing up before unbelievers to make a statement'. (Ch5.PA) This articulation carries evidence of commitment, witness, and evangelism within the simplicity of a mother-tongue conviction. A profession is considered by 22 of the 36 ordinary theologians to be helpful for the candidate and the church, and to serve as an act of witness to people attending to observe a believers' baptism:

> It is a witness to others of the change in your life. (Ch6.BG)

> That's what it is all about, openly confessing that you love God. (Ch5.JB)

> A profession of faith is important but not necessary'. Ch3.LF)

Others express reservations: 'Many people may want to [profess their faith] but not feel able to. It depends who they are giving testimony to', (Ch5.KaW) and 'I have difficulty with this concept. I don't understand the need'.(Ch6.FU) One articulation is: 'Affirmation of faith is a Congregational practice – but not in the CF'. (Ch4.FG)

Views vary on professions of faith among Ministers from denial (Ch1.M), to full support. (Ch6.M) Covenantal theology is cited: 'It is a profession of faith and mutual understanding - a sort of covenant'. (Ch2.M)

One Minister is particularly affirming: 'People telling their story is a wonderful thing, a wonderful expression of their faith. It is not just a quirky event. It should not be taken too lightly'. (Ch4.M)

Comments from the academics differ. One believes that a profession of faith should follow baptism, not precede it: 'The grace in baptism is demonstrated by professing your faith afterwards'. (Ac.1) The other academic takes a wider attitude: 'A profession of faith is not just a witness to the home community, it is a witness to nature, a witness of spirituality, to the community in this time and space'. (Ac.2)

There is no consensus about the place of a profession of faith attached to the act of baptism among the professional theologians that can serve as a guide in the search for theological poverty.

The majority of the ordinary theologians agree that a profession of faith is useful and acceptable with differing levels of enthusiasm but with little Systematic Theology expressed to support their beliefs, hence suggesting theological poverty. However, there are expressions of depth behind some of the contributors' beliefs, for example, the need to witness before family, friends and the church.

Adult baptism is related to church membership by some ordinary theologians with people being welcomed into membership following baptism. There is 'rejoicing in the sight of an adult baptism'. (Ch2.FG) This implies that adult baptism, like infant baptism, involves incorporation into the body of the Church and into the particular church where that baptism has taken place. This relates back to the incorporation of new members that was found in the historical review. This fuses the Espoused Theologies of baptism and church membership with the beliefs of welcoming and celebration.

7.3   Is intellectual impairment a barrier to baptism as an adult?

The European Evangelical Alliance (McLauchlan 2019) notes that terms of description such as 'disability' and 'people with disabilities' are all inadequate in some way. Intellectual impairment is used in this thesis as a blanket term which, it is hoped, will be sufficiently descriptive and yet prove to be acceptable to those people who live with their disabilities.

One aspect of adult baptism shown to be important to ordinary theologians is the level of understanding that candidates should possess. They consider that the appropriate age for believers' baptism should be determined by the level of understanding of candidates. To challenge this concept, contributors are asked to consider the situation of people who live with intellectual impairments.

7.3.1 Theologies on intellectual impairment from the literature

The theologies that exist have developed largely from the disability rights movement. Barnes (2019) proposes a move away from medical models of disability and offers a social model that recognises variety in impairment, locating disability within society. Disability Theology includes the need to provide access to and inclusion in church life, involving people with learning disabilities or intellectual impairment.

A theology of disability that is proposed by McLaghlan (2019) includes the spirituality of disability. He anticipates consideration of the person in the image of God asserting that those with disabilities are of equal worth in God's eyes (theological anthropology). He requires inclusion of the person in the drama of salvation involving which aspects of a life lived with disability might be preserved through the resurrection (soteriology and eschatology). Inclusion in the body of Christ is also important with questions involving worship and Church life (ecclesiology).

He uses arguments from L'Arche communities, that people with disabilities reveal the true nature of humanity and that our ideas of self-sufficiency are unmasked by God 'through these brothers and sisters of ours'.[46]

Salvation through baptism for people with intellectual impairment or dementia is considered by McLaughlan. He asks whether salvation requires, not only the work of Christ, but also an intellectual understanding of the Gospel, and the ability to articulate it. In contrast, Swinton (1997, p.25) suggests that those with intellectual disabilities can powerfully encounter and respond to God's saving grace through their relationships with others. The right to be part of the Church is addressed by Hauerwas (1988, p.187) who identifies some comments from the Catholic bishops:

> They are nowhere more eloquent … than when they describe the warm acceptance with which handicapped people[47] should be gratefully welcomed into the ecclesial community wherein we can all benefit from their spiritual gifts and the self-realisation they share with the rest of us in the Christian community, namely, that 'we all live in the shadow of the cross' (Hauerwas 1988, p.187).

McLaughlin (2019) expects that those with disabilities should minister God's grace to others. Participation in worship involves presence, rather than any particular activity.

There is an important difference between the baptism of an infant who lacks the ability for understanding but is likely, in due course, to obtain such understanding, and an adult with intellectual impairment. This is addressed by Whitt (2012, pp.60–67) who considers that a person may remain 'in a child-like position in the Church and never fully belong to the community of believers'. He emphasises the 'belongingness' of baptism and that they can show their response to the Gospel in other ways: 'We are made members of Christ far more by what is given than is expected'. They can show their love of God and of the Gospel more freely than those without such disabilities.

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[46] [A report on the activities of Jean Vanier working at L'Arche concluded that] "the organization had nothing to do with the sect and found no evidence that the beliefs of L'Eau Vive had spread to other L'Arche leaders. (From: Jean Vanier | Biography, Sex Abuse, L'Arche, & Facts | Britannica)

[47] The phrase "handicapped people" is used by Hauerwas but is now dated. See my comment on this on page 168

Whitt's view links the situation of intellectual impairment with that of indiscriminate baptism:

> Those in the tradition of believers' baptism should baptize persons with profound intellectual disabilities – not all such persons indiscriminately, but those children and adults who are already present in our congregations, the sons and daughters of faithful parents who have included them in the life of the Church (Whitt 2012, pp.60–67).

Hence, he excludes from baptism, candidates who do not have Christian parents. In this way, he appears to discount the many people in the community who join churches of their own volition without their parents joining as well. He is convinced that believers' baptism is the norm for most people but recognises that 'there are cases where baptising one who cannot confess faith is a proper affirmation of that person's place in the body of Christ' (Whitt 2012, pp.60–67).

There is little written in Congregational literature relating to disability and baptism. Dale (1996, p.126) assumes that teaching and growth will bring a child to spiritual maturity and knowledge of the faith, and that as adults, they will be able to express their faith. No allowance is made for intellectual impairment.

Similarly, Argent (2012, p.84) states that 'those adults who come to Congregational churches for baptism for the first time will be required to affirm their faith', again with no allowance for disability.

The literature on baptism and intellectual impairment is growing. The European Evangelical Alliance recently identifies the importance of: 'Those with learning or intellectual impairment, where communication and understanding also need to be addressed' (McLachlan, 2019). A full understanding, appreciation and development of a Systematic Theology of Disability is still in progress, particularly where that disability relates to intellectual challenges. It would appear from the literature that the systematic theologians have yet to complete that task and provide full guidance.

7.3.2 Responses on intellectual impairment from the interviews

Similarly, ordinary theologians who anticipate good levels of understanding before baptism make allowance for people with reduced intellectual ability.

> Intellectual impairment is difficult. There are different levels of understanding and all need to be respected. Despite any learning difficulties, we are all God's children and if baptism is what the person wants then it should be allowed. (Ch3.MN)

This compassionate approach that impairment should not be a barrier is articulated by the majority of ordinary theologians:

> Baptism as an infant is no problem so why should reduced educational ability be a bar to baptism. (Ch2.LH)
>
> It may be that they give of their faith in a different way. (Ch5.KaW)
>
> They should not be disbarred. They have true wants. (Ch5.KS)
>
> They come of their own free will but may not understand why, but you can't deny them baptism. (Ch5.KaW)

Some ordinary theologians require at least a minimum understanding of the purpose and meaning of baptism if the request is to be accepted. 'There needs to be real understanding and a declaration of belief before a baptism is undertaken'. (Ch5.KaW)

However, a more compassionate view appears when the baptism of people with intellectual impairment is raised in interview with the comment that asks, 'Who are we to judge how much understanding they have?' (Ch6.FG)

> People with learning difficulties may have an awareness and feel the presence of God and welcome God into their life. A person with Downs Syndrome received the Holy Spirit aged about 15. But parental guidance is needed. (Ch4.DE)
>
> God loves everybody. I work with adults with learning disabilities, and I know it is quite possible to have a faith. (Ch4.LS)
>
> God is a God of mercy and, if they can't understand the Gospel message, God has mercy on them. When they die, they will go to heaven like believers who die young. No one should be disbarred; that is really wrong. (Ch2.TB)

This shows traces of the same universalism for people with intellectual disabilities as is seen for all babies and children dying at a young age.

Some ordinary theologians still maintain the need for a degree of understanding together with a credible declaration of belief (Ch4.DR) but others believe that understanding is adequate as long as 'they know their Bible'. (Ch6.HU) Another contributor wants evidence of 'the concept of belief, salvation and morality'. (Ch2.LH)

These requirements may be testing even for many baptismal candidates who are not intellectually challenged. Several ordinary theologians rely on the pastoral knowledge of the Minister saying that regular church attendance would make matters clearer. (Ch5.MJ)

Two Ministers offer deeper comments:

> If infants are to be baptized, it is clear that baptism is not only to be offered for those who are able to adequately articulate a Christian faith. The grace comes from God, not from what I can do. (Ch2.M)
>
> In a person with impairment, they will need to be able to explain to me what baptism is. This is often more significant for people with learning difficulties. (Ch5.M)

Two other Ministers believe that intellectual impairment ought not to make any difference and that we should 'suffer the little children'. (Ch2.M & Ch1.M) A further Minister complains that we intellectualise things too much and that 'You can love Jesus without theology'. (Ch3.M) The final Minister, who has a sister who lives with Downs Syndrome, speaks with fondness of embracing her through baptism into the church. Most of the Ministers are more cautious than the ordinary theologians whose actions are more compassionate.

The academics also show compassion:

> Salvation is by grace, not intellectual ability. Faith is a response to love and baptism is God reaching out in faith. So, impairment is no problem. It is wonderful. (Ac.1)
>
> Every case is different, so you need to go back to each individual case and decide. If there is a will to be part of the ceremony of baptism, I would be very supportive of supporting them. Intellect is not the primary act. Kinaesthetically, they would still understand something. (Ac.2)

Despite the lack of an advanced Formal Systematic Theology of disability being available, the ordinary theologians have formulated their own beliefs embracing compassion and love for those involved. They are clear that 'God loves everybody' and that they should be included in the life of the Church through baptism if that is their request.

7.4 The quandary of spontaneous believers' baptism

Some ordinary theologians express anxiety about invitations for immediate baptism being made by some Ministers, regarding it as the equivalent of an appeal to 'come forward' or an 'altar call' associated with baptism. Two contributors have witnessed a Minister, standing in the baptismal pool, inviting anyone in the congregation who wishes to be baptized to come forward for immediate, spontaneous baptism.

7.4.1 Examples of spontaneous baptism in the literature

There is little authoritative literature, but spontaneous baptisms are described:

> As the service closes, an invitation calls people to demonstrate a decision they have made. They are invited to come if they want to receive Christ, want to re-dedicate their lives to God, are in need of prayer, or desire to be baptized. Those wanting baptism are then immediately baptized, usually after a short conversation with a church leader (Hegg 2014).

Supporting immediate baptism, Emery-White (2014) indicates that almost every baptism in the New Testament is 'spontaneous'.

People are confronted with the Gospel, challenged with the importance of baptism and the need for a public expression of their new faith. He cites 'the Ethiopian eunuch, the earthquake-rattled jailer and the thousands confronted by Peter's preaching at Pentecost'. No biblical case is made for instruction or catechesis preceding baptism other than having heard the Gospel. Baptism is the beginning of a relationship with Christ, 'not a subjectively defined point of spiritual maturity'. He concludes that offering baptism 'on-the-spot' is thoroughly New Testament.

Against this, Hegg (2014) holds that there is no case in the New Testament of people being invited to be baptized. In Acts, baptism is a call for public confession of repentance and faith. He complains that spontaneous baptism provides no opportunity for the authenticity of the person's profession of faith to be represented in their life. 'To baptize someone merely because they desire it makes the ordinance into a product that any emotionally moved religious consumer can acquire for the asking'.

The New Testament practice of baptism immediately following the preaching of the Word is supported by Whitehead and Whitehead (1998). They consider it should be administered on demand, at the nearest appropriate place after hearing a sermon or having a conversation. They also cite the jailor and the eunuch and contrast it with the lengthy catechesis of later centuries. Explicit professions of faith or repentance are identified as in the case of Simon the magician and other Samaritans, or implied faith as in the case of Lydia and her household where the Lord 'opened her heart' are cited.

Comparing churches where Ministers baptize immediately any adult who presents with those churches who counsel candidates and baptize them on some future occasion, Ellis (2004) considers the evangelical message of the event. He is concerned with the challenge to the faith of new believers and the desire to lead members of the congregation to make personal commitments to accept Jesus as their Saviour. Neither author is strongly in favour nor against spontaneous baptism but both express concern with the pastoral care of the candidates. No attempt is made to construct a Formal or Normative Theology for the guidance of Ministers or ordinary theologians. The Federation is silent on this matter.

7.4.2 Responses from the interviews on spontaneous baptism

Beliefs in favour of spontaneous baptisms are articulated by some contributors:

> Immediate baptism should be freely available to everybody who believes in Jesus Christ. If you want to make a commitment to Jesus Christ when and where you are, the angels will celebrate in heaven. (Ch4.DE)

> It should be allowed if it is something someone feels they must do'. (Ch5.PA)

> John the Baptist would have said 'do it'. (Ch3.FG)

However, half the ordinary theologians are either cautious about the practice or oppose it, expressing concern about all invitations to 'come forward'. (Ch3.FG) They believe that they need to understand why the candidate is asking for baptism (Ch4.SW), and the need to be satisfied that the person believes. (Ch4.SW)

Contributors against the practice compare it to 'healing service hysteria', (Ch3.MS) and the 'euphoria of the moment'. (Ch1.MP) The need for preparation for baptism and knowing the candidate is also important (Ch2.RS & Ch6.BG). 'I hope the Minister speaks to them first to help them to understand what they are doing', (Ch4.LS) and 'It goes against the grain of needing preparation and that the candidate needs questioning'. (Ch6.BG)

Some ordinary theologians articulate a more permissive approach:

John the Baptist baptized anyone who came. (Ch4.SW)

What they need is friendliness not theology. (Ch6.FU)

It doesn't sit easily with me, but we are not meant to judge others. (Ch3.LM)

Comment is also made about the potential loss of witness to friends and family if the baptism is to be carried out without their presence.

It takes away the witness to family and friends and deprives their home church of sharing the moment. It misses the chance to teach the whole church about baptism. (Ch6.BG)

Personal experience, as a candidate or as a witness, causes greater reflection in some contributors and produces some personal theological views:

This may be real tangible evidence of the Lord's work in their life. (Ch2.TB)

We don't know where that person is on their journey. (Ch2.FG)

It's difficult to determine if the Lord will only send those people who are ready for baptism. (Ch4.DR)

It may be an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. (Ch1.TB)

If the Holy Spirit touches someone we should accept it. (Ch6.JT)

It would be hard to deny it if someone feels called to be baptized. (Ch3.FG)

> The Lord drew me, and I wanted to know more. I wanted to know the Lord for myself, and Jesus says, 'Follow me'. (Ch4.FG)

The articulated views of the ordinary theologians divide into three equal groups: those rejecting immediate baptism completely, those who are cautious; and those who welcome the decision and action.

The Ministers are all against immediate baptisms, one Minister stating:

> I have been to services where that happened and seen people come forward. I can see where they are coming from in Scripture … But I have heard of people who have regretted it and needed teaching and counselling afterwards. (Ch4.M)

One Minister declares that he would not conduct an immediate baptism as he believes that baptism is an act of the Church and not of the Minister. He observes that he could be over-ruled by the Church Meeting but considers that baptism is a pastoral act that ought to trump church doctrine. (Ch3.M) An experienced Minister observes that people requesting immediate baptism do have some form of Christian faith and that he would not obstruct someone who asked for such baptism. He is always pleased that someone has been listening and is receptive to the Holy Spirit. (Ch2.M)

One Minister dismisses immediate baptism, saying 'It leaves me cold'. (Ch1.M) Another Minister states that baptism should be a planned event and that he would not baptize anyone who had not been in the church for a while. He arranges believers' baptisms twice a year and comments that, if someone did receive immediate baptism, 'The worse that would happen is that he would have an early bath'. (Ch6.M)

The academics have differing views on immediate baptism. One comments that he is uncertain, interpreting it as relating to infant baptism but observing that he would refuse nobody who had come to faith through grace. (Ac.1) The second academic has no experience of immediate baptism and thought that it might have links to rebaptism. She would not refuse someone who felt 'the pull of the Holy Spirit' and would do it if it happened. (Ac.2) Overall, the academics have less defined theologies than the Ministers but are primarily against the action.

Despite the literature's lack of a common theology for spontaneous baptism, the ordinary theologians have formulated their own beliefs and express them freely and with evidence of consideration. Formal theological poverty appears to be present, but this is offset by each contributor having derived their own personal beliefs.

7.5   Is rebaptism acceptable?

Beliefs about second baptisms or rebaptism will now be considered.

7.5.1 Rebaptism in the literature

The literature on rebaptism is extensive and covers centuries of debate. The majority comes from authors who hold established and polarized positions. Some follow the lead from Tertullian, Calvin and the Council of Trent (1545) and state that rebaptism is unacceptable and others that rebaptism is to be encouraged.

BEM is clear in the Lima Report (WCC, 1982, p. 4): 'Baptism is an unrepeatable act. Any practice which might be interpreted as 'rebaptism' must be avoided'. This report became a Formal Theology within many Church traditions, (Wright, D. 1988, p.15) but it has been challenged by requests for believers' baptism made by people who were christened as an infant who now wish to be baptized by immersion. The person may desire to make a statement of faith or want to adopt the promises made on their behalf as an infant.

Those who reject rebaptism frequently quote Ephesians 4: 4-6:

> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; **one Lord, one faith, one baptism**; one God and Father of us all, who is over all and through all and in all. (My emphasis)

Evans (2016) believes that this text 'Ties the unity of baptism to the glorious unity of the Church in Christ'.

This belief is challenged by Wright (1988, p.9), who claims that it misrepresents Paul's 'undoubted' meaning that the baptism we undergo is common to us all and hence is 'one baptism'. Opposing this, Keating (2002, p.3) states that, if baptism identifies the candidate with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection once, there should only be a need to be baptized once. He regards baptism as an act associated with entry into the Christian faith and claims that 'properly speaking a person should only be baptized once during the course of their life'.

Some opponents of rebaptism, such as Wright, insist that the second baptism would deny the validity of the first and that candidates should be instructed that they are denying their first baptism by going through the waters of baptism again.

> We must surely stand firm in resisting requests for a second baptism from those who do not repudiate their first. This would be brazen rebaptism. To grant rebaptism to those who want to feel that they really have done the right thing by the New Testament would be a more blatant depreciation of their first baptism (Wright, D. 1988, p.21).

The fault of the Church, the water, the Minister or the candidate have all been used to invalidate baptisms. Barth takes a firm line:

> It is certain that no rejection of the order and practice of baptism through the fault of the Church, or through the fault or lack on the part of the candidate, can make the baptism of a person, once it has been performed, ineffective and therefore invalid, or can lead to or justify a call to rebaptism according to a better order and practice. There is no kind of inadequacy in baptismal order and practice that cannot be removed or put right by means quite other than that of rebaptism (Barth 1948, p.35).

He states that questions of impropriety should not be 'restored or replaced by some deplorable sectarian re-baptism'.

Concerns are expressed about the ceremony itself. Where the baptism was not administered 'In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit', Evans (2016) demands, there is a need for the baptism to be repeated for correction and validation:

> The theology of baptism suggests that rebaptism in instances where a valid baptism has already occurred runs counter to the symbolic nature of the Sacrament itself. The confessional prohibition on rebaptism is well-founded and ought to be observed. But pastoral considerations should not be ignored. They should be met with tact and sympathy (Evans, W. 2016).

He goes on to note that baptism is a sign of faith and an act of obedience which presupposes the faith of the recipient and hence, as long as that faith is solid, the obedience to baptism should not be denied.

Some authors look to Acts 19:1-7 for justification. The twelve disciples who receive the baptism of John for the remission of sins, are re-baptized in the name of Jesus and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit that they had not obtained from John's baptism (Evans, W. 2016).

Developing this argument, Carter (2021) asserts that baptism is an adult decision requiring maturity and understanding and claims that 'the lack of vital spiritual knowledge and understanding is a valid reason for rebaptism', a belief that is echoed by my contributors.

> If one was baptized as an infant or child, or even as an adult, but later came to the understanding of sin, repentance, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the role of the Holy Spirit, that person should consider rebaptism (Carter 2021).

This attitude would lead to the justification of all requests for a second baptism where it could be demonstrated that mature understanding through preparation and age has now been reached.

In the Congregational tradition, Dale (1996) does not address rebaptism but celebrates adult baptism, presuming the candidate to be already baptized:

> Baptism, when administered to an adult, is a visible assurance of the same great blessings that it assures to a child. It does not confer on him the blessings of the Christian redemption but declares that they are his. It is a wonderful gospel – a gospel to him individually. If he has genuine faith he will receive it with immeasurable joy (Dale 1996, p.139).[48]

The current Formal attitude of the CF is provided by Argent (2012):

> Re-baptism or second baptism is not encouraged in Congregational churches, on the basis that the promises made on that person's behalf as a child will have been honoured by God and that the person's eventual coming to faith is witness to the efficacy of Christ's activity in his or her life (Argent 2012, p.84).

Arguments abound but most authors agree on the need for pastoral care in dealing with a request for rebaptism. White (1997, p.104) calls for a 'creative balance between pastoral care and sensitivity, historical understanding, denominational discipline, biblical interpretation, and rigorous theological reflection'. Where a request for rebaptism is rejected, the Minister must expect resentment and will need to provide candidates with considerable pastoral care. If the request is permitted, they must anticipate that the decision may be met with distress and offence by paedobaptist members of the church.

The literature covers the full range of theological opinions on rebaptism but does not offer Normative or Formal evidence that is convincingly strong and compelling in any single direction. This lack of concurrence on an agreed theology makes it difficult to decide whether theological poverty is present or not.

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[48] Note the dated gender references

7.5.2 Some beliefs about rebaptism from the interviews

The published academics appear to be more concerned about rebaptism than my ordinary theologians. Several contributors offer in interview that they have undergone believers' baptism. Three ordinary theologians declare that they were christened as a child and baptized as an adult. (Ch2.AB, Ch2.LH & Ch6.FU) Other contributors needed an explanation that the term 'rebaptism', when expressed in vernacular language, is used to describe the baptism of an adult who has previously been baptized or christened as a child. Following this, thirty of the thirty-six contributors express the belief that rebaptism is acceptable, some strongly in favour and others more passively accepting it as a part of church life today. Inclusive acceptance occurs in all six churches, irrespective of the views of the Ministers concerned. Supportive comments are: 'It is something to be celebrated'; (Ch6.JT); 'It was something I needed to do'; (Ch3.LF) and 'It was my own confession of faith'. (Ch2.PC & Ch2.FG)

Statements include the view that a previous baptism or christening was administered to a baby who had no knowledge of the event: 'I didn't know about it as a baby. I was only a few weeks old' (Ch1.JB), and 'If you were christened or baptized and didn't know about it or didn't believe at the time, then it is OK for it to take place'. (Ch2.TB) Twelve other ordinary theologians are supportive, whether or not they have undergone believers' baptism themselves.

Some contributors believe that rebaptism either celebrates an earlier baptism (Ch2.RS), enhances it (Ch2.AB) or that it demonstrates what a good job the person's parents and godparents had done! (Ch5.JW) Reasons expressed by some ordinary theologians support rebaptism but only in certain unusual circumstances: 'You might want to recommit to Jesus especially if you have fallen away and want to return'; (Ch4.DE) (Ch3.FG) and 'If they feel it would make them a better Christian'. (Ch3.JH)

Adopting their own baptismal vows is important to some ordinary theologians:

I needed to make my own profession of faith by immersion. (Ch2.LH)

It's a bit like confirmation in the C of E. (Ch3.JH)

We should either rebaptize or provide a confirmation practice. (Ch3.JS)

This contributor does not make it clear whether 'confirmation' would be a rite that involved water or not. Confirmation is a rite previously practiced in Congregational churches but long since has been discontinued.

Rationalisation of the practice appears:

> Baptism is like a marriage – sometimes it is nice for the vows to be renewed. (Ch5.KWi)
>
> My second baptism was my real baptism. (Ch2.FG)
>
> It is not baptism 1 and baptism 2. They are different things for different reasons. (Ch2.AB)

This contributor is reluctant to develop these reasons further.

> The validity of both first and second baptisms is explored. Only one participant believes that undertaking a rebaptism invalidates the former event, (Ch3.JS) while thirteen believe that it is not a denial of infant baptism. (Ch1.AD, Ch1.MM & Ch6.EM)

The question of by whom, where and when the baptism was performed is of little interest and does not affect their belief in the validity of the action, especially where the rite is considered to be symbolic in meaning. (Ch3.LF)

The need for pastoral sensitivity in requests for a second baptism is emphasised by some ordinary theologians who feel that that refusal would be: 'Harsh, sad, ignorant and cruel'. (CH3.LF) However, caution is also expressed: 'It's not just something you do. Not on demand. They must think more deeply'. (Ch6.ML & Ch6.HU)

Six ordinary theologians believe that rebaptism is wrong or probably wrong and this is also encountered in three of the six focus groups where the phrase caused considerable discussion. A common quotation is from Ephesians 4:5: 'One Lord, one faith, one baptism'. (Ch1.FG, Ch2.FG & Ch3.FG) but the text is not developed or linked to the surrounding passage, simply saying that baptism 'is a one-off act'. (Ch3.FG)

The other comments against rebaptism are less well developed with little critical thinking: 'I don't like rebaptism. It can cause problems'. (Ch1.BS) and 'Some people do not think it is a good idea to be baptized twice'. (Ch4.DE)

A cluster of ordinary theologians from a strongly paedobaptist tradition agree that baptism loses its meaning if it is done too frequently. (Ch1.FG)

The majority of the Ministers are against rebaptism, one Minister saying that baptism should be administered once and should be complete in itself. (Ch1.M) He continued that he would seek to guide the enquirer away from rebaptism as it is not necessary, and it would invalidate their previous baptism. The focus group from that church also had difficulties with rebaptism. Only one Minister quotes from Ephesians 4:5, (Ch2.M) another saying it was wrong in doctrine (Ch3.M), and a third saying that scripture is quite clear about not being rebaptized. (Ch4.M) Two of the Ministers relent a little by saying: 'It might be right in extreme circumstances' (Ch3.M), and 'I would not refuse'. (Ch2.M) Two other Ministers say they would consider rebaptism 'if it was the will of the individual and the will of the church' (Ch4.M), and 'if someone wanted to rededicate themselves'. (Ch5.M) The remaining Minister is strongly in favour of rebaptism: 'Rebaptism – absolutely. What does it mean to a baby?' (Ch6.M) In this way, he demonstrates his disregard of infant baptism which he states he would not undertake despite the Trust Deeds of his church allowing the practice. One academic theologian expresses reservation with rebaptism:

> Personally, I have no problem and, if all other possibilities are excluded, I think I would be prepared to do it. If the belief was so important, we could have a ritual, a ceremony. Both first and second baptisms should be honoured. (Ac.2)

She likens rebaptism to the renewal of wedding vows.

The other academic theologian is completely against rebaptism saying that he would try to persuade applicants against it and explain his theology of baptism to them. He does not, however, go on to develop an explanation of this theology in the interview despite encouragement. He is of the opinion that the baptismal service is not just about the person to be baptized but is about the whole church. Finally, he admits, that he would 'Go with the flow'. (Ac.1) Both academic theologians are against rebaptism to differing extents but neither expands on their Formal Theologies. They concur with the majority of the Ministers but are not in accord with the majority of the ordinary theologians.

The distinction between the welcoming position of most ordinary theologians and the rejection by all but one of the Ministers and both the academics underlines the lack of harmonisation of the Normative and Espoused theologies of the Ministers and academics with the personal beliefs expressed by the ordinary theologians. The compassion of the ordinary theologians is displayed. With no agreed theology emerging from the literature and a lack of concurrence about what the professional theologians adopt, it is difficult to say whether theological poverty is displayed. However, the beliefs of the ordinary theologians are clear and supported by reasoned utterances.

7.6 Other theologies and conceptualisations

During the interviews, some contributors articulate a range of tentative theologies, and one is explored here. A number of the ordinary theologians raise the symbolism of dying and rising again through baptism, especially those who have undergone or witnessed believers' baptisms.

7.6.1 Other theologies and conceptualisations from the literature

Proselyte baptism is conversion from heathenism to Judaism implying new life. The Talmud asserts that new life, whether by dying and rising again or by a new birth is important (Beasley-Murray 1962, p.28).

He claims that:

> [The candidate] becomes united with the form of Christ's death … to become united with the form of his Resurrection … the believer dies and rises with Him … the believer suffers a death like Christ's and rises as He did … 'We were buried with him through baptism … that we might walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4)' (Beasley-Murray 1962, pp.362–363).

The early Church identified with the 'Constitutions of the Holy Apostles':

> This baptism, therefore, is given into the death of Jesus: the water is instead of the burial … the descent into the water the dying together with Christ; the ascent out of the water the rising again with Him (Jones 1998, p.12).

The Lutheran position combines dying and rising again with the singularity of baptism: 'The drowning, the dying of baptism lasts as long as we live. So too the rising from the water, the spiritual birth, continues until death' (Burns 2006, p.150).

Astley uses Paul's symbology of the dying and rising of Christ in baptism:

> People were baptized by total immersion in rivers or lakes, which involved being pushed under the water before coming up, gasping for air, in a psychologically potent, drowning-saving movement – a vividly felt, 'new birth (Astley 2010, p.71).

This symbology is summarised by Migliore:

> Baptism is described as a dying and rising with Christ. The descent into the water signifies the Christian's identification with the passion and death of Christ, whereby the power that sin has in the old way of life is broken, and the Christian's ascent from the water signifies a participation in the new life based on the power of the resurrection of Christ (Migliore 2004, p.283).

The theology of dying and rising with Christ is well-supported in literature. Inheriting pre-Christian practices, Paul interprets Jesus' death and resurrection in terms of dying and rising again in his Epistle to the Romans. This informs the beliefs of many Christians who practise believers' baptism today and provides a theological framework within which they can live.

7.6.2   Articulations regarding other theologies and conceptualisations

Many personal beliefs are articulated:

> Buried with Jesus. Go down and come right up. Bury the old and bring in the new. (Ch4.FG)

> Buried with Christ and risen with him. Rise in newness. (Ch4.FG)

> Baptism is the sign of being buried and rising again. (Ch2.TB)

> Going through the waters of baptism, I died to sin like Jesus, and I'm risen with him. New life in Christ. (Ch3.LF)

Symbolism is emphasised:

> Going into the water and coming out anew. Symbolic. (Ch4.JD)

> Death and resurrection is symbolic. Buried and being raised. (Ch4.SW)

> I prefer 'death and resurrection' – the idea of death and rising up. (Ch2.RS)

The symbolism of rebirth is evident:

> Dying and being reborn. Going under the water. (Ch1.JB)

> Washing away previous sins and rising to be a born-again Christian. (Ch2.JC)

> If I visualise this, I am more like Nicodemus, being born again, faith proclaimed. (Ch3.JS)

One ordinary theologian from a church that practices infant baptism almost exclusively, says: 'Death and rising again. Never heard of it. I'm not familiar with either concept'. (Ch3.MN) One articulation by a contributor from a church practicing believers' baptism makes reference to the Holy Spirit. She does not expand on whether she sees the Spirit as an essential participant in water baptism or whether she links water baptism with a separate baptism of the Holy Spirit: 'Born again of the Spirit'. (Ch6.HU)

One third of the ordinary theologians hold beliefs supporting the concept of death and rising again through baptism. All of them are contributors who prefer believers' baptism by immersion, but they do not articulate any critiqued theologies.

Theologies of the Ministers are against the symbolism of death and rising again:

Dying and rising again. Neither really finds favour with me. I think they are both likely to be used in ways that detract from what I understand to be a biblical frame. Baptism is often interpreted on the basis of Romans 6. (Ch2.M)

One Minister wants to separate dying from rising again: 'Dying in water is different from dying in the ground. Rising to life is more symbolic'. (Ch4.M) The final Minister dismisses the concept completely: 'Dying and rising again. Utter nonsense!' (Ch1.M)

The academics hold differing views, one taking the rising again as symbolic of the waters of life. (Ac.1) The other academic is more forthcoming:

The idea of dying and being born again is extremely difficult to express in words, signs, and concepts. Both are valid expressions of conceptualisation. They refer back to the image of Christ. It may be that the imagery of death and resurrection is not so useful to post-modern people. The blueprint is to be Christ-like. I prefer the idea of baptism being like the reset button. Everything is started anew. (Ac.2)

From these findings, it is clear that there is no concord between ordinary theologians, their Ministers and the academic theologians regarding the symbolism of dying and rising again in baptism.

Many considered comments are made suggesting that the ordinary theologians have, in their minds, representations of the symbolic nature of baptism.

Again, there is no absolute theology of the symbolism involved in baptism but, none-the-less, the ordinary theologians have considered the matter and constructed their own beliefs. Whether this constitutes theological poverty or a system of reflecting on their experiences and teaching will be discussed in Chapter 9.

The information gathered from the articulations of my contributors relating to both infant baptism and adult or believers' baptism has now been considered. It is now necessary to consider the role that is played by the method or mode of baptism in the formation of the beliefs of my contributors.

Chapter 8: How should baptism be carried out?

Having researched the question in Chapters 6 and 7, for whom baptism is intended, attention is now turned to the second half of Taylor's question – 'how should one be baptized?'.

Throughout the history of Christianity, baptism has been a topic of strong debate both theologically and practically. There are two major sections of debate that are currently fought in Christian circles. The first is the question of for whom is baptism intended? The second question is how should one be baptized? (Taylor 2013, p.1).

8.1   Aspersion, affusion and immersion (sprinkling, pouring and dunking)

The mode of baptism has long been widely contested. There are three popular modes and each of these has been in use since the time of the New Testament. The three modes are immersion (in which the person is completely submerged), affusion (pouring) and aspersion (sprinkling). The word *βαπτίζώ* [49] is considered by Flemington (1948, p.11) to be an intensive or iterative form of the verb βαπτώ, meaning 'to dip' or 'to plunge'. He expands that βαπτώ occurs 16 times in the Septuagint, all of them with this meaning.

Packer (2011, p.182) states that no particular mode of baptism is prescribed in the New Testament. He argues that all three modes fulfil the definition of *βαπτίζώ* even though he defines baptism as going under and emerging from pure water. The baptisms of John the Baptist are widely taken to imply immersion given the meanings of *βαπτίζώ.* On theological grounds, Bridge and Phypers (1977, p.29) consider that pouring is as appropriate a form of baptism as immersion, in that it portrays the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the believer.

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[49] dip, submerge, baptize - Strong's Concordance

They also claim that baptism by sprinkling represents the sprinkling with the blood of Christ which all Christians receive when, in faith, they lay hold of the benefits of Christ's death for themselves. The mode of baptism will be examined further in this chapter.

One of the most contentious areas regarding baptism is the manner by which it is administered. My ordinary theologians are asked to describe how a recent baptism they had witnessed had been conducted.

I explained that three methods of baptism are in usage in Western Christian Churches today, aspersion, affusion and immersion. In aspersion, a small amount of water is sprinkled by the Minister or other approved person onto the head of the candidate as is described in Ezekiel 36:25-27. In affusion, water is poured from a jug, shell, or other vessel over the head of the person, whether infant or adult. Immersion occurs where the individual, usually an adult, is completely submerged in water. The contributors' articulations are divided between descriptions of a traditional, infant baptismal format, either by sprinkling or pouring, and descriptions of a baptism by immersion. The more recent the baptism, the more likely it is to have been by immersion. Some ordinary theologians have difficulty in identifying with the words 'aspersion' and 'affusion' and so sprinkling and pouring are substituted in the interviews as acceptable 'mother- tongue' equivalents. Immersion causes less of a problem.

8.2   Are aspersion and affusion the preferred methods?

Baptism conducted by either sprinkling or pouring is the normal practice in five of the six churches. However, baptisms are very rare in two of the six churches and infrequent in a further two. The experience of the ordinary theologians is, therefore, limited, possibly resulting in poorer and less well-considered articulated beliefs.

8.2.1 *What does the literature contribute on aspersion and affusion?*

Historically, more attention is given to the age of the candidate than the mode by which baptism is conducted. The Church Fathers, Zwingli, Luther, Bucher, Bullinger and Calvin all hold differing views which, although they change over time, do not conclusively come to an agreed mode under which baptism should take place in the Reformed tradition.

The Savoy Declaration and Statement of Faith and Order (1658) gives the lead to Independent, and later, Congregational churches, simply stating that: 'Baptism is rightly administered by immersing the person in water; but where immersion is impossible, baptism by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person is satisfactory (Owen et al. 1990).

In Normative Congregational theological terms, there are no creeds or liturgies to be followed but guidance is given in 'Patterns for Worship'. This loose-leaf file describes itself as '… not an authorised service book but is in keeping with our Congregational heritage. We hope it will be used as one set of resources among many' (Cleaves and Durber 1998).

Without a clear Normative Theology, the status and consideration of the mode of baptism are waning in modern Congregational practice, causing Kennedy to observe (2016, p.8): 'By the beginning of the twentieth century, baptism in Congregational churches had lost most of its significance'. Wright (2016, p.76) agrees that baptism in much of evangelical church life cannot be understood in detachment from the predominance of infant baptism and its large-scale failure to initiate people into the Church. There is a lack of clear, relevant and applicable Normative Theology on baptism in the CF.

The URC's paper on Baptism and the Basis of Union (URC 2021, p.3), is equally equivocal, stating that Ministers will not be compelled to administer baptism in a form to which they object in conscience and that the URC will not allow a congregation to dictate one exclusive mode of baptism.

This centralist, directive form of ecclesiology is not present in the CF where the ultimate authority in baptism, as in everything, is given to the Church Meeting for each individual church.

Guidance from Dale in 1884 indicates, in his opinion, that sprinkling is the modern representation of the baptismal formula, and that the proper administration of baptism is independent of the quantity of water poured or sprinkled on the baptized person. On the question of whether immersion, affusion or aspersion is closest to apostolic practice he says: 'They are unable to attach any serious importance' (Dale 1996, p.129). Congregational theologian Alan Argent is clear that the mode of baptism is for the Minister and the church to decide together (2012, p.48) Traditional Congregational baptismal theology remains unclear.

As this is one of the great unanswered questions from across traditions and denominations, the literature displays a wide range of theological opinions from which to choose. In Congregational churches, this range is evident and some of the churches will provide one mode of baptism while others will adopt another, with some providing facilities for aspersion, affusion, and immersion within one church. Ordinary theologians may have the opportunity to experience many theologies and practices from which to formulate their own beliefs.

8.2.2 What articulations are offered regarding sprinkling and pouring?

A significant minority of ordinary theologians consider sprinkling or pouring to be preferable.

> Full immersion does nothing for me, and I prefer sprinkling only. I am happiest with sprinkling, especially for a baby but I can see where immersion comes from. (Ch3.JH)

> Sprinkle a little water and make the sign of the cross. It is Trinitarian. Include all the little children present so that they all pour a little water into the jug used to fill the font with water. (CH5.KWi)

Four contributors who come from the same church comment that there has been only one baptism in living memory and they refer to this event as a christening:

> Christening is the sprinkling of little babies. (Ch5.FG)

I am happiest with sprinkling especially for a baby. (Ch5.MU)

Sprinkling is fine and is related to christening. (Ch5.KS)

In a christening, water is poured on his forehead for infants. (Ch5.KaW)

Another ordinary theologian describes the use of a shell in baptism which would imply pouring, but states that they prefer sprinkling. No recent baptism by immersion is recorded at that church and, although they have a baptistry, it has not been used for many years.

For infants, sprinkling is the best way. We use a shell but that is a recent way of doing it. (Ch1.BS)

Sprinkling is for infants; immersion is for adults. (Ch1.TB)

One final comment is:

Any way, but sprinkling is best. (Ch2.PC)

Three of the six Ministers interviewed favour baptism by sprinkling:

I have used all three modes, but I am perfectly content with aspersion. (Ch3.M)

I use sprinkling for babies and young children, but it is perfectly valid for adults. (Ch3.M)

How? Sprinkling is the only way. (Ch1.M)

The firm views expressed by this last Minister are particularly interesting because this church holds dual accreditation to both the CF and the Baptist Union, and it does possess a baptistry. The Minister is very strongly in favour of sprinkling as the only acceptable method and no baptism by immersion could be remembered by the focus group. However, the contributors from that church have divided views with half preferring sprinkling to pouring, and half preferring immersion. This latter group voice stronger views to support their beliefs such as 'washing away sins', and 'the sense of entering the water as they are and coming out as a new thing'. Immersion produces greater animation in this focus group than any other matter.

Affusion also has its advocates amongst the Ministers in other churches:

> I use a palmful of water and pour the water over their heads three times. I am now more confident and have started using sprinkling. (Ch5.M)

> Affusion is very acceptable to older people, and it has post-apostolic approval. (Ch2.M)

The comment about post-apostolic approval is not developed.

Searching for a Formal Theology from the Ministers, there is a full spectrum of beliefs from sprinkling only to immersion only with others occupying the mid-ground. Only one of the Ministers offers a scriptural basis for their beliefs and none call on tradition to support their actions.

There is a lack of theological consistency demonstrated across the Congregational churches sampled. Given that the Church Meeting makes decisions about the mode of baptism and not the Minister, the statements made by the Ministers towards an Espoused Theology are surprisingly firm if divergent.

One academic theologian has strong beliefs about baptism by pouring.

> I think it is vital to pour water over the person, less water for a baby and more for an adult. The act of pouring demonstrates God's love pouring out on us.

> I show the parents or the candidate that I am going to portray the baptism by using a glass. The water symbolises God's Spirit poured over us and we are the glass. If the glass is upturned the water will flow away. If the glass is the right way up, the water will flow in and fill the glass with life-giving, useful life. The love of God is just as real as the water that is poured, and we catch the water as faith. I rarely use a font but usually I use a jug full of water. (Ac.1)

He also has views against baptism by immersion.

> I had a recent request for baptism by immersion. I took part in the service but did not undertake the baptism. Baptism means pouring water and demonstrates the Covenant of Grace. (Ac.1)

In contrast, the other academic theologian expresses no preference, being equally willing to accept the candidate or the family's requests.

> I am very happy to accommodate any mode of baptism that the family or the individual requests or even suggests. (Ac.1)

Aspersion and affusion are the preferred methods of baptism for most of the Ministers and academics and a significant minority of the ordinary theologians. However, this leaves the views of those favouring immersion still to be explored. Overall, there is little theology expressed to support the ordinary theologians' beliefs which appear to be based more on experience and practice than doctrine. One exception to this is the statement on the bookplate that the CF is Trinitarian but the mode of baptism practiced is more likely to be driven by tradition and practicalities than by theology making theology less obvious.

8.3   Is immersion the preferred method of baptism?

The ordinary theologians are asked to describe their thoughts and beliefs about baptism by immersion and this produces a division between those strongly in favour and those with weaker opinions against.

8.3.1 What does the literature say about baptism by immersion?

The writers of the Didache (50-120$_{CE}$) argue in favour of baptism by immersion.

> And concerning baptism, baptize in this way: Having first said all these things, baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in living water. But if you have no living water, baptize into other water; and if you cannot do so in cold water, do so in warm. But if you have neither, pour out water three times upon the head into the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit (Didache n.d.) (Chapter 7).

From this it can be seen that immersion is the normal mode of baptism in the early Church with aspersion or affusion being acceptable if little water is available. Candidates whose frailty prevents baptism by immersion are considered by Cyprian in his epistle, stating that other modes are legitimate:

> You have asked also, dearest son, what I thought of those who obtain God's grace in sickness and weakness, whether they are to be accounted legitimate Christians, for that they are not to be washed, but sprinkled, with saving water … whence it appears that the sprinkling also of water prevails equally with the washing of salvation (Cyprian of Carthage n.d., p.12).

The origin for immersion, Brooks claims, can be found in the *mikvah* in Jewish ritual pools (Brooks n.d., p.4), with Rabbis insisting on complete immersion *'tebilah'* (Kohler and Krauss 2017, p.1). The act of baptism is not described in detail in Scripture, but it depicts a person going 'down into the water'[50] or 'coming up out of the water'[51] suggesting that baptism is by immersion.

Defining the word baptism, Carson defends his view on immersion by identifying the word 'bapto' from 'baptizo', primarily to 'dip'. He claims that 'baptizo, in the whole history of the Greek language has but one [meaning]. It not only signifies to dip or immerse, but never has any other meaning' (1981, p.19). He maintains that 'If our Saviour commanded them to baptize disciples *in the profluent stream,* must not baptism be by immersion*'* (1981, p.114). Packer remains unconvinced, concluding:

> No prescription of a particular mode of baptism can be found in the New Testament. The command to baptize may be fulfilled by immersion, dipping or sprinkling; all three modes satisfy the Greek verb *baptizo* and the symbolic requirements of passing under, and emerging from, cleansing water (Packer 2011, p.182).

The Congregational theologian, Dale, disagrees stating: 'It is the general belief of Congregationalists that the second [by affusion or pouring] was the form most commonly adopted in primitive times…sprinkling is the modern representative'. He continues:

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[50] Acts 8:38 – the Ethiopian eunuch
[51] Mark 1:10 – the baptism of Jesus

> When there was sufficient water accessible for the purposes – a river, a pool or a bath, the person to be baptized stood in the water and the administrator, who stood with him, poured water freely over his head, repeating the baptismal formula (Dale 1996, p.129).[52]

The symbolism of baptism is important for some writers. The WCC states in BEM that:

> In the celebration of baptism, the symbolic dimension of the water should be taken seriously and not minimised. The act of immersion can vividly express the reality that in baptism the Christian participates in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (WCC 1982, p.6).

The symbolic and emotional nature of baptism by immersion is considered dominant by Adams (1994):

> The very powerful symbolism of total immersion appeals to some people, i.e., it is not believers' baptism that many want but rather believers' baptism by total immersion. The theological implication is secondary to the emotional appeal (Adams, 1994, p.1).

A biblical connection linking the symbolism of coming up out of the water with the resurrection of Jesus is introduced by Taylor (2013, p.6), citing Colossians 2:12 but he concludes that the Bible does not give specific instructions as to the mode of baptism, 'Scripture is silent on the details of the practice'.

The literature is clearly divided between supporters of baptism by immersion and those against it, sometimes on ideological, theological, or denominational divisions. Congregational literature is unhelpful in formulating a theology of baptism by immersion and the ordinary theologians are left to devise their own beliefs.

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[52] Note the dated gender references

8.3.2 Contributions offered in the interviews regarding immersion

Some espoused theological views are articulated by the ordinary theologians where they express the taught traditions of their home church. These views may or may not have been critically examined or simply observed. Personal theologies are also expressed where the ordinary theologians have thought through their beliefs, critically adopting them individually and articulating them: 'I believe that immersion is necessary because that's what Jesus did'. (Ch2.TB) Some ordinary theologians articulate both Espoused and Operant Theologies. In some cases, these theologies are mutually supportive and in other cases, in conflict within one person: 'I believe that pouring is more biblical but that is not the way we do it at my church' (Ch2.FG) and, 'I believe that baptism should be by immersion, but the Minister does sprinkling, but that is not biblical'. (Ch5.PA)

The ordinary theologians may not be using classical language themselves as it is used by theologians, but they are doing it and living it through their beliefs. The majority of ordinary theologians comment that total immersion is their preferred mode of baptism, making their case with evidence from both Espoused and Operant Theologies:

> Baptism means immersion – a step towards faith. More water means more holy but, in practice that doesn't work. For an adult, immersion is preferable but not in the case of a small child. (Ch3.FG)

> Baptism is by full immersion for adults only. (Ch5.FG)

> Baptism should be totally under water and the person should emerge a new person. A recent baptism was in a paddling pool, and it was undignified. (Ch6.EM)

> The ultimate is going through the water with full immersion. The act of going through the waters is the main thing. It symbolises the washing away of sins. It could be done in a swimming pool, at a school or in a river or the sea. The River Jordan was the place where Jesus was baptized so rivers are OK. (Ch1.JB)

> Baptism is total immersion in water – that is what baptism means. (Ch4.DR)

Scripture is an important resource for the ordinary theologians: 'It fits best with what the Bible states' and 'Baptism in the Bible …'.

These beliefs could be based on the theological doctrine of *sola scriptura,* relying on the Bible, and hence a Normative Theological basis for the Congregational tradition. Symbolism is again important. The beliefs of the immersion cohort of ordinary theologians are simply expressed. 'Dunk them completely so that they come up clean'. (Ch2.JC)

Emphasis is expressed by some members of one focus group on the symbolism of the act: 'In the baptismal waters, the Sacrament of Baptism is made visible, washing the candidate's body clean, symbolic of the changes that take place in the soul'. (Ch2.FG) This statement from a focus group contains theological references to the Sacrament of Baptism and the cleansing power of the action. However, some of the ordinary theologians in this focus group dislike the use of the word 'Sacrament'. Baptism is not identified, for them, as a Sacrament and there is little trace of sacramental theology. One contributor articulates that the candidate would 'emerge a new person' symbolising a Christian's new birth. The image of cleansing through baptism is strong:

> The Bible says immersion in the River Jordan so I can see where it comes from, but immersion needs a special pool. Immersion is more characteristic of Jesus in the Jordan. The other two modes are symbols about faith and believing. (Ch5.MJ)

> There is an awful lot to be said for full immersion, the symbology of it, going down into the water and being washed off. It is powerful but not always practical. (Ch5.PA)

> Jesus was immersed in Galilee in the Jordan. The eunuch was immersed. Full immersion is a sign of God's grace, and we are immersed in God's grace. It is what Jesus did and the idea is to be completely washed in baptism. (Ch2.FG)

> The symbolism is of full immersion. This is much more meaningful and dramatic. (Ch1.MP)

Many personal beliefs are articulated using the symbology of dying to sin and rising again and these have been considered more fully in Chapter 7. The ordinary theologians who state a preference for immersion offer some strong beliefs:

> Baptism should be for adults only because it is a faith statement to enter the community. Immersion is a strong statement whereas affusion and aspersion are nothing. (Ch3.JS)

> You must need to be baptized. Laid back and brought up again. Immersion – you need to know as an understanding person what will happen. (Ch6.HU)

Understanding is a strong theme, and the candidate is required to make a statement of faith based on an awareness of the commitment made. The rite of baptism is restricted to adults only as understanding and commitment are required.

A Minister who has been in post for many years favours infant baptism but five of the six ordinary theologians from that church (Ch2) favour immersion and offer biblical reasons for this: 'Jesus was baptized the same way': 'Baptism in the Bible happened in a river or the sea'; and 'Jesus was immersed in Galilee in the Jordan'. Tentative beliefs are offered – 'Come up clean'; 'It is the symbol of what Jesus has done'; 'We are immersed in grace'; 'Full immersion is a sign of God's grace'; and 'Completely washed'. The Espoused theology expressed by the Minister appears to differ from the beliefs of his congregation. This dissonance passes uncommented by either the Minister or the ordinary theologians, but it is possible that traditions may change over time if the views of the ordinary theologians persist and grow.

Most of the contributors make allowances for candidates who have medical or frailty problems preventing full immersion:

> Immersion should be proper immersion if it is going to be done, medical conditions excepted, but I come from a Baptist background. It should be a conscious decision to accept the Lord Jesus as Saviour and be a witness to others of the change in your life. (Ch3.LF)

> I have a preference for immersion, but I would accept pouring and sprinkling but only if they were physically unable to go through the waters. How it is done, though, is not so important. Why they want it done is more important. (Ch2.AB)

The strong preference for baptism by immersion is laid aside allowing sprinkling or pouring where medically necessary. The level of understanding, normally expected in an adult, and the conscious and deliberate action of baptism is mediated by compassionate consideration of the limitations of the candidate. 'Why they want it done is more important' and reveals a level of compassion and understanding that surpasses strict adherence to an Espoused, Normative or Formal Theology.

Certain practicalities of baptism by immersion were also mentioned:

Immersion is wonderful but it would be awfully cold in this church! (Ch5.KS)

I was surprised that infant baptisms go on, and horrified that a lot of Congregational churches don't have a baptistry. I am blessed to have been in a Baptist Church. I learnt so much from them, but not from Congregational churches. (Ch6.BG)

A bucketful of water is not respectful if what they want is immersion. (Ch5.FG)

I witnessed a baptism with the person standing in a paddling pool and a jug of water was poured over him. It was humiliating. (Ch3.LF)

Witnessing a baptism by immersion has caused some ordinary theologians to think critically about why that mode has meaning and significance for them. There are some who voiced beliefs that consider the symbology of 'going down into the water and being washed', and of 'Jesus in the Jordan' to be important.

For other ordinary theologians, the amount of water is not important:

The amount of water doesn't really matter. It is all symbolic anyway – the symbolic use of water. There is no need to be submerged but it must be done in a faithful way. (Ch3.LM)

The mode doesn't matter, it's what is discussed that matters. (Ch5.JW)

I think immersion, but it is not the water that matters, it's the Spirit. (Ch6.JT)

The mode does not really matter – it's all symbolic. (CH6.FG)

How it is done is not important. It has to be the right way for you. You have to believe. It is very individual. (Ch6.ML)

The symbolism of water is, again, emphasised, but the role of the Holy Spirit is mentioned by just one ordinary theologian.

The mode of baptism and the quantity of water used did not matter to many contributors, but some did draw attention to the theological link between being baptised by immersion and the death and rising again that this symbolised. The significance of water for washing and cleansing was also mentioned. Others recognised the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as being symbolised by the pouring or sprinkling of 'powerful Holy Water'. Whichever method is used, it is important to my contributors that baptism should be undertaken with dignity, individuality, and concern.

The ordinary theologians offer flexible, considered, personal theologies regarding the mode of baptism without being unbending or rigid. However, another Minister rejects all but total immersion. 'Full immersion is the only way'. (Ch6.M)

Other ministerial contributors comment:

> Immersion is tied to Romans 6. (Ch2.M)

> If the person concerned wanted immersion, I would be happy to do that, but I have only ever conducted one and that was in Ullswater!' (Ch3.M)

> The depth of water is not important, but I prefer immersion. I have done a sprinkling when asked. The church was used to sprinkling but I explained the Greek 'baptismo'. (Ch4.M)

A further Minister is strongly against immersion, citing Romans 6 as justification:

> I have baptized by immersion on too many occasions with deep regret. By bowing to these requests, I have contributed to a credence that I regret, more than any other thing in my ministry. Many people now assume that immersion is usual and request it and I deeply regret not being more difficult and practical. If I had refused immersion and insisted on affusion it would have upset our Baptist friends. (Ch3.M)

It is not possible to draw from this Minister the cause for his 'deep regret … more than any other thing in my ministry', but he acknowledges the interplay between different traditions and the difficulties that the beliefs of others can cause.

There is no consensus between the Ministers regarding which mode of baptism is appropriate or permissible, and no strong theological justification for any mode is offered other than an oblique reference to Romans 6 which is not developed. The Greek word 'baptismo' is used by one Minister to justify baptism by immersion but no explanation is offered.

Three ordinary theologians from one Church where the Minister excludes immersion, disagree with him. The Minister's Espoused Theology is not matched by the operant beliefs of members of his congregation. In the church that has adopted immersion exclusively as its Espoused Theology, only four ordinary theologians concur with their Minister. This raises the question of whether the beliefs of Ministers percolate well from pulpit to pew.

Two of the Ministers accommodate the views of others, one adjusting his theology to align with those of another tradition and the other who feels compelled to compromise his theology to portray the Church in a welcoming light.

The majority of ordinary theologians express a preference for immersion and support this with considered conviction. In contrast the Ministers and Academics are equally divided in their responses, some offering more detailed theologies. Little reference is made to literature or teaching in the articulations of the ordinary theologians' beliefs, but some strong values are held. With divided theologies and ideologies, it is questionable whether theological poverty can be sought in a deeply divided area of theology.

8.4   Is the water special or does it become special?

Water is used in all forms of baptism, but does it have to be special, or does it become special during the service? This matter is of importance to a small number of ordinary theologians.

8.4.1 The literature's contribution about the nature of the water for baptism

Although the source of the water is dismissed by Barth (1948, pp.20–22) as unimportant, he considers that it is changed in its nature by faith. 'Truly, water cannot do it, but the word of God which is with and of the water and the faith which believes such Word of God in the water'. He describes how the baptismal water is 'comprised in God's word and commandment and therefore sanctified – God's water'.

The historical complexities of blessing the water used in baptism is described by Spinks (2006a), Beasley-Murray (1962) and Atherstone (2011). Hippolytus gives a lead by advocating blessing the water. Spinks (2006a) details Anglo-Saxon rituals including four sections; prayers for God to be present; for the water to be prepared for human fruitfulness; for the signing of the water: 'I bless you, O creature of water', and for the power of the Holy Spirit to descend into all the water of the font.

Atherstone (2011, p.63) describes baptism in the Middle Ages as an elaborate rite involving salt, oil, spittle, candles, baptismal robes, the sign of the cross, exorcism and the blessing of the water. Beasley-Murray's historical account (1962, p.356) involves an equally complex process: 'The priest recites a long prayer for the blessing of the water, and in the course of this prayer signs the water with the cross with his right hand, casts some of it out from the font in four directions, breathes upon it three times in the form of a cross, drops wax into it from a lighted candle in the form of a cross, divides it cross-wise with the candle placed in the font, removes the candle and pours holy oil and chrism in the form of a cross into the water'. Little of the complexity of this ritual can be detected now except the use of the sign of the cross.

Free Church tradition from The Savoy Declaration introduces grace in place of ritual: 'The grace exhibited by the Sacraments is not conferred by any power in them'. Thompson (2006) introduces a new element comparing the two Sacraments. He believes that:

> The water blessed by the priest became the instrument of washing of the Holy Spirit. This was analogous to communion, where the priest would consecrate the bread and wine to become the instruments of grace (Thompson, R. 2006, p.93).

This approach is echoed by one of the Ministers in this project:

> I think the Lord blesses the Sacrament in exactly the same way as he blesses the bread and the wine. The Sacraments themselves are the source of the blessing of God's people. The water does not become special. (Ch5.M)

Again, the lack of a clear theology or even a Free Church theology on blessing the baptismal water does not make it easy to determine whether theological poverty exists from the literature.

8.4.2 Contributions from the interviews regarding the water

Only one fifth of the ordinary theologians advocate a form of blessing of the baptismal water, one likening the water in the Sacrament of Baptism to the elements in the Sacrament of Communion:

> There ought to be prayers over the water to bless it. (Ch1.AD)

> I want the water to have been blessed. The water needs to have been blessed. (Ch1.MP)

> I want the water to be special like the bread and wine. It is not, like, just tap water. (Ch1.MP)

These comments come from a church where infant baptism is the norm.

A further fifth of the contributors regard the water as not being special but would like it to be blessed:

> What sort of water does not matter – sea, river are all acceptable. The water should be blessed, but it doesn't become special; not in our tradition (Ch1.BS)

> The sort of water is not special – it could be just anywhere, but it should be blessed. But, in an emergency, any water would do. (Ch1.FG)

Some of the contributors who do not advocate blessing the water articulate their reasons and reveal their ordinary beliefs:

> The water should not be blessed. It's all about God and washing away sins. (Ch1.JB)

> The water is just symbolic, any water can be used, it does not become special. The River Jordan was used by Jesus and that was and stayed just a river. (Ch1.TB)

> The water doesn't change in baptism. It is blessed by the Spirit so there is double symbolism. (Ch2.FG)

The final 20 contributors are dismissive of the nature of the water:

> We use water from a garden tap. There is nothing in the Bible that tells us what to do. The Jordan was filthy, but Naaman took a dip in it to heal his leprosy. (Ch2.FG)

The water should not be blessed – there is no need. It's just tap water. Jesus was baptized in an insignificant river. Blessing is not necessary and is a symbolic process – river, lake or sea are acceptable. It should not be filthy water. We come out cleansed of our sins so it's not a good symbol if the water is dirty. No, the water should not be blessed, everybody is blessed. (Ch5.PA)

The sort of water doesn't matter but, in the New Testament, most seems to be in the Jordan. It has to be in water but any body of water that is big enough for the person to be dipped is OK. The location is not important either – it's a sign and symbol. If they can demonstrate blessing the water scripturally, I will change my mind. Philip did not bless the water. (Ch4.RD)

One Minister takes a sacramental view:

I think the Lord blesses the Sacrament in exactly the same way as he blessed the bread and the wine. The Sacraments themselves are the source of the blessing of God's people. The water itself does not become special. (Ch2.M)

The other Ministers are dismissive about the water used:

Do I bless the water? Certainly not! That is Anglican or pagan! Nor do I think the water becomes special. I will use any water, river or sea included. (Ch2.M)

It is not the font or the water that is important. I don't bless the water – we do not bless things in the Congregational church, but we are delighted when God blesses things. Water could not be changed by blessing it. Grace is not channelled through church ceremonies. (Ch3.M)

Any water is acceptable, and the water is not blessed. There is nothing special about the water. It comes out of the tap, and it goes down the drain. (Ch6.M)

The two academic contributors take relaxed stances on the water used in baptism; it remains water whether it is blessed or not. One academic does pray over the water saying that the blessing is not of the water but of the candidate and the church:

The water I use is ordinary tap water and I do not bless it. It stays ordinary water as I pour it over the head of the person, using a scallop shell to signify pilgrimage and dipping it into the water in the font. I pour the water three times to signify the Trinity. If they are an adult, they kneel, and I pour water over them into towels. (Ac.1)

The water signifies the water of foundation and creation, the passage out of Egypt and the wilderness in Exodus 14 and 15. Water is one of the most powerful symbols and adds an extra layer of symbolism through the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan. I am very basic about the water, but I do bless it, but then I tend to bless everything. I would be quite happy not blessing the water – no problem. (Ac.2)

Both academic contributors have clear theologies of symbolism – pilgrimage, creation, exodus and the baptism of Jesus but deny any change in the character of the water. Neither academic exhibits a sacramental or other Formal theology.

Only seven of the ordinary theologians and one Minister consider that the water becomes special. A further seven want the water to be blessed before it is used and all the remaining ordinary theologians, Ministers and academics dismiss it as not being necessary.

The ordinary theologian contributors appear to be largely uninterested in whether baptismal water is blessed or not, and do not think it changes in nature by blessing. Any complicated Systematic Theology is disregarded by pragmatism.

In this Section, the articulations made by the contributors have now been considered in detail. The utterances about infant baptisms, adult and believers' baptisms, and the method of baptism that form the data for this thesis have been presented and themes have been allowed to emerge. In Section 3, the implications and conclusions arising out of these themes will now be presented.

SECTION 3: Concluding Material

Chapter 9

In the previous two Sections, the core background information has been presented and the empirical findings have been investigated. I now intend to restate the questions and hypothesis of this thesis and to explore the finding, particularly in relation to theological poverty and the discovered personal ordinary theological beliefs of my contributors. I attempt to find an overarching systematic theology that would incorporate my contributors' beliefs. I also make suggestions regarding the implications that my study has for Ordinary Theology; for Congregationalism; for the CF and for the CIPT. Finally, I make suggestions for future research and investigations that might expand of the contribution to knowledge that this thesis has made.

9.1   The research, the questions, and the hypothesis

Does theological poverty exist within the Churches of the Congregational Federation and, if so, to what extent?

Have alternative, valid belief systems been constructed in place of traditional theologies by the ordinary theologians in these Churches?

The purpose of this study is to investigate the claim from Camroux (2008b) that there is evidence of theological poverty in churches today. I have used churches of the CF to explore this, particularly as it relates to baptismal theology. An important additional area of study is to explore whether there are alternative belief systems that exist within these churches, replacing or mediating any theological paucity that is discovered. The construct of Ordinary Theology described by Astley (2002b) is selected as the research tool in this qualitative study.

9.1.1 Synopsis of the findings

There are four areas that emerge from the data. Firstly, I address the question of whether theological poverty is demonstrated in this study.

Secondly, I look at the baptismal beliefs revealed by ordinary theologians. I then consider whether there are areas of ordinary baptismal theology that can be drawn together and consolidated into existing theologies. Finally, I identify the contribution that this research has made and the opportunities that it offers for future research in other areas of church life.

9.1.2 Theological Poverty?

The results establish that, in terms of Systematic Theology, each of the churches in this study demonstrate a considerable measure of theological poverty in the area of baptism. This relates to all fields of baptismal theology and supports Camroux's claims and those of others.

I have assumed that Camroux would agree that the sort of theology that he regards as lacking in churches today is Systematic Theology.[53] Hence, a systematic theologian is searching for, and not finding, Systematic Theology within the body of the Church. It is precisely within that ecclesial body that the ordinary theologians reside. The selection of the ordinary theologians in this study is governed by Astley's definition that they should not have been taught (systematic) theology, they are unlikely to be able to demonstrate such theology. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the search is unsuccessful when, by Astley's description, ordinary theologians are 'those believers who have received no scholarly theological education' (2002b, p.1). Camroux is looking for Systematic Theology within a group of people who have not received any scholarly theological education. They are not systematic theologians by definition and searching within people for something that it has been determined they should not have is bound to fail.

I also consider that Camroux's choice of the word 'poverty' implies a lack or scarcity and even an inferiority of the theology that may be found. My preferred term for this study is 'paucity'. There is extensive poverty of Systematic Theology present, but the theology of my contributors is demonstrated in different ways and formats from those that a systematic theologian would anticipate.

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[53] See Chapter 2 for my definitions of Systematic Theology, Theology and Ordinary Theology

For example, biblical references are made in the articulations of the ordinary theologians but are lacking in detail and their precise biblical location. Broad themes are preferred to specific references. However, I prefer to regard it as a paucity of Systematic Theology (a smallness in quantity or supply). The implication of the former is that the theology that is found is of a poor quality and, hence, inferior. Using the word 'paucity' removes the judgemental quality of what is found and reduces considerations to a quantitative element. Theology is there but it is in short supply.

9.1.3 Proposed reasons for the paucity

I suggest that the first reason for this paucity is the lack of any recognisable liturgy or creeds within the Congregational tradition when compared to the established Church. In the Church of England, creeds are recited regularly, and common liturgies and lectionary readings are followed. In this way, a Normative Theology is established in the minds of those attending the services. Official Church teaching is required to conform to an accepted format. However, within the Congregational tradition, there are no official creeds, liturgies, or centrally authorised Church teachings. Scripture is given the focal place as the mainstay of church doctrine. However, each church is free to use any liturgy or creed if it so chooses whether original or borrowed from other sources. The Congregational Federation does not prescribe any format or belief except that it is Trinitarian.

A second reason is Argent's assertion (2013, p.522) that there is a lack of serious ecclesiological works emerging from the CF. He notes that those few works that have been produced are treated as 'the preserve of ministers and academics and were neither read nor welcomed by church members'. This is certainly found to be true in this study where none of the contributors make any reference to books other than the Bible, nor use printed material to support their beliefs. This situation has, in the past, reached the extent that Peel (2008, p.151) describes it as a 'collusion between pulpit and pew' that 'takes theology out of local congregational life'. Additionally, Argent (2013, p.522) observes that many Ministers 'also shunned theological writings, leaving them to the intellectuals'.

In this way, the unspoken and possibly unconscious collusion can be extended from pew to pulpit and on to academia. Each is content within their own world which locates Ordinary Theology in the pew, a practical form of theology in the pulpit and Systematic Theology in the academy. There is evidence supporting this suggestion in this study as the Minister contributors did not make reference to theological books or resources to support the beliefs they are articulating. My two academic contributors have written extensively but their works appear not to have penetrated sufficiently to be cited in the articulations. With ordinary theologians, pulpit theologians and academic theologians appearing to occupy different realms and content to do so, it is legitimate to ask why this situation exists.

One reason that I propose is that there is a lack of a common language between them. Academics write and converse in a different style and using words that are totally incomprehensible to many ordinary theologians. This complex vocabulary is needed to communicate between experts in a 'code' that excludes non-experts. The vocabulary and the manner of its presentation uses a theological form of Le Guin's 'father-tongue' (1989, pp.147–8).[54] As she describes it, this is the language of power and of public discourse that speaks aloud, is the highest form of language, and is the language of thought that seeks objectivity – the objectivity of Systematic Theology. In contrast, ordinary theologians use a form of Le Guin's 'mother-tongue' involving vernacular descriptions of their beliefs. These lack a 'code' to be used between ordinary theologians as their ideas and beliefs are rarely communicated.

The use of non-theological language emerging in this study is both an advantage and a difficulty. It is an advantage in that the terms articulated are everyday and so can be understood readily if one listens theologically, separating substantiated beliefs from social opinion. It is a problem in that I need to examine critically the articulations from the ordinary theologians in order to identify the utterances of real value in the expressed beliefs. However, it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that I understand the utterances because they contain recognisable words and phrases.

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[54] As noted on page 130, Ursula Le Guin's writing (1989) is based on her strongly held feminist beliefs which, although dated and gender stereotypical, do provide a dimension of language that is relevant to this thesis.

In some instances, a contributor expresses a belief in words and concepts that is so different from that understood by academics, and even by other ordinary theologians, that it is easy for it to be misunderstood. A simple example of this is where one contributor considers that a function of baptism is to make the baby 'cry out the devil'. The articulations by contributors that are 'different' are described by Borg (2011, p.5) as Christian illiteracy. Here, I take illiteracy to have its secondary meaning of the lack of knowledge in a particular subject rather than the inability to read or write. There is no common language in which all ordinary theologians are used to communicating. They are rarely asked about their beliefs and are unused to speaking about them.

One example of this lack of a common language is shown in the mixed use of the words 'christening' and 'baptism' by ordinary theologians. Ministers and academics, almost uniformly, speak of baptisms. This feature is much less consistent among ordinary theologians who sometimes use the words interchangeably. There is also a lack of uniformity when they speak about infant baptisms. Some assert that baptism is the correct word that is used by Christians and that christenings are referred to by non-church attenders. A christening is implied to be a lesser entity provided mainly for outsiders. Alternatively, baptism is taken to be the 'proper' term – 'doctors speak of a fracture, but patients speak of a break'. A third alternative is that 'christenings are for infants; baptisms are for believers'. In this way, both the age factor of the candidate and the mode of baptism are called upon to justify the different use of the terms by some ordinary theologians. The word 'baptism' that is unanimously used by the Ministers is qualified and used in different ways by their ordinary theologian church members. I suggest that with the decline in infant baptisms and the relative rise in baptisms by immersion, the former are no longer the norm, and the latter are increasingly welcomed, both as a baptism and as entry into the church.

Unlike the situation for systematic theologians where there are journals and books to communicate professionally, there are few common publications for ordinary theologians, and they lack this resource. Just as the spoken word is rarely used to convey an ordinary theologian's inner beliefs because these are infrequently shared, even less is there a common written means of communication.

There are few ordinary theologians who speak publicly about their faith and beliefs and even fewer who write about them. There are not many vernacular journals and books written by ordinary theologians with the intention of sharing ordinary theological views, and most ordinary theologians would probably not consider reading them. There are relatively few conferences and gatherings where Ordinary Theology is spoken, and even those that do exist attract a limited and possibly atypical group of attendees. The teaching and discussions are led by people who certainly are not ordinary theologians. Bible studies and prayer meetings in churches exist, but they are poorly attended in some churches and they may be simply a means for Ministers to convey their theologies and beliefs rather than a true dialogue spoken in the language commonly used by ordinary theologians. The absence of a common language and a common means of written communication tends to isolate ordinary theologians inside their own unuttered beliefs.

A further reason is a peculiarity of Congregational polity and ecclesiology, that each individual church is fully competent, through its Members' Meeting, to determine all matters of faith and order for that church. This leads to individualities emerging between the churches in worship and practice, every church having its own formats of worship and its own theologies. This becomes visible in this study through the meaning, format and practice of baptism. There is a recognisable similarity between the subject in Congregational churches but not a uniformity. Hence, teaching from the pulpit and through Bible studies may lead to the adoption of the theology of the Minister and the customs and traditions of that individual church. This will develop into an Espoused Theology for the church concerned where the theologies are embedded within the congregation's articulations of the beliefs of that church. This may, or may not, correspond to the Espoused Theology of any other Congregational church or, indeed, Free Churches as a tradition. Similarly, the ordinary theologians within each church may not adhere to the espoused or operant theologies of that church.

The independence of the local church is frequently fiercely maintained, causing Osborn (1953, p.124) to question whether Congregationalism can adequately express the ecumenical nature of the Church because of this independence.

This mainstay freedom of autonomy in Congregationalism is challenged by Rushdoony (1998, p.2) who maintains that: 'The logic of autonomy is that every man becomes his own God and universe and no one else has the right to judge him'.[55] Without proposing that this study supports Rushdoony's contention, there is certainly evidence that some of my contributors hold beliefs that are both individual and personal and do not correspond to the Espoused Theologies of their church or even, in some cases, orthodoxy. The lack of centralised tenets that are promoted by the Federation has the potential to lead to every church and every ordinary theologian having their own beliefs as suggested by Rushdoony. Not only may the ordinary theologians hold their own beliefs, but they may be satisfied with these beliefs as they live out their own lives within their Christian context. They may see no difficulty with them, and no reason why this should not be so. An example of this is holding the belief of universalism of entry into heaven for infants that die young even when, elsewhere, the same contributor believes in the absolute necessity of baptism for salvation.

There is evidence that some ordinary theologians hold beliefs that do not correspond with the Espoused or Operant Theologies of the church they choose to attend. However, this does not appear to cause either the congregant, or their church or the Minister, sufficient dissonance for the problem to need to be addressed, even if they are conscious of a problem. For example, in one of the churches, two ladies will not stand for an infant baptism but will stand when a dedication is taking place. Both the Minister and the congregants must be aware of this disagreement of beliefs but neither chooses to voice the problem. There is also evidence that some ordinary theologians hold beliefs within themselves that are mutually exclusive.

There may be a reluctance from the churchgoer to modify their beliefs for a variety of reasons including that they do not wish to be taught to the level for which the Minister aims, or even at all if they are satisfied with passive participation. It is quite possible that the churchgoer feels no need for further theological or Bible teaching and so 'opts out'. Alternatively, the Ministers may choose to reserve advanced teaching to themselves as part of the 'priestly function'.

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[55] Noted the dated gender reference

Whichever is the case, each is content in their own realm, the academics in their academia, the Ministers in their pulpits and the ordinary members of the congregation in their pew. It is hardly likely that this situation will spontaneously change if each is content, and it may be that change is neither wanted nor welcome.

Peel, Sell and Camroux expect that an unspecified level and type of theology should be present in all churchgoers, this having been imparted by their Ministers in their role as Pastoral Theologians. However, the quality of the tuition to Ministers by academics in theological colleges and Bible schools is variable and the absorption by the ministers-in-training is also unequal. Indeed, in the CF there is no requirement for Ministers to have received any scholarly theological education. It is strongly recommended, and provision is made, but it is for each church and their Minister to consider whether, and if so, to what extent, this education is a requirement. Pastoral theologians may have Doctorates, Masters or first degrees – or none at all. Systematic Theology, therefore, may not have been imparted to the pastoral theologians – they may be self-taught.

Given this situation, it is likely that even less Systematic Theology will have been communicated to the congregants in their care. This is not to say that they are untaught or taught badly, or that the Ministers are not gifted in biblical education – but the teaching is not necessarily in the Systematic Theology that Camroux is seeking. This is not a one-way problem. The teaching may be variable, but the absorption of the teaching material may be equally erratic. There may be an element that the Minister does not want his congregants to be so well versed in theology that they could become challenging, and this could be coupled with some resistance from the congregant, as Peel (2008, p.151) put it, 'a collusion between pulpit and pew'.

It can be seen in this study that theological paucity is demonstrated and, in particular, there are no clear systematic theologies that are being held surrounding infant baptism. Original sin, the absolute need for baptism for redemption, forgiveness and entry into heaven are hardly mentioned by the ordinary theologians – the poverty of Systematic Theology is visible.

9.2 Baptismal beliefs revealed by Ordinary Theology

Given that a paucity of Systematic Theology is found within the churches that are sampled, this study demonstrates the discovery of the beliefs that members hold particularly about baptismal theologies.

it is apparent that there is not a theological vacuum – belief systems have developed to take the place of the missing Systematic Theology. The evidence shows that ordinary theologians have developed their own beliefs to satisfy their own religious needs. 'Theology' is not a word that my contributors use especially about their own beliefs. Theology is something that 'clever people' use to talk about religion. Their 'God-talk' is frequently unspoken, internal, and perhaps unconscious. For them, it is not 'theology'; that is for others. Instead, the ordinary theologians are heard to say 'I believe that …' before explaining the religious beliefs that they hold. These beliefs are firm and clear in their minds if not articulated clearly, and hence they fulfil the definition of Ordinary Theology given earlier in Chapter 2.

Ordinary Theology is personal but there is evidence of a degree of commonality between the beliefs that are uttered. Each contributor expresses the view, for example, that all babies who die go immediately to heaven, an interesting form of universalism. There is no prior discussion about this belief, and it appears in all the individual interviews as well as in the focus groups. The contributors come to their own considered conclusions and beliefs individually. However, there are areas where a number of contributors or even a single person holds personal beliefs that are not common to the group. For example, one contributor uses 'father-tongue' language to articulate 'Sin, past, present and future will be absolved in baptism by the blessed blood of Christ'. Salvation through baptism and by the blood of Jesus is an individual articulation that stands apart from other responses. It is a clearly held belief that is important to the person concerned. Some beliefs that are expressed are individual while others are communally held.

It should be noted that the beliefs articulated may or may not concur with the Espoused Theologies within each church. In the case of rebaptism in one church, the espoused theological practice of the church allows for both infant and believers' baptism. In the focus group for that church, opposing beliefs are expressed with some firmness, both for and against the espoused practice of the church. While the question is debated in a lively manner, it does not become heated, and everyone is content to follow the established practice without bad feeling.

A further situation is where the Operant Theologies of a church differ from the stated Espoused Theologies of that church. This leads to some individual contributors distancing themselves from both theologies, choosing instead to formulate their own personal beliefs. An example of this is where a single contributor commented that the church had usually undertaken baptisms by pouring, but the new Minister had introduced sprinkling. However, he believed that immersion is right.

It is also clear that some of the beliefs held are not internally consistent within a single contributor. One participant comments in one utterance that it is necessary for an applicant for believers' baptism to have a full understanding of the deeper meanings of baptism. This same contributor also believes that a person with limited intellectual capacity should not be denied baptism under any circumstances, saying that they would go to heaven anyway, just like little children. Love and compassion overcome any preconceived restrictions for theological awareness.

An essential component of the beliefs that are held is that they serve the understanding of the individual believer. They fit with their overall tenets of Christian love, concern and care for others and, where a potential clash might have occurred, kindness and consideration prevail. These beliefs are sincerely held and are held with honesty. They are the beliefs by which they live and are exemplifications of Ordinary Theology as portrayed by Astley.

There is evidence that the beliefs are internally tested in that they hold together as an entity with a measure of integration that might appear to be fairly loose at times. The beliefs are not, in most cases, isolated with no internal integrity. There is a visible thread that pervades the beliefs that constitute an identifiable whole.

The beliefs are internally tested, critically examined and hold together as a religious conviction. An example of this is where contributors are asked about the appropriate minimum age for believers' baptism, and they answer that we could take as exemplars either confirmation in the established Church or bar or bat mitzvah in the Jewish tradition. The question is examined and tested against other comparators that the person holds, and an anchored answer is given. There is internal integrity.

There is also evidence that new concepts are thought through critically by contributors before being accepted into their belief systems. This occurs where new ideas are presented to contributors that they have not consciously considered before, such as the conceptualisation of baptism. The process involves a two-stage sequence of hearing and considering a new proposal and testing it against their own pattern of existing beliefs. Following this there is a process in which the new thoughts are examined more critically. This will involve accepting the concept, adapting it to concur with their internal convictions, or rejecting it and offering reasons why it is not acceptable to them. This is a personal process that may have been voiced or is more likely to have been unspoken. This development is visible where concepts such as 'dying and rising again' or 'dying to sin' are put to the contributors. This may sound to be a rather random process with little critical reflection, but it is observed in many of the contributors who seem perfectly capable of rapid consideration of ideas without them remaining mere opinion. Supporting facts and reasons are usually offered and articulated after reflection. Does this new idea 'fit' or should it be rejected?

The thought processes described are a means of organising Ordinary Theology. New and original religious ideas are processed and incorporated into an existing framework of beliefs, representing a parallel and comparable process to that practiced by systematic theologians. Systematic Theology involves the organisation and application of a system to the religious material.[56] The ordinary theologians show that they have organised their convictions to produce personal belief systems.

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[56] See Webster in Chapter 2

This involves a process of consideration of any new proposals that are presented to them and ensuring the cohesion of the ideas into an orderly whole. Inconsistent ideas are rejected, appropriate ideas are accepted and incorporated into the individual's belief system. Beliefs are organised and their Ordinary Theology is developed as new concepts are sorted by each individual. This is the process that takes place Sunday by Sunday in services and in weekly Bible study groups in churches of all traditions in order to build up the theological knowledge of church members.

9.3   *Ordinary theological beliefs concerning infant baptism*

This study shows that infant baptisms are relatively infrequent events within most of the churches in the study but that believers' baptisms occur more frequently. This may be because the CF follows the national trend of shrinking churches where there are fewer babies and more adults in the fellowship. Alternatively, it may be that it has relatively few flourishing churches who undertake infant baptisms, and a growing number of churches that evangelise and baptise adults through believers' baptism.

Resulting from this, I find that there is a need expressed by the ordinary theologians for alternative services of dedication, blessing and thanksgiving in place of infant baptisms for babies from outside the fellowship. While the Ministers, with one exception, express a preference for infant water baptisms, the ordinary theologians are much more prepared to accept that alternative services should be offered, especially to non-church members. There is concern that 'outsiders' are being asked to make promises about bringing up their children in the Christian faith that they have no intention of keeping. There is wide acceptance among the ordinary theologians that blessing the child or giving thanks for their safe delivery are preferable services where non-church parents have requested a baptism. The desire is to love the child and the family and to welcome them into the church without being prescriptive and without pressurising them into any commitments they do not want to keep or forcing them to attend church simply to get their child baptized. Love for the child and their family finds a way to be welcoming. The use of these alternatives provides a way for some ordinary theologians to overcome the problem of a 'closed font' policy at their church.

Where a Minister has decided, or a set of church deeds decree that baptism is open only to the children of church members and their families, the provision of alternatives to baptism is a potential solution to this problem. This solution is particularly welcome where there is an expectation that parents would be required to attend a series of classes in order to understand the commitment they are entering into, or to attend church for weeks or months before a baptism could be considered. Where a 'closed' font policy is relaxed somewhat to allow the infants of non-members to receive baptism, there is still a concern that a certain level of understanding of baptism should exist in the parents – it is not baptism on demand. Families are welcomed but with reservations. The belief is that the font should neither be firmly 'closed' nor totally 'open'. The desire is to welcome the child and the family into the church and to 'protect the font' from overt abuse. Welcome is in tension with reservations and alternatives to baptism are seen as an acceptable middle option.

The presence of a 'closed font' theology at a church requires parents and families to either be church attendees or to, at least, undergo some form of preparation. In contrast, where the question of an emergency or 'clinical' baptism is presented for discussion, the beliefs are different. An emergency baptism may be requested where a child is dangerously ill and at risk of dying. All the previous requirements for preparation, 'closed fonts' and attending church for a required period of time are dismissed as unnecessary. There is no appeal to theological tenets of original sin, forgiveness and the need for baptism for admission to heaven. The sick child is 'loved' into a position of acceptance to the extent that it almost enters into a belief in universalism. No child could possibly be considered to be in need of baptism for forgiveness and acceptance into heaven. All children will go immediately into the arms of Jesus if they should die. No Systematic Theology is necessary or wanted; just the universal and complete love of Jesus, waiting to receive the child. There is no absolute need of baptism expressed but there is complete agreement that the Minister, or even a member of the church or a nurse should conduct a baptism if it is the wish of the parents. The need or the absence of need for baptism is swept away by love and compassion for the family at their time of grief. Even the most committed Minister from the 'believers' baptism' church agrees that he would readily conduct an emergency baptism out of sympathy for the parents.

The various systematic theologies that might have impeded an emergency baptism are discarded in favour of love and compassion and the ongoing need for pastoral support. A theology of love completely eclipses systematic theologies. The child is loved into heaven and the family are loved by the Church.

9.4   Ordinary theological beliefs concerning adult baptism

Turning to consideration of the baptism of adults, there is, again, a variety of beliefs from the contributors. The first group, whose tradition is one of infant baptisms, think that an adult baptism is unusual and anticipate that it should be conducted in the same manner as for an infant using sprinkling or pouring, but with the candidate standing or kneeling.

An equally large second group equates adult baptism with believers' baptism and mainly speaks from experience, either personal or as a witness to such a baptism by immersion. The first group speaks in the abstract, from tradition and from memory; the second group speaks personally, from experience and, at times, emotionally. This, again, illustrates the separation between tradition and experience in the beliefs that they hold in the rightness of their chosen form of baptism.

The appropriate age for baptism of an adult candidate is an important point raised by the ordinary theologians. There is no uniform and agreed age identified but reference is made to three factors; confirmation, communion and bar or bat mitzvah. Some of the contributors chose to anchor their beliefs on the age that is appropriate for an adult baptism to the Anglican tradition where the rite of confirmation is taken as demonstrating the standard, appropriate age. The belief is that if a young person is old enough to be confirmed, they are old enough to receive believers' baptism. This perceived link with confirmation is strong even though confirmation is not a rite that now exists within Congregationalism. An alternative belief links an appropriate age for adult baptism to being admitted to receive communion.

The link is made between the two Sacraments, baptism and communion, that a young person needs a certain level of understanding of both, and that the appropriate age is, therefore, one of understanding and not chronological years. An element of protection for the Sacraments and the elements appears to be important although there is a desire to welcome young people and to encourage them to consider their attitudes to both rites.

A separate link is made to the Jewish rites of bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah. This is the religious initiation and celebration of a young person who has reached the age of thirteen. The proposal suggests an actual chronological marker, and this achieves general acceptance within the contributors but with some variation of the actual age. The essential element is that this was 'old enough' and involves a measure of initiation and acceptance into the adult community with celebration of that fact.

Understanding, as discussed earlier, produces strong feelings that an adult candidate must have an appreciation of the basis of baptism, what it means and what it signifies. Understanding is considered to be more important than chronological age. There is, however, no consensus about what that understanding should involve, what theological complexity is to be expected and how this should be imparted and tested. There is agreement that teaching, testing and investigation should be delegated to the Minister. This exemplifies the lack of agreed theological statements and guidelines on such matters and emphasises the potential isolationist nature of Congregationalism.

The importance felt about the necessity for understanding the essential role of baptism, coupled with the need for preparation leads some contributors to want the candidate to make some form of profession or confession of faith usually before but sometimes after entering the waters of baptism. The document *'Patterns for Worship'* (Cleaves and Durber 1998) provides some guidance, and this is followed in some CF churches. The candidate is asked some wording such as 'Do you believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour', and responds 'I do'.

This is followed by the baptism and the words 'I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit'. While not enforced liturgically, some form of words such as these is normal, and my contributors want this to be followed. Some recognise this as a profession of their faith, but others expect the candidate to make a statement of their journey to faith and the significant steps along that journey. The wording and sequence are anticipated by the ordinary theologians and, although there is some lack of agreement about the progression, there is a general belief that something in this style is necessary. The understanding of baptism, with appropriate preparation, would lead on eventually to a confession of faith in some wording that would demonstrate the candidate's acceptance of what they are doing.

However, the contributors are then challenged with the situation where the candidate has some form of intellectual impairment. The age of the candidate now becomes immaterial and the question of the degree of understanding that they could bring to baptism becomes problematic. Questions such as how much could, and should one demand of each candidate by way of understanding before they may be baptized; whether they should be denied believers' baptism because of their disability and what right has a church to preclude someone who believes that they are a follower of Christ from the Sacrament of Baptism could be asked. One Minister said at first that he would expect a candidate to be able to explain the Christian faith to him, but then he retracts that statement by asking himself whether he would be able to explain the Trinity. Another Minister states that all he wants to hear is that a candidate loves Jesus and that they know that Jesus loves them. That, for him, is sufficient as a profession of faith.

In contrast to these differing theological views, all the ordinary theologians take a loving and central ground. They all want the candidate to be loved through the waters of baptism, or through an adult baptism by sprinkling. No disability is so severe that they could refuse baptism to anyone who seriously requested it. Christian love and compassion abound and completely overrule any theologies of exclusion that demand a certain level of systematic theological knowledge. Applicants are to be 'loved into the Kingdom of God' and their baptism celebrated.

Some ordinary theologians go further and want people who are intellectually challenged to have active inclusion into the church, for their presence to be a cause for celebration and for them to be involved in the life of the church, not only as disabled people, but as people who have contributions to make to the church activities.

It is also important that the situation is used to enable the positive role of disability in worship to be understood and welcomed. Christian love overflows. The limited intellectual abilities of these applicants are seen as potential sources of joy, and all matters of theology are set aside in loving the new church members into a full participation of church life and love.

A further challenge to the beliefs is that preparation and understanding of theology is needed before a baptism could take place, particularly when a spontaneous baptism is requested. Some contributors have witnessed a Minister standing in a baptismal pool following a planned baptism and issuing an invitation for any member of the congregation who wants to be baptized to come forward for immediate baptism. This prospect causes a measure of division among the ordinary theologians, some of whom want to insist on a period of questioning before the baptism can take place, deferring it to a future date if necessary.

Others are content to dispense with preparation and questioning of the applicant's belief by allowing the immediate baptism to go ahead. Theological understanding and investigation are abandoned, for some contributors, in favour of an immediate baptism on a simple confession of faith. Others still want the Minister to take a few minutes to discuss matters with the applicant to determine that their faith is genuine before proceeding. Finally, a small number believe that it is the work of the Holy Spirit that has brought that person at that time to that service and that the work of the Spirit should not be impeded. This rather complex theology of Spirit direction is simplified into their beliefs about the love, work and movement of the Holy Spirit in someone's life. The Spirit has been at work in that person's life for some time and should not be thwarted by human restrictions. Love of the candidate eclipses any systematic theological needs.

Rebaptism presents a difficult and challenging matter, and this is the most debated consideration of the study with opposing beliefs being contended vigorously. The Lima report and other systematic theological sources are clear that 'Any practice which might be interpreted as 'rebaptism' must be avoided', (WCC 1982) but this position is not defended with scriptural or other reference.

This belief is also held by the majority of the Ministers and academics in my study, and here, reference is made to Ephesians 4:4-6. 'There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all'. One Minister accepts everyone who is earnestly seeking believers' baptism by immersion, whether this is a first or repeat baptism, while the other Ministers and one academic are strongly against rebaptism.

My contributors express beliefs that are across a wide spectrum with some also quoting the words of the Ephesians reference. A small number have never given thought to a request for a second baptism, their experience dictating that one baptism, usually as an infant, is all that is normal. A small number are against rebaptism in any form, believing that one baptism is all that is needed, the one baptism lasts for a lifetime. However, the majority are receptive to the concept of a rebaptism, welcoming it as a display of having accepted Jesus as their Saviour, or as a demonstration of their mature Christian faith and their desire to become a full church member. There is no suggestion that the act of baptism is salvific or theologically necessary in any of the responses. It is seen as a symbolic event, either of becoming incorporated into the Church or as an act of obedience. In this latter case, the oblique reference is to the instruction of Peter to 'repent and be baptized, every one of you'.[57] The baptism is also stated to be a witness to the church and to others that the candidate has accepted Jesus as their Saviour. It is acknowledged that this acceptance may have occurred at a separate time and place before the baptism is requested. These beliefs emerge clearly in the individual interviews but become animated in the focus groups, thus illustrating the value of the groups in helping the contributors to explore their beliefs and providing them with the opportunity and willingness to share their words.

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[57] Acts 2:38

The contributors who accept that rebaptism could take place want to welcome the newly baptized person unreservedly into the church. This places thirty of the thirty-six ordinary theologians at odds with their Ministers and with the academics who hold a systematic theological line against rebaptism. The Formal, Normative, Espoused and Operant theologies of five of the six churches are against rebaptism but the majority of my contributors welcome the practice. This unexpressed and perhaps unconscious tension is not significant in the practice of baptism in those churches where baptisms are so rare. However, it does demonstrate that the Systematic Theology of professional theologians may not be in step with the more flexible, compassionate, and loving beliefs of their congregations. In the single church where believers' baptisms are frequent, the Minister and his congregation are in accord and uniformly in favour of these baptisms whether a repeated baptism or a first event.

The question is asked about whether a second baptism invalidates a previous christening or baptism. Wright's lead (1988, p.21) is that people who request a second baptism are, in effect, denying their first baptism and blatantly repudiating that baptism. Evans (2016, p.4) considers that rebaptism 'runs counter to the symbolic nature of the Sacrament itself'. The professional theologians are divided on this question, but the ordinary theologians have not even considered it to be a hinderance and have some difficulty in understanding why it could be a complication. They just want the person who is to be baptized by immersion to be loved and welcomed. The symbolism of the event is very important to them, and they understand its importance for the candidates. They also understand the need for pastoral care should an application for rebaptism be rejected by the Minister.

Some Ministers are concerned that a candidate may not be requesting a believers' baptism for the spiritual significance of the event, but, rather, that it is baptism by immersion that the applicant really wants. It is the means and 'theatre' of baptism that is being sought. Again, the ordinary theologians are not concerned by this and accept the candidate with enthusiasm and love.

Systematic theologians might expect that the symbolism of baptism would be emphasised by many ordinary theologians, but when my contributors are pressed to conceptualise their symbolisms, there is a lack of Systematic Theology evident.

The symbolism of baptism by immersion as dying and rising again through the waters is only loosely held by a minority of my contributors although this is a prominent theology from many writers. Astley (2010, p.71) describes it as a 'drowning-saving movement'. Dying and being reborn emerges as a concept in a small number of contributors as does death and resurrection, but this is also a weak connection. Being born again of the Spirit is only mentioned by one contributor who voices this without further development. Little mention is made otherwise about the Holy Spirit.

Visualisation and conceptualisation are not strongly represented which I find surprising given the previously unarticulated nature of the beliefs expressed. If words are not used to convey or hypothesise concepts by ordinary theologians, then pictures could be expected to be held as non-verbal substitutes in the critical analysis of beliefs, but this is not in evidence.

9.5   Ordinary theological beliefs concerning the mode of baptism

Having answered the question for whom baptism is applicable, the second area of concern is to enquire about the appropriate mode by which one should be baptized. This has been debated by theologians for centuries without agreement and the matter is not made clear in the literature. It is noted in this study that aspersion and affusion are more likely to occur in Congregational churches where baptisms are less frequent.

The Savoy Declaration in the 17th century, gives the lead to Congregational churches at that time, that 'baptism is rightly administered by immersing the person in water' (Owen et al. 1990, p.22) although Dale (1996) is of the opinion that sprinkling is more normally Congregational in the late nineteenth century. My contributors' observations are that, where infant baptism is the norm for the church, it is more likely to be called a christening and sprinkling is the usual method. 'Sprinkling is for infants; immersion is for adults'.

Most of the Ministers are clear about what is the normal mode and follow the paedo-baptismal practice. The minority are open to, or exclusively in favour of, believers' baptism where immersion is necessary.

The frequency of baptism in any one church is a material factor in deciding which mode is adopted. In general, the more infrequent the baptisms, the more traditional the church and the more infant baptism by sprinkling or pouring is anticipated. The more frequently baptisms take place, the more likely they are to be believers' baptism by immersion. Whether this is by direction of the Ministers or led by practice is not explored but there is, within all the sample churches, at least one contributor who favours baptism by immersion and is prepared to defend that belief. The defence includes 'that's what Jesus did', and 'that's the biblical way'. The Bible is frequently cited as the authority for baptism by immersion on which the ordinary theologians base their beliefs. The symbolism of total immersion is significant and frequently expressed without any trace of sacramental theology. Baptism by immersion is a strong statement of faith whereas affusion and aspersion are less so. God's grace is considered but this is applied to both pouring and immersion. 'In baptism, God's grace is poured out over us' is contrasted with 'We are immersed in God's grace'.

Tradition is, unsurprisingly, found to have a strong influence on the baptismal beliefs of ordinary theologians. They are most likely to hold to traditional views if their experience of baptisms is from the more distant past and their churches have few baptisms occurring. Traditional beliefs are strongest in paedobaptism congregations.

This finding links with the next – experience. Where infants and adults are being baptized by sprinkling or pouring, this tends to provide the basis for the beliefs expressed by the contributors from that church. The articulations from these ordinary theologians are held with less strength and with less conviction. In contrast, the ordinary theologians in the churches where believers' baptism is normal, and elsewhere when contributors have undergone or experienced such baptisms, the beliefs are expressed with assurance and sincerity.

There is no consensus either within the professional theologians or the ordinary theologians about the most appropriate method of baptism, but the contributors are most likely to support immersion for biblical reasons. The fact that the person wants to express their love for Jesus is more important than how they choose to do it.

Mention has been made earlier of the individual and personal beliefs formulated by ordinary theologians and an attempt will now be made to group the beliefs into existing systematic theologies.

9.6 Ordinary theologians have individual, practical beliefs

Emerging alongside the paucity of Systematic Theology that is demonstrated, this research shows that ordinary theologians formulate alternative but valid belief systems in place of the traditional Normative and Formal theologies that systematic theologians might expect to find.

The evidence for the presence of these alternative baptismal beliefs is strong and is articulated by the ordinary theologians with conviction. The contributors articulate their beliefs willingly and the majority of the interview prompts result in clear beliefs being expressed. They have been carefully and personally considered and examined to determine how they fit within the individual contributor's belief systems. Not only are the beliefs internalised and formulated individually, but they are also organised so that each has its place within the structured faith system for each ordinary theologian.

The depth of the convictions and beliefs that emerge from the responses might not be accepted readily by professional theologians as 'theologies'. They are, instead, the life-guides by which the ordinary theologians live. These beliefs have to be understood in non-theological language in order that their richness may be comprehended. This requires the language and thought processes of Systematic Theology to be suspended and vernacular communication adopted for a full appreciation of the truths being shared.

In addition, there are a small number of themes where the interview prompts are less successful in eliciting responses. These either fall outside the contributor's sphere of knowledge (e.g., baptism of the Holy Spirit) or, in some cases, their experience (e.g., believers' baptism). There is no evidence of ordinary theologians voicing on-the-hoof opinions to provide for these omissions. They either have a belief that they share relating it to a source that has caused the belief to form, or they ask to pass on the question. Asking to pass on any particular topic was a rare event and none of the contributors refused to answer any question. The absence of biblical textual detail is interesting but less than surprising.

In general, the ordinary theologians have a fairly good knowledge of the Bible. However, chapter and verse details are lacking, a happening that may be described as poor scriptural geography. Their considered beliefs demonstrate that the hypothesis of the construction of alternative, valid belief systems is accurate replacing the traditional theologies by the ordinary theologians. These are ordinary theological beliefs by which the holders live and worship that are shown to be present within the churches. The compassionate beliefs that emerge form strong operant beliefs, are held with conviction and sincerity and have been formulated through the ordinary theologians' experiences of church life. There is a poverty of Systematic Theology, but a richness of beliefs emerges based on love and compassion as displayed through baptism. A relative lack of concern for dogma and doctrine is matched with more individual and practical approaches demonstrated through my contributors' personal beliefs of care, concern and love.

9.7   Personal alternative theologies are considered

The paucity of Systematic Theology does not leave a theological vacuum within the ordinary theologian participants. Beliefs that have been born of experience and tradition are built into complex personal theological systems by which individual Christians live their lives and worship their God.

I will now discuss four unanticipated suggestions derived from the articulations. The theologies to be considered are theologies of love, compassion, the Golden Rule and finally a theology based on the Second Great Commandment.

9.7.1 A theology of love

Matthew 22:37-40 can be taken as a basis for a love theology on which my contributors can base their beliefs:

> 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (NRSV)

In this study, there are many demonstrations of love that emerge from numerous responses. For example, the love for the parents of a sick child that overcomes any barriers to infant baptism. Love for the intellectually impaired adult who wants to be baptized by immersion that overcomes requirements that all applicants for baptism should have a period of study and a measure of understanding before they may be baptized. Love for the child whose unbelieving parents present their child for baptism overcomes the requirement that they should be from a church family. Love and hope for a newly baptized believer overwhelm objections that rebaptism is unacceptable. The common theme is love.

Oord emphasises this in his book on the Nature of Love and calls it a 'theology':

> Too often theologians neglect these biblical words. Love is present in Christian devotional literature, worship lyrics, testimonials, and other forms of Christian experience. But too many theologians write their formal theologies with love as an afterthought. The logic of love – God's love for us and the love creatures are called to express in response – is largely absent and rarely followed consistently (Oord 2010, p.1).

Here, Oord is critical in his words about theologians, but it is just this love that the ordinary theologians demonstrate throughout their articulations. Christian love pervades their beliefs, and it is the premiss on which they build their faith and live out their lives.

Oord continues:

> Given that themes of love are central in the Bible, one would think love would be central in formal theology. Most Christians know 'God is love' as 1 John 4:16 says. Many memorise Jesus' words: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life' (John 3:16). These verses suggest the primacy of love. They suggest love is a central feature of God's nature (Oord 2010, p.1).

Love inspires many biblical verses and themes. From the book of Genesis through to the book of Revelation and from the time of the early Church through to today, the Christian story revolves around love, and it is on that love that my contributors have developed their beliefs.

Oord extends his work into a fully formed Theology of Love, criticizing writers such as Tillich, Nygren and Augustine. He analyses agape, eros and philia with kenosis and develops the full theology in which he defines Christian love: 'To love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic/empathetic response to God and others, to promote overall well-being' (2010, p.17).

The Theology of Love that Oord describes requires intentionality rather than the spontaneity that my contributors exhibit. It requires sympathy and empathy which may strongly motivate the feelings that were provoked in my contributors in the case of the baptism of a dying child and for the parents. This was not demonstrated, for example, in beliefs expressed about alternatives to baptism, where a blessing was proposed rather than asking the parents to make promises that they had no intention of keeping. Oord looks for the promotion of general well-being in his theology of love, whereas I found more specific motivations are being expressed. For example, one of the churches rejects infant baptism except in the case of a dying child.

Rejection of other applications would not promote the well-being and happiness for parents and their families. The general contentedness of everyone involved might have been more successfully achieved if the demands of the parents had been met.

I am not convinced that the words and actions of my contributors fit completely to Oord's theology. In many cases, what they are doing is not deliberate, premeditated and calculated. It is a response of the heart to a situation that is presented to them, in life or in the abstract. It is motivated and driven by the deep Christian beliefs, often unconscious, by which they live. Neither am I convinced that it is a *response* to God, sympathetic, empathetic or otherwise. A response is a reply, an answer or a retort. My contributors are not necessarily replying to God; they are behaving in a deeply engrained Christian manner. I am also not convinced that their intention is to promote overall well-being. If well-being is happiness, comfort, and safety, this does not completely fit with my contributor's articulations. Their 'love' is simpler, more heart-felt and heart-driven than Oord's theology would require. They happily describe their Christian love and how it affects and shapes their beliefs about baptism. Oord's Theology of Love, while it is helpful and partially explains the attitudes that my contributors display, it is not fully able to describe their beliefs.

9.7.2 A theology of compassion

Oliver Davies (2001, p.225) writes of a theology that could sit alongside my contributor's articulations. He describes a 'Systematic Theology of Compassion'. In this, he sets out his first section on Kenotic Ontology and drives 'Towards a New Metaphysics'. This level of complexity constructs a situation that most of my contributors would be unable to appreciate. He defines, in Chapter 11, that:

> Compassion is a human condition which is constituted by the simultaneous interplay of cognitive, affective and volitional dimensions. Cognition is involved to the extent that we reconstruct, or recognize, the other in their need; it is affective to the extent that we share in the suffering of the other, and it is volitional to the extent that our recognition and our feeling prompts us to act in a way that will be in the other's best interests (Davies 2001, p.232).

In this way, he is constructing a complicated theology of compassion which might be better expressed more simply as a feeling of sympathy inclining one to be helpful or show mercy.

Davies' definition of his Theology of Compassion does not fully describe the basis of the beliefs found from my contributors. These emotions of sympathy and mercy are not an adequate description of the articulations of my contributors but showing helpfulness could be allowed. It may be that compassion is the driving force in the case of parents who might imminently be losing their child, but it is not out of pity or mercy that beliefs are expressed relating to a rebaptism for example. Compassion is, at times, a motivational force for my contributors, and is a useful component in the formulation of their beliefs, but it is not adequate to embrace them fully. They require a greater measure of love to be incorporated into their beliefs.

9.7.3 A Golden Rule theology

Evidence of Golden Rule Theology is demonstrated in parts of this study. Golden rule philosophy is a moral or ethical code that has been shown to have existed from at least 500BCE among the 'inegalitarian social settings of the ancient Hebrews'. (Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy n.d.). It is not, therefore, exclusive to Christianity and can be found among humanists. It is a guide for living that can be summarised in the Sermon on the Mount as: 'In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you' (Matthew 7:12). This is, in turn, based on a half verse in Leviticus 19:18b: 'but you shall love your neighbour as yourself'.

Golden Rule Christianity is described by Ammerman (1997, pp.196–216) who states that Golden Rule Christians are best defined, not by ideology but by practices and are characterised by a basic Golden Rule morality. The Golden Rule suggests the importance of caring for people in need, welcoming strangers and doing good deeds. 'People should seek to do good, to make the world a better place'. 'Their own measure of Christianity is right living more than right believing'. Taking this further, she considers that it is caring for the needy and living out Christian values every day that is important. Golden Rule Christians, as described by Ammerman, are less concerned about right believing and more concerned with a morality and a sense of compassion.

It is this principle that unifies its practitioners rather than a theology. Its requirements are similar to those expressed by my contributors but arise from a philosophical basis rather than from a theological foundation.

Golden Rule Christianity is grounded in the Bible but not in its literal interpretation, with the Bible being taken as a useful guide for individual Christians in their search for basic moral and religious teachings. 'They draw from Scripture their own inspiration and guidance for life in this world'. In this way, their knowledge of Scripture is not deep, but it does provide a simple basis for making the world and one's own life a little better. This level of Bible knowledge and application is similar to that found in my contributors in this study.

Ammerman notes that Golden Rule Christians lack a language for describing God which she attributes in part to 'low rates of participation in church activities'. This mirrors the lack of a theological language in my contributors but there is no evidence that this is due to lack of participation in the church but rather that they have a vernacular language that they are content to use.

The main reason why the title 'Golden Rule Christians' for the contributors in this study is inadequate can be identified from Ammerman's chapter where she states: 'Golden Rule Christianity … is explicitly non-ideological. That is, it is not driven by beliefs, orthodox or otherwise. Rather, it is based on practice and experience' (Ammerman 1997, pp.196–216). In this study, it is the beliefs that the ordinary theologians hold, which have grown largely out of practice and experience, that are the motivational force for action. Golden Rule Theology misses the direction of the inspiration for my contributors. The Golden Rule is not driven by beliefs and, in contrast, my contributors' articulations and actions are fully driven by what they believe. Their beliefs are deeply personal and not centrally disciplined. They may even be a little unorthodox but, for them, they fit into their generalised belief structure and serve to provide them with a raison d'etre for their religion.

The form of Christian beliefs that my contributors articulate about baptism are largely based on the Bible and are tempered by experience as has previously been described. They are firmly held and of great personal importance to them rather than the concept of doing good exhibited in the Golden Rule philosophy.

There is a similarity between my contributors' articulations and the Golden Rule, but this is not sufficiently strong as to describe adequately their beliefs. They do not fit easily into the Golden Rule theological mould. Love, compassion and an ethical code are strongly present in the articulations from my contributors. However, they do not correspond sufficiently to any of these theologies to persuade me that they fall under the umbrella of any of them although the Golden Rule theology is closest.

9.7.4 Second Great Commandment theology

As none of these three theologies appear adequately to embrace the articulations from my contributors, I am proposing that a different theology presents the best fit. It is not original but little attention appears to have been given to it and little has been written about it. The demonstrations of love that come through in the articulations from my contributors, rather than following Oord's theology of love, can be better described by reference to the second of the Great Commandments based on Matthew 22:39: *'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'.* They are examples of what I am calling a Second Great Commandment Theology of Love.

. My study shows that there are many examples of Second Great Commandment Theology in baptism. I will now examine the themes from the research to determine whether the articulations from my contributors support this proposal

The first discussion that emerges from the research relates to the words 'baptism' and 'christening'. Most of my contributors are clear that there is a difference between these words where baptism is retained for infants of church members and christening is used for non-church children. They do not deny access to a christening for 'outsiders' where the family are unlikely to be seen in church again but have a special ceremony for church families which they call a baptism.

They are happy to treat their neighbours as themselves in that they may receive a service and ceremony but still have a sense of specialness for babies from the church's own families. In this way, the 'neighbour' is almost accepted, welcomed and treated as oneself and as an equal for baptismal purposes.

Linked to this is the question of an 'open font' policy for baptism. My contributors are equally divided between those who favour open access to baptism and those who feel that some measure of church commitment is necessary before baptism is agreed. Here again, everyone is accepted as a neighbour and offered baptism for their child but there is a felt need to 'protect the font' from those who might abuse the Sacrament of Baptism. There is a sense of specialness that pervades with a preference being shown for church members. This persists when consideration is given to the provision of alternatives to baptism for the children of non-church members. Here, in the churches where it is felt that a baptism is less suitable because the family are not from the church, services of blessing, dedication or thanksgiving are considered more appropriate. The families are not rejected but they are offered an alternative that might meet their individual needs better by not making demands that would not be met. Love of the neighbour demands that their wishes should be met but without the imposition of undesirable rules. Thus far, considering the name of the ceremony, access to open baptism and to alternative services, my contributors find ways in which love for their neighbour from outside the church could enable their needs and wants to be met. Barriers are not erected but are broken down and the neighbour is welcomed as oneself without compromising Christian beliefs. The neighbour is being loved and welcomed on almost equal terms in a Second Commandment compliant way.

A further area relating to infant baptism concerns the emergency baptism of a sick or dying child. Here, unanimously, my contributors want the child to be baptized if the parents request it, and this applies even in the church where believers' baptism is the norm. The beliefs behind this unanimity vary from compassion for the parents and family through to an occasional articulation that the child needs to be baptized for protection. None of the contributors suggest that baptism is essential for the salvation of the child. In this way, my contributors' attitudes of love around emergency baptism support the proposal of Second Great Commandment Theology.

Turning to adult baptisms and leaving aside any debate about adult baptism being a service for an adult by aspersion or affusion, I am left with baptism by immersion. Considering the age at which baptism is appropriate, there is a general consensus that it should be above the age where understanding of the act of baptism is achieved but that this would vary according to the candidate. There is no importance attached to whether the applicant for baptism comes from within the church or from another church with fewer facilities, and the neighbour is treated as well as members of the church. It is assumed that the applicant's Christianity has been explored before baptism and preparation is anticipated.

The need for a profession of faith before baptism is debated but there is a general understanding that a demonstration of the applicant's journey to faith is appropriate. There is evidence of Second Great Commandment beliefs and actions. Things are mutually understood and accepted; age, understanding, preparation and a statement of faith, all as part of the unwritten traditions of the churches.

Applications for baptism that are made by people with intellectual impairment are considered and deeper thought is given. Without question, all my contributors want to welcome these people for baptism. Those who usually insist on a deeper level of theological understanding and lengthy preparation want to put aside such restrictions and barriers and encourage the applicant in their request for baptism. Contributors want people with disabilities of all sorts to receive the baptism they desire without any constraints that might limit their expressions of faith. They just want to welcome people, especially those with intellectual disabilities. It is clear that there is an element of pity in this situation, but the comments made by my contributors demonstrate more concern about loving the disabled person than pity for their condition. Loving your neighbour through Christian, Second Great Commandment beliefs is stronger than Compassion Theology.

Spontaneous baptism also causes some division in beliefs. Some contributors see an applicant who wants to demonstrate their love for Jesus immediately through the waters of baptism.

Others believe that it is a movement of the Spirit in the person's life that comes to completion through the waters, and yet others are more concerned about the motivation behind the request of the person for baptism. The majority belief is that of wanting to love the applicant into baptism with a concern that the Minister should speak to the applicant briefly and pastorally before proceeding. The support for the request is strong especially where this comes from a person from within the church and is known to the congregation. Where the application comes from an unknown person from outside the church, support is reduced with suggestions being made that caution should be exercised. The baptism should be deferred to allow the Minister to investigate the application further. In this way, the love for the neighbour ensures that they know sufficiently about baptism before embarking on the event, and that they would, in due course, be invited to be baptized.

Requests for rebaptism are also contentious but are well supported. There is little concern whether an application is from someone who has received a previous baptism or not. The fact that this may be a rebaptism that would be rejected in most orthodox situations is not considered to be material. My contributors just want to love the person through the waters of baptism and celebrate with them. It is likely that this person would be known to the congregation and accepted by them as satisfactory. Here love for a neighbour is demonstrated whether it is a first baptism or rebaptism.

Overall, the efforts to test whether love of one's neighbour is demonstrated in this research have shown that Second Great Commandment theology is a better 'fit' to describe the collection of beliefs that my contributors shared with me than the three alternatives, but that it is not a perfect match. There is a greater emphasis on conformity, wanting others to conform to the church's theologies and one's own beliefs and to join the church in order to achieve full benefits. Church members are very welcoming to visitors and 'fringe' people but want them to adhere to certain beliefs that are needed for the visitor to become a church member or, at least, to become a regular attender.

As can be seen above, love pervades the contributors' articulations suggesting elements from Oord's Theology of Love. There are also elements from Davies' Theology of Compassion where there is pity for the soon-to-be bereaved parents or a person with a mental disability. The Golden Rule approach from Ammerman is a near 'fit' and recognises the contribution of practice and experience. However, it is the Christian beliefs that my contributors hold, orthodox or otherwise, that drive their actions. Finally, there are elements of a Second Great Commandment Theology evident of the loving of one's neighbour. My contributors certainly have areas that are based on experience and practice, but their driving force is their personal and deeply held beliefs.

This leaves my contributors without an explicit, existing theology which is able to house their beliefs fully. The data show that there is a powerhouse of rich, personal beliefs that do not conform entirely to the recognised theologies that I have suggested. Nonetheless, they are present, they are personal, and they are the ordinary theologians' ordinary beliefs that have long been ignored. They are important to my contributors if not to anyone else. They form and inform the lifestyles of my contributors and are the driving force for their faith. They may not be the same as the person sitting next to them in their church, or people in a neighbouring church, or any of the other churches in my study but they are live, deep, rich and worthy of consideration and study. They may not correspond to the Espoused or Operant Theologies of their home church or of their Minister, but that does not appear to be of great concern to them.

It may be because of the nature of Congregationalism, rejecting as it does, any prescribed theologies, that the churches do not hold to a uniform theology of that tradition or, indeed, that there is a Congregational theology of baptism. That is the very nature of Congregationalism, that churches are competent to determine their own beliefs, traditions and theologies. This much must be acknowledged. The question may be asked whether this level of freedom to choose one's own beliefs threaten the cohesion of the tradition?

9.8   Contribution from the research and suggestions

This study confirms the presence of systematic baptismal theological paucity (poverty) in the sample churches and suggests that this may be present in other areas of church life and worship. Unpacking that statement, the research identifies the nature of the paucity that is found as systematic theological poverty and shows how this is unsurprising when Ordinary Theology is used as the lens and ordinary theologians, as Astley defines them, as the contributors. However, I suggest that theological paucity is a more accurate term as there is some Systematic Theology visible, not a total absence. In this way, the work of Camroux is confirmed but it is refined and built upon to provide a better understanding of the situation in the study churches from the CF.

More important than this confirmation is the uncovering of the personal beliefs that are held by the ordinary theologian contributors. The paucity of Systematic Theology that has been identified does not result in a theological vacuum. Each of the ordinary theologians provide articulations from their own belief systems. Within each contributor there is evidence of personal beliefs that have been constructed over time from their exposure to theological teaching and from experience within their own church tradition and from other traditions. The beliefs are shown to be considered critically and honed to fit with their already internalised belief systems to formulate a body of organised beliefs. Each of these belief systems will be individual, discrete and distinctive as the articulations show, but they are held with sincerity and are life-guiding for the person who holds them. They are not static but are being added to and moulded by further experiences and learning. They may or may not be considered to be orthodox and may or may not be internally consistent. One ordinary theologian may hold beliefs that are mutually exclusive, for example, the offering of emergency baptisms for sick children while believing that baptism is not salvific and that the child does not need to be baptised for salvation. Each person holds their exclusivities in tension without apparent difficulty. However, beliefs are rarely articulated in public and must be sought if they are to be studied and understood. This research shows that the beliefs held are valid, personal, vital and important to the person concerned, and demonstrates the richness of those beliefs.

In this research, I have tried to unify some of the beliefs in largescale terms into recognisable 'theologies' that might be acceptable to a systematic theologian in order to provide an acceptable umbrella term. However, having explored a theology of love, of compassion and of the Golden Rule, I conclude that none of these are adequate to embrace the beliefs of my ordinary theologian contributors. I propose as the best fit, a Second Great Commandment Theology which is similar to Golden Rule theology except that it is based on beliefs more than actions. It comes from the second half of Matthew 22:39, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'. The appropriateness and applicability of this theology is explored in this study, and it is suggested for future testing.

The potential to propose different measures to address any theological poverty that is uncovered is considerable. Discussions would need to take place about the importance of addressing theological poverty in the churches. The Church may seek to survive adequately with its current tripartite paradigm. Systematic Theology could be left to the academic theologians and Pastoral Theology could be left to the Ministers. Finally, in this paradigm, ordinary theologians should not worry about theology at all. They have the richness of their 'organised ordinary beliefs' to support and sustain their Christian lives.

This research focuses on theological poverty as it is found in the baptismal theologies of a sample of churches within the CF. Further studies immediately propose themselves to widen this work. The first opportunity for research relates to the other Sacrament that is recognised within the Free Church tradition, that is, communion. The major difference between baptism and communion within Federation churches is likely to be based on experience. Communion is frequently celebrated on a weekly or monthly basis. Baptism may not be experienced for months or even years. Ordinary theologians have less need to construct beliefs to accommodate baptismal theologies as baptisms are often rare events as opposed to communion which is likely to take place more frequently. The regularity with which communion is celebrated may be more likely to stimulate relevant critical thought and systemisation of beliefs.

The study of the potential for theological poverty around the Sacrament of Communion within the Federation would be interesting. A further area of study would be to return to the bookplate in Chapter 1 which initiated this thesis. It specifies that '[The CF] is Trinitarian in doctrine'. As the other specific doctrinal 'distinguishing feature of Congregationalism', the ordinary theological understanding of the Trinity could be revealing especially when it is placed alongside the findings in this thesis.

The lack of a liturgy could influence the extent of any poverty as the repetition of well-known and comfortable phrases could imprint the bases for theological beliefs in the minds of congregants. Exploration and comparison between churches where there is a liturgical format and those who have dispensed with or lack a liturgy may produce interesting results. The use of liturgy may produce more acceptance of Formal, Normative and Espoused Theologies in such churches.

A further potential for comparison would be to repeat the research undertaken in this thesis in churches of other traditions. In the Anglican Church, where baptisms are more frequent events, research could reveal differences in results, particularly where 'open font' policies are in place. The URC, alongside which the CF developed but which has a different ecclesiology, could reveal the effect of the centralisation of the theology and administration of the denomination. The URC is clear in its Basis of Union that it will determine, centrally, certain theologies and policies (URC 2021). Ecclesial arrangements such as the primacy of the church Members' Meeting within the CF is replaced in the URC by authorities external to the church. This may impose restrictions on the Espoused Theologies of individual churches, and it would be revealing to research the impact this could have on ordinary theological beliefs.

Interviews about baptismal theologies within a Baptist Church would, naturally, produce different results but it would be interesting to see whether the ordinary theological beliefs articulated still demonstrate a measure of theological poverty, perhaps revealed through linguistic concerns. However, whether the beliefs of the ordinary theologians would be found to follow the Espoused Theologies of their respective traditions could be questioned and would be interesting to explore.

The range of interesting potential investigations of theological poverty using the construct of Ordinary Theology that others could investigate appears considerable.

9.9   Ordinary theological beliefs and Cameron's four voices of theology

Considering Cameron's (2010, p.54), Four Voices of Theology (See p. 27 in this thesis), I have taken note that the upper two boxes in the diagram are Normative The Normative element is problematic in the Congregational tradition and the Formal element is weaker than in other traditions. I have found that the theologies of the lower two boxes in Cameron's diagram, Espoused and Operant Theology do not represent accurately the beliefs articulated by my contributors. The theologies articulated and embedded in a church, and that church's actual practices do not correspond closely to the expressed beliefs of the contributors.

I have, earlier, proposed a fifth and lower box where the beliefs of the contributors may be contained if, indeed, they can be contained at all. The beliefs that are gathered from Scripture, from any liturgy encountered, and from exposure to teaching and experience are internalised and held in dynamic tension and activity by each individual believer. These beliefs, frequently unshared, unarticulated, or even consciously formulated are the Ordinary Theology of my ordinary theologians.

9.10   Final thoughts

In order to address the research questions, I will restate them here:

Does theological poverty exist within the Churches of the Congregational Federation and, if so, to what extent?

Have alternative, valid belief systems been constructed in place of traditional theologies by the ordinary theologians in these Churches?

This study confirms the poverty of systematic baptismal theology in all the sample churches, but I have chosen to moderate the question by using the word paucity in place of Camroux's poverty. There is evidence of theology present in all the churches, but this is not of a Systematic Theological nature.

It is not a total absence and so I have called it a paucity rather than a poverty because poverty also carries a pejorative tone.

The interesting and exciting corollary to this is that the contributors in these churches have developed and constructed their own valid belief systems that serve them well in place of the formal theologies of their Ministers and Congregational academics. There is evidence that these belief systems are 'owned' by each contributor, are dynamic and are rich in detail if this is sought. They are also organised by each churchgoer into a format that is largely coherent and that satisfies each person. They have a large measure of internal integrity but are individual and largely have grown over many years as the religious experiences of each person grow and are critically reflected upon before integration into their system of beliefs. The beliefs I uncover from ordinary theologians are what really matters, both to them and to their churches. The prevalence of these beliefs and their richness in expression in our churches is important and action is needed to understand and encourage these beliefs.

If the 'real' theology to be found in churches is described as Ordinary Beliefs, it is suggested that attempts should be made to understand and develop the richness, depth and breadth of those beliefs rather than to attempt to convert them into Systematic Theology, and those that hold them into systematic theologians. Such attempts would need to start from the baseline of the current beliefs that the ordinary theologians present. If such an approach is attempted, it may be asked which church-based approaches would be most profitable in developing ordinary theological beliefs – pulpit teaching, small groups or house-group churches? Would resisting the incorporation of the beliefs of the ordinary theologians who are present in a church result in a personal retreat into each individual's own unshared beliefs?

Would attempts to reduce theological poverty by encouraging a more systematic theological understanding and attitude be counterproductive as it could be seen as imposing theologies on ordinary theologians who might find them uncomfortable?

This study suggests that ordinary theologians, Ministers and academics are accepting the status quo of relative systematic theological paucity in the congregations in their churches. This might serve to perpetuate the 'clerical paradigm' and the authority and status of professional theologians. As a result, the perceived hierarchical position of Ministers and academics would continue without any motivation for change. (cf. Argent (2013, p.522) and Peel (2008). This concurs with Christie's findings (2005, p.209). that her subjects resisted any evaluation of their faith

Theology, expressed as beliefs, is found to be evident and important in my ordinary theologian contributors and their churches but it may not be recognised as such when sought by professional theologians. An alternative proposition is that the language used by theologians prevents the theological thoughts being articulated by the ordinary theologians in ecclesial words and phrases. In his book Speaking Christian, Borg identified that:

> For many, an increasing number, Christianity has become an unfamiliar language. Many people either do not know the words at all or, if they have heard the words, have no idea what they mean … Even for those who think they speak "Christian" fluently, the faith itself is often misunderstood and distorted by many to whom it is seemingly familiar. They think they are speaking the language as it has always been understood, but what they mean by the words and concepts is so different from what these things have meant historically, that they would have trouble communicating with the very authors of the past they honour (Borg 2011, p.5).

It may be that the beliefs and theologies discovered in this study are more in harmony than theological poverty would suggest, but that the potential concord is concealed by linguistics and ecclesial language.

In addition to the ordinary theological articulations expressed in the thesis, I add the Latin phrase 'vox populi, vox dei' - 'the voice of the people [is] the voice of God'. Although this saying was used in a disparaging way by Charlemagne, it has grown in credence to imply that the voice of the majority of the people reflects the will of God. Ordinary theologians may be regarded as 'vox populi' in that, when they speak, they are the people of God and their voices, taken together, are worthy of attention.

Two further theological terms have come to express the understanding that all believers participate in elaborating Christian truth: *sensus fidei* and *sensus fidelium*. The first refers to the Christian's possession of the fundamental truth of his faith. The second refers to a Christian's role in actively defending and elaborating that faith (Burkhard n.d.). Not wanting to take this conjecture too far, taking together, vox populi, vox dei; sensus fidei, sensus fidelium and the articulations of ordinary theologians, we have good reason to listen to the beliefs of the ordinary churchgoer, not only about baptism but about other aspects of ecclesial life and belief. Astley emphasises the need for listening to the members of the churches, taking them seriously and listening to their theologies. In other words, their Ordinary Theology needs to be taken seriously.

Throughout this study, the construct of Ordinary Theology has been used and has proven to be a safe and reliable research tool. Ordinary Theology is a force which should, not only be recognised but also listened to and valued. In addition to its importance as a research tool as shown in this thesis, it enables the everyday theological beliefs of regular churchgoers to be identified, studied and respected. Ordinary Theology is, not only a powerful research tool but it 'is the theology to which every Christian pastor, preacher and teacher must relate (Astley and Christie 2007, pp.4–5). it involves reflection, judgement and interpretation and, hence, can be properly considered to be a theology. As Astley continues, 'Statistically … ordinary theology *is* the theology of the church … a 'working theology' … and the wisdom of the people'. However, there is not just one Ordinary Theology; there are as many ordinary theologies as there are people, each of them with their own beliefs. As Rowan Williams (2001, p.9) observed, people 'speak of God with a marked local accent'.

This is the importance of Ordinary Theology as shown in this research. Although the articulations may be confused, hesitant, apparently superficial or unorthodox, they are also sensitive to context, experience and situations.

Ordinary theologians are closer to the everyday heartbeat of our modern world but incorporate what they learn from Scripture and worship into their own contexts and experiences; their own Ordinary Theologies. I believe, with Astley and Christie (2007, p.27) that:

> *The study of ordinary theology can be a fruitful way*
>
> *of enlarging and enlivening this theological process.*

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Churches contributing to conversations

Aberdeen, Balmedie	Cove Bay	Islington, Union Chapel
Aberdeen, Danestone	Cranbrook	Kentish Town
Aberdeen, Kittybrewster	Crediton	Kilmarnock
Aberdeen, Northfield	Dereham	Kingswood
Aberdeen, Woodside	Dordon, Long Street	Kirkaldy, Pathhead
Abertillery	Dowlais, Ivor	Kirkaldy, West End
Airdrie, Coatdyke	Driffield	Knowle Green
Airdrie, Ebenezer	Dudley	Lanark
Anchor, Wandsworth	Dulverton	Lapford
Ardrossan	Dundee	Larkhall
Ashby-de-la-Zouch	East Bergholt	Leicester, Clarendon Park
Battlesbridge	East Ham	Littlington
Bedford, Bunyan Meeting	Ebbw Vale, West End	Llanhilleth, High Street
Bedford, Elstow Bunyan	Esk	Loddiswell
Beer	Eyemouth	Long Itchington
Bellshill	Fairford	Maidstone
Belvedere and Erith	Forden	Manchester, Lees Street
Berkeley	Frampton on Severn	Manchester, The Studio
Bethesda, Cwrt Sart	Freystrop	Market Harborough
Birmingham, Ladypool Road	Glasgow, Lloyd Morris	Markfield
Blaby	Glasgow, Parkhead	Markham
Blaenavon	Grassington	Martin Top
Blantyre	Grimsby	Minsterly
Bow	Guilden Morden	Morton in Marsh
Bradford, Kipping	Harden	Musselborough
Bretherton	Harting	Narborough
Bristol Hope	Haverford West	Newark
Bristol, Kingswood	Haverhill	Newport
Brixton, Trinity	Heathfield	Newton Burgoland
Carlisle, Lowther Street	Herstmonceux	North Nibley
Carmarthen	Higham	North Walsham
Castle Combe	Highbury Quadrant	Norwich

Caterham	Hutton	Nottingham
Cawsand	Ide	Oakamore
Chatham, Emmanuel	Iden Green	Oakham
Cheltenham, Highbury	Ipswich, Hatfield Road	Old Coulsdon
Chinley Chapel	Ipswich, St Clements	Oldham, Ebenezer
Clydebank, Radnor Park	Ipswich, Worship Jesus	Oldham, Greenacres
Colchester	Isle of Sheppey, Bethel	Oldham, Springhead
Corfe Castle	Isleworth	Orsett
Padfield	South Chingford	Tredegar
Penge	Southam	Trudoxhill
Pennymoor	Southwick	Ullesthorpe
Perth	St Hellier	Uppingham
Pickering, Welcome	Stalbridge	Urmston, Greenfield
Pontypool	Stambourne	Walkden
Port Talbot	Steeple Bumpstead	Wandsworth
Rhiwderin	Stepney	Whitland
Richmond	Stroud	Whitley Bay
Roxton	Swansea, Fabians Bay	Wickwar
Scarborough	Swansea, Paraclete	Wimbledon
Scunthorpe	Swansea, Upper Killay	Witney
Sheffield, Hillsborough	Taunton, North Street	Wivenhoe
Sheffield, Tapton Hill	Taunton, Stoke St Mary	Woodford Wells
Sherston	Thornhill	Woodham Ferrers
Shillington	Thundersley	Yelvertoft
Shotts	Tollesbury	

170 Churches (70% of all CF Churches)

Appendix 2 - Churches where detailed discussions took place

Discussions took place with people during visits to the following Churches		
Abertillery	Greenacres	Roxton
Balmedie	Heathfield	Sheerness
Battlesbridge	Hillsborough	Shillington
Bellshill	Hutton	Shotts
Bow	Kentish Town	South Chingford
Bunyan Meeting	Kipping	Springhead
Cawsand	Kittybrewster	Stalbridge
Chinley	Loddiswell	Tapton
Colchester	Market Harborough	Upper Killay
Crediton	Mussleborough	Uppermill
Danestone	Newark	Wandsworth
East Ham	Newport	Whitland
Elstow	Northfields	Wimbledon
Fabians Bay	North Nibley	Witney
Frampton	Orsett	Woodham Ferrers
		Woodside

46 Churches (18% of all CF Churches)

Appendix 3 - Visits to events where discussions took place

Welsh Leaders' Assembly (12 people)		
Training Weekend (20 people)		
CF XTRA Summer Camp (30 young people)		

Appendix 4 - Discussion points used to build the interview schedule

1	**Who is baptism for?**	Infants	Adults	Believers	Families	Children of Members	With church connections	Indiscriminate	Christening different?
2	**How should baptism take place?**	Affusion Pouring	Aspersion Sprinkling	Immersion	Nature of the water	By whom?			
3	**When should baptism occur?**	Soon after birth	At eight days	Infant	Age of responsibility	Adult	Age of understanding	Intellectual impairment	Late in life
4	**Where should baptism take place**	In home church	In a church with better facilities	Before the whole congregation	In private	Emergency baptism	Before other believers	Act of witness to others	In the sea, lake, pool or river
5	**Baptism as cleansing**	Purification	repentance	Renewal	Regeneration	Re-birth	Original sin	Renunciation of the devil	
6	**Need baptism for salvation?**	Essential	Desirable	Not essential	Act of salvation	Human action	Divine action	Necessary for heaven	
7	**Baptism as introduction?**	Naming	Entry into the Church	Cradle roll	Needed for membership	Access to communion	Confirmation	Take up own promises	
8	**Need for preparation?**	Classes	Teaching	Discipleship	Spontaneous	Link to Lent and Easter	Preferred time (Easter)		
9	**Need for support?**	Godparents	Supporters	Sponsors	Whole church	Commitment			
10	**Baptism of the Holy Spirit?**	Link to water baptism?	Before or after water baptism?	Separate, unlinked event?	Divine action	Everyone to experience it			
11	**Role of visual theology**	Nature and position of the font or baptistry	Gift of a candle	Christening gown, baptismal robes	Tomb or womb?	Death and resurrection	Anointing	Sign of the cross	Historical practices
12	**Church polity/ agreement**	Minister's decision	Church decision	Church Trust Deeds	Policy	Protocol			

Appendix 5 - Subjects raised during conversations and covered by literature

Infant Baptism & Infant Christening	Sheerness, Stalbridge, Chingford, Perth, Newport, Hutton, Elstow, Anchor, East Ham, Witney, Newport, Tredegar, Kipping, Woodham, Danestone, Ladypool,
Scripture: "brought children"	Woodham, Danestone, Ladypool, Newport
Christening for babies Christening = children Baptism = babies	Chingford, Orsett, Hillsborough Newport Tredegar
Infant Dedication or Thanksgiving	Highbury, Cawsand, Stalbridge, Perth, Tapton Hill, Sheerness, Heathfield, Greenacres, Uppermill, Northfields, Kittybrewster, Woodside, Danestone, Chingford, Crediton, Bow, Hutton,
Godparents	Chingford, Orsett, Uppermill, Greenacres, Hillsborough, East Ham, Witney
Sponsors	Chingford, Orsett, Uppermill, Greenacres, Ladypool, Hillsborough
Baptism of Jesus	Northfieds, Uppermill, Nibley, Danestone, Elstow, Sheerness, Orsett, Greenacres, Tapton, Nibley, Kipping,Witney
Scripture: Ethiopian eunuch	Woodham, Newport

Scripture:
  Whole family of jailer
    including the children?
	Woodham, Newport, Uppermill, Elstow, Nibley

Immersion / aspersion / sprinkling	Liverpool, Hillsborough, East Ham, Witney
Place of baptism – in church or out	Perth,
Water- is it different?	Perth

Adult Baptism	Tredgar, Blaenarvon, Chngford, Bow, Stallbridge, Caterham, Perth, Heathfield, Orsett, Uppermill, Greenacres, East Ham, Witney
Leave it to pastor	Chingford, Orsett, Uppermill, Danestone,
Baptism for non-Christian Parents and Baptism for non- church members	Woodham, Isleworth, Nibley
Church related people or general public	Tapton, Blaenarvon, Bow, Stallbridge, Nibley, Witney
Baptism for church children Only	Tredegar
Minimal teaching on baptism	Crediton, Loddiswell, Northfileds, Kittybrewster, Woodside, Elstow, Nibley, Sheerness, Stallbridge, Isleworth, Chingford, Hutton, Woodham, Tapton, Heathfield, Uppermill, Sheerness, Hillsborough
Baptism and church membership	Blaenarvon, Chingford, Stallbridge, Loddiswell, Crediton, Caterham, Tapton, Northfields, Balmedie, Orsett, Elstow, Nibley, Sheerness, Hillsborough, Kipping, East Ham, Witney
Place of baptism with a service	Perth
Whole church commitment	Chingford
Rebaptism	Orsett, Chingford, Newport, Wimbledon, Hillsborough
Baptism not essential	Sheerness, Perth, Orsett, Uppermill, Balmedie Kipping, Witney
No link to salvation	Ladypool, Nibley, Sheerness, Orsett, Chingford, Loddiswell, East Ham, Witney
Not connected with Holy Spirit	Loddiswell, Perth,
Baptism of the Spirit	Orsett, Loddiswell, Perth, Wimbledon

Confirmation	Orsett, Greenacres, Danestone, Uppermill,
Discipleship teaching on Baptism Discipleship	Chingford, Hutton, Nibley, Kipping, East Ham Chingford, Hutton, Nibley
Link to Communion?	Balmedie, Chingford, Crediton, Bow, Loddiswell, Stallbridge, Caterham, Elstow, Nibley, Sheerness, Hillsborough, Kipping, East Ham, Witney
Candles, robes and other equipment Link to OT, Jewish & Early Church practices	Latimer, Crediton
Circumcision	Liverpool
Scripture: Go and make disciples – baptising them	Orsett
No church protocol / policy	Crediton, Bow, Sheerness, Uppermill, Balmedie, Danestone, Cawsand. Nibley, Hillsborough, Kipping
Small Fonts or Baptistries (rare)	Loddiswell, Stallbridge, Newport, Danestone, Blaenarvon, Crediton, Bow, Greenacres, Elstow, Nibley, Sheerness, Woodham, Orsett, Heathfield, Sheerness, Wimbledon, Hillsborough, Kipping, Witney Newport, Tapton Hill, Northfields, Chingford, Crediton, Bow, Loddiswell, Nibley, Anchor,
Age of baptism	Liverpool
Degree of understanding	Ladypool
Degree of preparation	Chingford, Isleworth
Intellectual ability	Isleworth

Appendix 6 - Themes from the literature

1	Infant baptism. Whole households
2	Dedication. Thanksgiving. Naming Ceremony
3	Sponsors. Godparents
4	Baptism in Scripture
5	Water, not the sacrament. Material element. River, sea, pool. Quantity – affusion, aspersion, immersion or sprinkle
6	Believers' baptism
7	Action by Minister, only Minister?
8	Indiscriminate baptism
9	Baptismal instruction
10	Entry into the Church. In our church. Before our fellowship. Public event. Baptism and membership. Church commitment
11	Rebaptism, once for all. Irreversible. Can't get 'unbaptized'
12	Baptism not essential. Babies dying early – lost in hell. Non-baptized in heaven
13	Salvific
14	Baptism of the Spirit. Gift of the Spirit
15	Confirmation. Baptism's unfinished business. Laying on of hands
16	Disciple making
17	Communion. Reception and participation

18	Old rituals. Exorcism. Fasting. Vigil. Naked – new clothes. Put on Christ. Candle. Anointing with oil. Chrism – sealing. Water exorcised and blessed. Milk. Six weeks Lent -> Easter
19	Circumcision
20	Conversion
21	Pardon, cleanse, renew, spiritual washing, ritual washing
22	Regeneration
23	New birth, re-birth, start of link with Christ
24	Sacrament. Divine action. Outward sign. Inward change
25	Repentance. Original sin
26	Participation in Christ's death and resurrection (tomb)
27	Profession of faith

Appendix 7 - Themes found only in conversations

Scripture:
 	
    Go and make disciples –
 	
    baptising them
	Orsett

No church protocol / policy	Crediton, Bow, Sheerness, Uppermill, Balmedie, Danestone, Cawsand. Nibley, Hillsborough, Kipping
Small Fonts or Baptistries (rare)	Loddiswell, Stallbridge, Newport, Danestone, Blaenarvon, Crediton, Bow, Greenacres, Elstow, Nibley, Sheerness, Woodham, Orsett, Heathfield, Sheerness, Wimbledon, Hillsborough, Kipping, Witney Newport, Tapton Hill, Northfields, Chingford, Crediton, Bow, Loddiswell, Nibley, Anchor,
Age of baptism Degree of understanding Degree of preparation Intellectual ability	Liverpool Ladypool Chingford, Isleworth Isleworth

Appendix 8 - Themes found only in the literature

1	Conversion
2	Pardon, cleanse, renew, spiritual washing, ritual washing
3	Regeneration
4	New birth, re-birth, start of link with Christ
5	Sacrament. Divine action. Outward sign. Inward change
6	Repentance. Original sin
7	Participation in Christ's death and resurrection (TOMB)
8	Profession of faith

Appendix 9 - Schedule of interview prompts

1.   What does the word 'baptism' mean to you?

2.   Do you think that there is a difference between a baptism and a christening?

2.1   What does the word 'baptism' mean to you?

Can you remember the last baptism you attended?

Please describe what happened.

What did this event mean for you?

2.2   What does the word 'christening' mean for you?

Can you remember the last christening you attended?

Please describe what happened.

What did this event mean for you?

3.   Who do you think baptism is for?

3.1   Is baptism mainly for: infants, adults?

3.2   What about christening? Is that mainly for infants or adults?

3.3   What does "believers' baptism" mean to you?

3.4   The Bible talks about whole families being baptized.

What are your thoughts about that?

3.5   Do you think baptism should be available to:

Church members and their children only?

Those with a connection to the church?

Anyone who requests it? *(indiscriminate baptism)*

3.6   Some churches offer alternatives to infant baptisms.

Blessings, thanksgivings, dedications.

What are your thoughts about these alternatives?

4.   How do you think a baptism should take place?

4.1   Do you think baptism should be:

by pouring? *(affusion)*

or by sprinkling? *(aspersion)*

or by immersion?

4.2   Is the sort of water used important?

Ordinary water in a font?

Deep water in a baptistry?

A swimming pool, river or the sea?

4.3 Some people believe that the water should be blessed before it is used.

> What do you think about that?

> Does the water become 'special' through the blessing?

4.4 Does it matter who performs the baptism?

> The Minister, an Elder or a Deacon, or anybody?

5. When do you think a baptism should take place?

5.1 As a baby or infant?

> Soon after birth?

> At eight days? *(cf. circumcision)*

> As an infant?

5.2 If someone has not been baptized as a child when might this be done?

> When they are old enough to make decisions for themselves?

> What does that mean to you?

> What about people with intellectual impairment?

What degree of understanding should candidates demonstrate?

5.3 As an adult?

> At what age does someone become an adult?

5.4 Late in life?

5.5 Following a conversion experience?

5.6 On a profession of faith?

6. Some people request believers' baptism even if they were baptized as a child

6.1 How do you feel about this?

6.2 Does this mean that their infant baptism was not valid?

6.3 Should their request be permitted?

7. Where do you think baptism should take place?

7.1 Should it take place in the person's home church?

> Or is a lake, river or the sea acceptable?

> Or is another church with better facilities preferable?

7.2 Should the whole church family be present?

> Or is a private baptism at home acceptable?

7.3 Do you think a baptism should take place

in the presence of other believers?

7.4   Should it be an act of witness to others?

7.5   Is there a place for an emergency baptism?

8.   When you think about baptism, do you –

8.1   Think of it as cleansing or purification?

8.2   Think of it as an act of repentance?

        Or renewal?

        Or regeneration?

        Or re-birth?

8.3   Think it has anything to do with original sin?

8.4   Think it has anything to do with the need for exorcism?

9.   Do you regard baptism as being related to salvation?

9.1   Is baptism essential for salvation and forgiveness?

        Or is it desirable?

        Or not essential at all?

9.2   In fact, do you think of baptism as an act of salvation at all?

9.3   Is baptism necessary for admission to heaven?

9.4   Do you regard baptism as a human action?

        Or a divine action by God?

10.   Do you think baptism plays a part in entry to the Church?

10.1   Does baptism serve as a means of introducing the person
to the church?

        Or as a rite of entry to the Church?

        Or perhaps simply as a naming ceremony?

10.2   Is baptism needed to be a part of the Church?

        Or for church membership?

        Or for access to communion?

10.3   Is there a place for confirmation to 'complete' baptism
in some way?

10.4   Should there be some other way for a person
to take over their own promises?

11. **Do you consider that preparation for baptism is important?**

11.1 Should there be a time of preparation before baptism?

11.2 Is this for candidates or for their God-parents or sponsors?

11.3 Should there be baptismal classes?

11.4 Or some other form of pre-baptismal teaching from the pulpit?

11.5 What about discipleship classes after baptism?

11.6 Should there be a place for spontaneous or immediate baptism?

11.7 Is there any link between baptism and Lent or Easter?

11.8 Is there is a preferred time for baptisms to take place?

(Easter/Pentecost/any Sunday?)

12. **Do you think that people undergoing baptism need support?**

12.1 Is there a place for God-parents in baptism?

Or sponsors?

Or supporters?

12.2 Should the whole church commit to supporting the candidate?

12.3 To what extent should that support be a commitment?

13. **Do you see a link between water baptism and baptism of the Holy Spirit?**

13.1 What do you understand by "Baptism of the Holy Spirit"?

13.2 is it something that everyone can or should experience?

13.3 Does it have some link to water baptism?

Or is it a separate, unlinked event?

13.4 Do you regard Baptism of the Holy Spirit as a gift from God?

14. **Are there any rituals and conventions that you think**

are important in Baptism?

14.1 Do you have any views on the place of fonts and baptistries?

14.2 Are baptismal gowns or other traditional apparel important?

14.3 Do you think the candidate should be given a lighted candle?

14.4 Should the candidate be marked with the sign of the cross?

14.5 Is there a place for anointing the candidate with oil?

14.6 Are there any other traditional practices you think are

important?

15.   How do you visualise baptism?

Some people have special ways in which they conceptualise baptism.

15.1   One concept is of baptism as 'tomb or womb'.

Do you identify with this view?

15.2   Another concept is of 'death and resurrection'.

Do you identify with this view?

15.3   Or are neither of these concepts comfortable for you?

16.   Are you aware of any church policies and agreements about baptism?

Some churches have Trust Deeds that specify things about baptism.

16.1   Are you aware of any such rules in your church?

16.2   Do you know of any policies or protocols affecting your church?

16.3   Does the Minister make decisions about baptism in your church?

16.4   Or is it the Church Meeting?

17.   Is there anything else about baptism or christening

you would like to share?

Appendix 10 - Letter to Ministers inviting them to participate

York St John University

28 Oakland Place

Buckhurst Hill

Essex, IG9 5JZ

07802 410 258

020 8559 1808

pauldavis16@hotmail.co.uk

October 2017

Dear Minister,

I am writing to ask for your support and help in a project I am undertaking with York St John University.

It involves interviewing, in person or by telephone, about six people from each of six churches for between 45 and 60 minutes to explore with them their views and beliefs about baptism. The people concerned will be ordinary, willing, adult church attenders without any formal theological training. They will need to be able to give their informed consent to participate.

The dual purposes of the project are to understand where church attenders stand on the question of baptism, and secondly to provide the information for the input to a Doctor of Philosophy degree I am undertaking with York St John.

Each potential participant will receive an information sheet (copy attached) and will be asked to complete a Consent Form (copy attached) as this is required by the university. They may, of course, withdraw from the study at any time.

In addition, when all the individual interviews have been completed, I plan to conduct a group discussion, preferably in person, with all the participants from each church.

Ideally, I would find it very valuable to conduct a parallel interview with you as the Minister, Pastor or Church Leader for comparison purposes if you would allow me to do so.

As you will realise, I do not know which members of your congregation might prove to be successful candidates and so it would be very helpful if you could act as a sort of "gatekeeper", identifying a range of participants who would be happy to help and have views about baptism that they would be willing to share.

If you are willing to support me in this study, please let me know so that I can take things forward.

I do appreciate that you may feel it necessary to seek the approval of your Leadership Team and possibly the Church Meeting before we can proceed. If it would be helpful for you to have more detail, please let me know. It is a condition of the Research Ethics Committee that I ask you to confirm that you agree to the conditions of this research, that no coercion is applied to interviewees, that they are able to give consent to their participation and that they are aware that they may withdraw at any time.

I have taken the liberty of attaching a copy of the Information Sheet and the Consent form.

Please let me know your initial response to this request and, if favourable, how you would be able to take this forward. My telephone numbers and email address are given at the head of this letter.

Every blessing,

Rev Dr Paul Davis

York St John University

Appendix 11 - Minister's Agreement Form

"Ordinary" Baptism: Congregational Theology

I confirm that I understand the purpose of this project and the way it will operate.

I agree to act as a "gatekeeper", identifying and proposing some of the members of the church congregation as possible participants for the project.

These people are members of the congregation who:

- o Have not received any academic theological training
- o May have interesting views and beliefs about baptism that they are prepared to share
- o Have not been coerced or pressurised into taking part

Please confirm that each participant:

- o Will receive a Participants' Information Sheet
- o Knows that they should sign the Participant Consent Form only if they understand it and are willing to take part in the study
- o Knows that they may decline or withdraw at any time without penalty

Signed …………………………………………………………………..

Print name …………………………………………………………………

Minister/Leader of …………………………………………………. Church

Appendix 12 - Research participant information sheet

Research Project Title

"Ordinary" Baptism: Congregational Theology

What is the purpose of this project?

The purpose of this project is to listen to the thoughts and beliefs of ordinary church members on the subject of baptism and to compare these with church traditions.

How have I been invited?

You have been nominated by the Minister/Leader of your church as a member of the congregation who may have personal views on the subject of baptism.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited as an ordinary church member of one of the churches of the Congregational Federation where baptisms may occasionally take place. By "ordinary",   I mean people without any formal theological training

Do I have to take part?

You have been invited to take part but you are free to decline the invitation. No coercion or persuasion may be applied and you will need to sign a consent form indicating your ability and willingness to take part.

What will I have to do if I decide to take part?

Participation will involve a one-to-one confidential conversation which may be in person or by telephone. This will be recorded and notes will be taken. This conversation will take between 30 and 60 minutes. When all the conversations have taken place, there will also be a group meeting to allow further discussion, at a place that is convenient for everyone. There will be no need for any preparation before either event.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

It is very unlikely that there will be any harmful outcomes to you from this project.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

You will be helping the interviewer to complete a project leading towards the award the degree of Doctor of Philosophy with York St. John University.

You may also become aware and reach some understanding of your own views on baptism within your church.

What if something goes wrong?

Please be aware that you may stop the interview and withdraw from the study at any point if you wish to do so without indicating any reason for this. If you have any cause for concern about your part in the project, you are free to approach any member of the Church Leadership Team or the interviewer's Project Supervisor at York St John University.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All responses will be kept anonymous including recordings and notes from the interview. Written notes will be locked away securely. Recordings will be stored on a computer and will be password protected. At the end of the project, the recordings will be safely retained against the possibility of future research use. Before any such use is made, your further consent will be obtained.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results of the project will be written up, maintaining participants' anonymity, into a Project Report. This will be shared with the interviewer's Project Supervisor, Examiners and with University Moderators.

The final Project Report will be held on file at the University and may be made available to other researchers.

Who is organising and supervising the research?

This research is an integral part of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The research will be supervised by a Supervisor from York St John University.

Contact details for further information

Please feel free to contact me with any concerns you may have about the project. Please feel free to contact me.

pauldavis16@hotmail.co.uk

Or to ring me on 020 8559 1808 or 07802 410 258.

Appendix 13 - Participant's Consent Form

TITLE OF PROJECT: *"Ordinary" Baptism: Congregational Theology*

Please complete and sign this sheet only if you understand the purpose of the study and you are willing to help with it.

Have you read the Participant Information Sheet?	YES / NO
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and to discuss the study?	YES / NO
Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions?	YES / NO
Have you received enough information about the study?	YES / NO
Can you confirm that no coercion or pressure been applied to persuade you to take part?	YES / NO
Are you aware that the interview will be recorded and notes taken?	YES / NO
Have you been made aware that the recordings will NOT be destroyed at the end of the project?	YES / NO
Are you willing for the recording to take place?	YES / NO
Do you consent to participate in the study?	YES/NO
Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time and without having to give a reason for withdrawing?	YES / NO

Signed ....……................... **Date** ....

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS) ....……........................