

Dear Rich Waller and the admissions committee,

During my application process I was asked at which points I differ with the doctrinal statement of Biola University. I responded candidly in the understanding that students of many denominational persuasions apply and are accepted into programs at Biola University, and that doctrinal diversity was permitted within the sphere of evangelical theology. I wish to assure you that I believe the Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God. I consider myself to be theologically orthodox.

I am not certain whether I am being asked merely to clarify, or also to actually *defend* my positions on those three issues with which I differ. If I am being asked to relinquish those beliefs that differ from the position of Biola University, then there is little reason for us to move forward. In the expectation rather that a diversity of Christians are included in your programs I will attempt to both clarify and defend. I suspect my paper will come across a bit defensive. Please forgive me for that. I take your challenge to be more serious than a friendly chat.

I am sure you understand that I am Lutheran. Although I grew up in the Lutheran Church, however, it was after having “explored the field” of churches early in college that I came back to embrace Lutheran theology in a heart-felt way. These words may leave an impression that my particular denomination is the all-important issue for my Christianity. To the contrary, I receive as gifts the fellowship and insight of my brothers and sisters in Christ of every denomination who confess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. I will repeat what I stated in my application that my intention in coming to Biola is NOT to shake things up. I wish rather to rub shoulders with fellow evangelicals and to become better equipped to proclaim the Gospel. I do not regard differences over the sacraments as matters that should separate Christians. Now, however, since I am being asked to clarify where I stand theologically, my answer is, with the church of Luther’s reformation.

With respect to baptism and the Lord’s Supper I regard these as what Lutherans call sacraments (mysteries). They are actually “instruments” through which God works salvation. In departure from Roman Catholic theology, I consider these two rites are not in any sense magical. Faith is required. Faith receives the gifts these sacraments convey. Apart from faith they are of no benefit. And yet there is a sense in which God objectively promises to work in and through each respective sacrament.

For example, in Romans 6, the Greek words *eis* (“into”) and *sumphutoi* (“united”) are repeated. The act of being baptized places us *into* Christ where we are *united* with His death and resurrection. This is the language of instrumentation. God actively works in the candidate in the actual act of baptism. Phrased differently, in baptism it is God who is doing the work, not the person who is getting wet. At the same time, the baptized person is commanded to actually *reckon* his life as dead to the old way of sin, and alive to the new realm of salvation (v.11). So, there is a mysterious relationship between the act of salvation in the rite, on the one hand, and the command to personally lay hold of that salvation, on the other. There is an additional passage to consider. It is significant that

Peter writes in his first letter (3:21), “Baptism...now saves you...” (*nun sozei baptisma su*). Here too the language describes baptism as an actual *instrument* of salvation.

Now it is also true that a non-instrumental context is found in many other passages referring to baptism. Acts 2:38, for example, says, “*Repent and be baptized and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*” But I see no conflict here since the New Testament broadly holds the priority of God’s grace, on the one hand, and the command to believe, on the other, in constant tension. This tension is neither clarified nor resolved in Scripture. It is allowed to remain as a tension.

Now I will get to what I believe is the bottom line. If you are concerned whether I am saved, my answer is that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is my life. I live and breathe salvation in Jesus Christ. Secondly, if I appear fixated on commending baptism instead of Christ Himself to our generation, be assured that it is the latter. It is Christ who is the affection of my heart and the object of my preaching. On the other hand, it is significant that the clearest treatment of baptism in the New Testament appears in the center of St. Paul’s extensive argument for salvation in Christ (Romans 6:1f.).

As for the mode of baptism (sprinkling or immersion) I agree with Luther that immersion is actually a better expression of the reality of baptism than is mere sprinkling, (note Romans 6:4). On the other hand, I find no *command* to actually immerse the candidate in the New Testament. An over-emphasis on the amount of water used is a movement into legalism and away from the message of grace.

I embrace infant baptism. I suspect this position will be regarded as the most problematic of my three statements on baptism. I want you to understand that I am not opposed to adult baptism for adults who are converted to Christ. Yet there are several New Testament grounds on which infant baptism rests. First, in the Book of Acts there are occasions in which whole families are baptized. I understand that this does not constitute proof. But the Apostle Paul, in Colossians 2:11,12, likens baptism to spiritual circumcision. Since infants (eight-day-old males) were incorporated into the Old Testament covenant, it follows, unless Paul should make a break with the parallel, that infants are candidates for baptism in the New Covenant. It is significant that “buried” in verse 12 is a participle that belongs to the same sentence as verse 11. It is literally translated (... , being buried with him...). In the Greek the words “*and you were,*” acting as a mild conjunction, are not in the text. The words, “*...buried...by baptism*” (the literal Greek translation) therefore are in strong continuity with the previous verse on circumcision. Second, it is significant that infant baptism is not forbidden in the New Testament. Here, of course, I am resting in part on the argument from silence.¹ I recognize the dangers laden in such an argument. But in this particular context the grounds for argument from silence are very strong. If it were true that the early church broke with the Old Testament on the age of candidacy for initiation into the covenant, reason would expect the New Testament to loudly and repeatedly announce that change. To break from infant circumcision in the Old to adult-only initiation in the New, would amount to a huge departure. Yet there is no such announcement of a break. The New Testament is silent on any demand for adult baptism alone. That adults are in fact the

more commonly mentioned as candidates for baptism in the New Testament rests on documents that are historical in nature (The Book of Acts) rather than prescriptive in nature (the epistles). And this larger number of adults being baptized in the New Testament is parallel to the beginning of Israel's history where the first wave of candidates for circumcision were adults who were then followed by their children.

As for the Lord's Supper, and consistent with an earlier statement on baptism as a sacrament, I believe that in communion we encounter what is called the "real presence" of the living Christ and not just a memory of His sacrifice in the past. This is not transubstantiation as held by Roman Catholics. Neither is it a repetition of His sacrifice. But it means that in the two elements we receive the body and blood of Christ. Jesus said of the elements, "This is (touto estin) my body" and "This is (touto estin) my blood" (Mark 14:22-24). The Greek, in summary, is translated "is," and not "represents."

As for the third difference that I expressed, eschatology, I do NOT differ as to the *fact* of Jesus coming again. My difference is over the doctrine of pre-millennialism to a moderate degree, but even more so on what I perceive to be an undue fixation on end-times prophecy. On this third issue I admit I am the least studied. Yet there are reasons for that. First of all, since I am persuaded from Jesus' own words that we can't and therefore won't know the time of His coming (Matthew 25:13), then I find other areas of theology more profitable for my time. Second, I am persuaded that the Book of Revelation is, by its very nature, written by The Apostle John to 1st Century Christians and also *for* 1st Century Christians who needed comfort in the midst of severe tribulation. It is difficult for me to accept that John wrote to those Christians who were trying to keep their heads above water, about events twenty or more centuries later than the time in which they actually lived. In short, it is we who are called back to the message John gave Christians in their time, not they who are called to wonder about events in our time. Third, it appears that history is generally ambiguous as to signs of His coming. Every generation since the time of the early church has had their grounds for believing Christ was coming in their respective time.

Again, I expect and long for the return of Jesus Christ. In the meantime, I live with my questions about the signs and the times. I am not opposed to learning more about Biola's position on eschatology. I will take that class for all I can receive from it.

I hope my responses will be received and that I will be considered for your program. I believe I am an outstanding candidate for your consideration. The signs are numerous for me that such a program as Biola's is where God is calling me to be.

In Him,
Rev. Gary Wayne Jensen

ⁱ Dr. Jeramias writes, "*Delay of baptism in the case of Christian children was wholly unknown in the primitive Church.*" It was not until the year 329-30 that we have certain evidence of a case of Christian

parents letting themselves grow up unbaptized. Joachim Jeramias. Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries. (SCM 1960), p. 56. Cited in Craig Parton. The Defense Never Rests. (Concordia, 2003), p.143.