# DEPENDENT INDEPENDENCE: TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF SOUTHERN BAPTIST ASSOCIATIONALISM

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by

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**APPROVAL SHEET**

DEPENDENT INDEPENDENCE: TOWARD A THEOLOGY
OF SOUTHERN BAPTIST ASSOCIATIONALISM

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To Evie,

I dedicate this dissertation to you. Without your selflessness and sacrifice, this dream could never have become a reality. Each day you show me the meaning of unconditional love and humility.

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# PREFACE

I am thankful for many people who have helped make this dissertation possible. My doctoral supervisor, Gregg Allison, has exhorted me to become a better writer and thinker; most importantly, he has exemplified what it means to love God and serve Christ's bride with Christ-like humility. The other members of my dissertation committee, Stephen Wellum and Tom Nettles, have provided listening ears and sharpening insight. My external reader, Nathan Finn, provided interaction, critique, and encouragement that were immensely valuable as he supervised an independent study on associationalism in 2014.

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Samuel Tyson

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# CHAPTER 1
# INTRODUCTION

## The State of the Discussion Regarding Baptist Connectivity

Within his work *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Gregg Allison promotes a position of "strong connections between congregational churches."[1] This material piqued the researcher's interest. A common criticism from Presbyterians and Anglicans is that Baptists (especially Southern Baptists) merely care about their own congregation, with little concern for connectivity between other local bodies of Christ. While these claims may be an overstatement, it is worthwhile to consider if Baptists today are, in fact, enamored with independence, to the detriment of connectivity. This mindset has been detected within the Southern Baptist Convention. Within his work *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Proposal*, David Dockery pointedly asserts, "If Southern Baptists truly are to be a people of God before a watching world, we must visibly exhibit an attitude of unity . . . . We need to hear afresh that visible unity that is grounded in truth is God's expectation for us."[2] Allison's and Dockery's exhortations lead to the questions at hand. Should like-minded Baptist churches exhibit more connection? What place does association hold within a proper biblical and historically Baptist ecclesiology?

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[1]Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 297.

[2]David S. Dockery, *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Proposal* (Nashville: B and H Academic, 2008), 52.

## Thesis

This dissertation argues that a proper twenty-first century Southern Baptist ecclesiology comprises an exegetically grounded understanding of church connectivity that includes accountability and mutual care, as demonstrated in the New Testament literature.[3] This associational concept does not disrupt local church self-governance, a core Baptist belief.[4] Also, proper Southern Baptist connectivity retrieves and exemplifies the early American Baptist tradition, as illustrated by early American Baptist associations, namely, the Philadelphia tradition. Baptists of this era put forth an ecclesiological associationalism that strove to uphold robust inter-church connection. This connection reflected a desire for doctrinal fidelity and encouraged churches to maintain doctrinal purity and unity among local bodies connected to associations. This dissertation illustrates that Baptist associationalism during the nineteenth century underwent a transition.[5] This transition, signaled by denominational expansion, undercut the ecclesiological connection between like-minded Baptist churches, thus departing from its original conception. This new conception of Baptist church connection prompts the need for a reappraisal of this core aspect of Baptist ecclesiology.

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[3]To specify, the thesis does not argue that accountability and mutual care are the only (or even primary) sources of connection between like-minded churches, but rather are characteristics that comprise proper church connectivity. Also, "mutual care" entails, for example, churches ministering to each other in times of need or perhaps exhortation when churches are embarking toward heterodoxy. This action is akin to pastoral care within the local church. The Second London Confession considered church connectivity within article 14: churches should "hold communion amongst themselves." William Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 2nd rev. ed., rev. Bill J. Leonard (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2011), 288–89.

[4]In his seminal study on associations, Walter Shurden asserts that Baptist associations were initially formed based upon practical realities (i.e., the need to prevent persecution, etc.). For further study, see Walter B. Shurden, "Associationalism among Baptists in America, 1707-1814" (ThD thesis, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1967). This dissertation argues that theological concerns and doctrinal accountability served a meaningful functional role in these entities. In other words, these entities attempted to promote and maintain doctrinal fidelity and hold conjoining churches to similar standards, thus giving accountability.

[5]This paper will demonstrate that this redefinition distorted the traditional understanding of key ecclesiological concepts, such as the Body of Christ and the Priesthood of Believers.

## History of Research

Throughout the history of Baptist associations in America, significant writings have captured the nature and purpose of this branch of Baptist ecclesiology. The following summary considers these academic offerings; the section treats monographs (including dissertations) and essays in chronological order. In consulting the literature, it seems Baptist ecclesiological literature and practice prior to the mid-nineteenth century reveals dissimilar renderings of the relationship between local church autonomy and inter-church association than the generations that followed.[6]

### Monographs and Dissertations

In 1955, Hugh Wamble presented a substantial dissertation regarding fellowship among seventeenth-century English Baptists. While his study does not directly pertain to Baptist associationalism within America, his in-depth treatment of English Baptist life provides consultation for the current work. Wamble quested to determine the degree and character of relations among seventeenth-century English Baptists, as well as other professing Christians outside the Baptist persuasion.[7]

In one chapter, Wamble argues that British Baptists developed a unique connectional system.[8] Certain cultural conditions made this arrangement both possible

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[6]To this point, current literature reveals that most Southern Baptists and Evangelical British Baptists emphasize different aspects and tensions between church autonomy and connection. This hypothesis will be illustrated in the "History of Research" portion of this chapter. Perhaps this difference speaks to specific philosophical and/or sociological aspects within the American context.

[7]G. Hugh Wamble, "The Concept and Practice of Christian Fellowship: The Connectional and Inter-Denominational Aspects Thereof, among Seventeenth Century English Baptists" (ThD thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1955), 2. Within this work, Wamble provides helpful demarcations. He separated "connectional" from "connectional fellowship." "Connectional" refers to relations outside a local church but within a denomination, the interrelations of Baptists beyond the local church level. A fellowship, strictly interpreted, deals with particular interrelationships among types of Baptists with enhanced theological affinity, namely, General and Particular Baptists. On the contrary, though, Wamble realized that "connectional" also demarcated these affinity-based ecclesial relationships. Of Wamble's eight chapters, three provide particular relevance to this study. In chap. 2, he considers the Baptist emergence as a distinct group that sought to consolidate as local churches and associated churches.

[8]Ibid., 235-73.

and necessary for Baptist life in England. First, an emphasis on believer's baptism and regenerate membership differentiated them from paedo-Baptists, such as Congregationalists and Presbyterians. This theological difference provided a category of the universal church between the interdenominational and the local church level. In other words, Baptists were able to focus on this connectional "space" without sacrificing their doctrine of the universal church. Second, the minority status of Baptists in England necessitated the need to receive strength, security, and fellowship from churches of like faith and order. Third, the geographical reality of Baptists as scattered local bodies, even within the same local church, provided an experimental basis for connectionalism.[9] Fourth, a minister's submission to a local church bred congregational initiation of these organic groups; simply put, the congregation could establish and maintain continual partnerships even through pastoral transition. Finally, English Baptists were forced to defend themselves from outside aberrant theological movements that threatened to undercut core Baptist convictions.

Not only did he provide the landscape for English associational culture, but Wamble also described their organic configuration. These entities were, in his words, "An experimental attempt to maintain fellowship and to preserve denominational integrity."[10] These connections between churches were not initially designed to serve a formal purpose. They originally served as an experimental endeavor seeking to maintain fellowship and provide doctrinal integrity.[11]

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[9]Secondarily, yet noteworthy, the primacy of the congregational polity meant, in many cases, that the local churches instigated church connections without waiting for ministerial initiation. Also, associations allowed Baptists to protect themselves against the radical sectarian movements such as Levellerism, Fifth Monarchianism, and Quakerism. See Wamble, "Concept and Practice of Christian Fellowship," 142.

[10]Ibid., 237.

[11]Ibid., 342-45. Interestingly, Wamble discovered that the vitality of fellowship diminished in proportion to the formalization of these groups.

In 1967, Walter Shurden penned another landmark study on Baptist associationalism which was focused on American Baptists. His purpose was to provide a critical study of Baptist associations in American from 1707 to 1814.[12] Shurden also considered associational constituency. He surmised that associational membership consisted of confederating churches, rather than united individuals.[13] The impetus for Baptist associational origin proved his most fundamental contribution. Shurden concluded,

> After studying the three bases of associationalism, this writer is convinced that practical concerns, not biblical teaching or theological concepts, provided the best clue to the origin of associational life. Associations resulted from a natural organizational evolution and were designed to meet emergency needs. Baptists' major concern in organizing associations was neither the actualization of ecclesiological theory nor the fulfillment of Biblical teachings. They simply desired a workable plan for solving problems common to all churches.[14]

Shurden's research provides helpful background to the study at hand.

A decade before Shurden's work, in 1956, the Southern Baptist Convention formed a committee on the "Coordination and Promotion of Associational Work." The fruit of those laborers yielded the 1969 research project of Lynn E. May, Jr., "The Work of the Baptist Association."[15] This study is relevant because May's work displays a pragmatic turn in Southern Baptist associational life. May began with a brief history of associations. Following the primary scholars on this subject, he argued that the emergence of missionary societies changed the makeup of the traditional associational

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[12]Shurden recognized 1814 as a transitional date for Baptist associations due to the advent of the Triennial Convention, which initiated a new era of denominational organization of associations. Shurden, "Associationalism among Baptists in America," viii.

[13]Shurden noted that some Southern Baptists have disputed this point. This dissertation will provide more depth to Shurden's initial findings. He believed this church-centered approach was clear from both official associational statements and common practice. Ibid., 231.

[14]Ibid., 110.

[15]Lynn E. May, *The Work of the Baptist Association: An Integrative Study*, Historical Research Project, nos. 69-136 (Nashville: Southern Baptist Convention, Inter-Agency Council, 1969).

structure.[16] May described the changing tide of associations in light of denominational development as such, "As the conventions became more influential they were increasingly able to meet the needs once met exclusively by the Association. The trained leadership and financial resources of statewide and other Baptist convention agencies enabled them to offer assistance to the churches in many areas of their work."[17] He continued, "The need for promoting such denominational programs causes denomination leaders to look to the Association as a promotional agency."[18]

As for the historical trajectory, associations continued to build on the basic plan developed by the seventeenth-century Baptists; thus May asserted, "Churches associate in order to voluntarily accomplish common objectives they could not achieve alone."[19] Rather than detracting from a historical emphasis, May viewed the association's transition as a "development" because they were accommodating the changing needs of Southern Baptists.[20]

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[16]May, *Work of the Baptist Association*, 19.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Ibid., 20.

[19]Ibid., 25. May's work meshes with the changing ecclesiological mindset of mid-twentieth century Southern Baptists. Perhaps, this mindset controls his narrative and frames his reading of associational history. As Gregory Wills notes, church "success" following the late-nineteenth century was defined in terms of efficiency and pragmatic progress, capturing May's approach. Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900*, Religion in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 131-34.

[20]Much of the associational material published by the SBC during May's generation echoed his mindset and tone regarding associational history and purpose. For instance, see S. F. Dowis, *Associational Guidebook* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1960). An even more recent work captures this thought also. See Paul Stripling, *Turning Points in the History of Baptist Associations in America* (Nashville: B and H Publishing, 2006). However, this survey of research also found a counter example from an institutional publication. George Gaskin, superintendent of missions of the Denver Association in the 1970s, emphasized the classical function of the association as being concerned with the doctrinal soundness of churches within the constituency. See George Gaskins, "A Philosophy of a Baptist Association," *Baptist History and Heritage* 5, no. 4 (October 1, 1970): 207–12. Michael Waldrop more recently produced another counter example in his 2009 dissertation, in which he proposes that Baptists, by their ecclesiological nature, consistently face the question of the compatibility of autonomy and cooperation. For him, this issue necessitates a proper theology of cooperation. Waldrop calls for a more "Biblically and theologically robust consideration." Michael Wayne Waldrop, "Toward a Theology of Cooperation: A Historical, Biblical, and Systematic Examination of the Compatibility of Cooperation and Autonomy among Local Baptist Churches" (PhD diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 4. This work reflects the historical understanding and counters the SBC's notion, "Cooperation is often based on pragmatic rather than theological motivations." Waldrop, "Toward a Theology of Cooperation," 2. It should also be noted that Waldrop contributes a fruitful discussion of inter-church accountability found in

The next important work to consider, *Baptists in Transition: Individualism and Christian Responsibility*, was penned in 1979 by Northern Baptist theologian, Winthrop Hudson. Fundamentally, Hudson argued that the Baptist church had been infected by an identity crisis that manifested antithetical methods of association. He argued that early Baptists viewed the Christian faith from a "churchly" understanding.[21] According to this mindset, God's fundamental purpose in Christ was to create redeemed people; Christians belong together as a body of Christ. Christians are dependent upon one another to succeed in the Christian life. For Baptists, this understanding yielded an associational type of organization.[22]

The converse understanding is rather individualistic. He pejoratively labeled this a "non-churchly" understanding of the Christian faith. It is grounded in the conviction that God's primary interest lies in the individual Christian. Hudson said, "The Christian is thought as a free man, the captain of his own soul, the master of his own fate, unbound and unfettered, under no necessity to ask by-your-leave of anyone."[23] This view, he argued, entails that every person becomes his own church. Essentially, there is no church (in a collective sense) but rather individual Christians who voluntarily meet together. In Baptist life, this mindset has yielded the societal model of connection,

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Pauline literature. Waldrop reminds readers that Paul ends 1 Cor 8 with an appeal that the Corinthian Christians demonstrate their love and thus justify Paul's confidence in them "before the churches." Waldrop asserts that Paul attempted to motivate the Corinthians by reminding them their behavior was not isolated, but rather it would be observed by all of the churches. Based on this interpretation, Waldrop surmises that the mutual accountability that exists in local church membership should be expanded to include inter-church relationships. With Christ as the head, Waldrop insists that local churches should not exist in isolation, but rather provide encouragement and accountability to others of like faith and order. Waldrop, "Toward a Theology of Cooperation," 150. To support this assertion, Waldrop chronicles individualistic tendencies within the SBC in order to illustrate an ecclesiological deficiency among his native context and intended audience.

[21]Winthrop S. Hudson, *Baptists in Transition: Individualism and Christian Responsibility* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1979), 18.

[22]Ibid., 19. Hudson also penned other similar works regarding associations and church order, wherein he argued that the inception of the Triennial Convention in 1814 served as a major catalyst in undercutting the original purpose of associations. See Winthrop S. Hudson, "Stumbling into Disorder," *Foundations: A Baptist Journal of History and Theology* 1 (April 1958): 45-71.

[23]Hudson, *Baptists in Transition*, 19.

consisting of individuals that unite to promote and achieve particular results. Each view bears implications. The first one comprehends the local church as a part of the larger whole church. Thus, local churches are called to fellowship with others of like faith and order "to carry out common concerns and subject themselves to correction and discipline at the hands of other churches."[24] Hudson argued that the second viewpoint champions local autonomy. In his mind, this mindset views no church beyond the local body, other than the communion of saints in heaven. They remain free individuals, except reserving the right to unite freely in a local society.[25]

In 1989, Francis Sacks, a Roman Catholic, embarked on a unique ecumenical writing project when he penned a critical analysis of the famous Philadelphia Baptist Association. Dealing directly with the most prominent Baptist association in America, this work offers specific relevance.[26] The Philadelphia Baptist Association did not explicitly argue for a visible ecclesiological distinction beyond the local church; they accepted certain visible dimensions.[27] These dimensions carried theological weight and ecclesiological power. Philadelphia Baptists accepted the existence of divinely authorized powers outside the local church. Categorically, the PBA recognized that power resided within the gathered church, the local church officers, but also the church council, and the association. Regarding the latter two entities, the PBA provided a key distinction between the church council and the association. Church councils were occasional forums organized by partnering churches within the association in order to settle disputes

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[24]Hudson, *Baptists in Transition*, 21.

[25]Ibid., 21. Hudson continued to describe implications of these two views. However these differences are specifically relevant to Northern Baptist polity and history, and thus do not contribute to Baptist thought as a whole. Later in this work, Hudson considered the associational principle among early Baptists, specifically of the Philadelphia tradition. Hudson championed these principles and critiqued individualistic tendencies within Baptist life.

[26]Francis W. Sacks, *The Philadelphia Baptist Tradition of Church and Church Authority, 1707-1814: An Ecumenical Analysis and Theological Interpretation*, Studies in American Religion 48 (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1989), 4–5.

[27]Ibid., 582.

between local congregations. The churches viewed the council as a divinely authorized entity based on the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Occasionally organized as such, councils possessed no superior jurisdiction over the churches, but rather had the divine guarantee that if the council faithfully followed the Holy Spirit's leadership, the truth of God's gospel would enlighten his servants to settle church disputes.[28] Differing from occasional councils, associations stood as permanent ecclesiological entities designed to support and encourage partnering churches.

While the PBA believed associations possessed power, this power purely derived from the will of the conjoining churches. For instance, the association held power to remove unsound churches from its assembly because the churches had placed themselves under the oversight of the association. While associational fellowship derived biblical precedent from Acts 15, the PBA believed the Scriptures recommended, rather than required, them. Thus, association-power was ecclesiastically originated, not divinely authorized.[29] All in all, Sacks summated that the PBA adequately sustained the tension between seemingly dialectical understandings of local church autonomy and the interdependence of churches.[30]

More recently, in 1997, Southern Baptist historian Gregory Wills published *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900*. While the entire volume does not directly relate to the topic at hand, Wills offers essential historiography regarding the cultural transformation of the term "democracy" in American church life. While not immediate, this shift also affected Southern Baptists. In 1850 and prior, Southern Baptists understood democracy largely in terms of ecclesiastical authority. By 1950, they comprehended this concept in terms of

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[28]Sacks, *Philadelphia Baptist Tradition of Church and Church Authority*, 582.

[29]Ibid., 584–85.

[30]Ibid., 621.

individual freedom. Wills states,

> The church oriented evangelicalism of the early nineteenth century American Protestantism continued the Puritan pursuit of the pure, primitive church. Twentieth-century American evangelicalism preferred pietism's traditional approach: the promotion of an individual spirituality that was loosely connected to the institutional churches. Evangelicals are no longer convinced that there was a divine mandate to establish peer churches as the kingdom of God on earth. The kingdom was within. Individual piety required no mediation of the ecclesiastical institutions. The role of the church had changed.[31]

Ecclesial authority also existed within early American Baptist associations. Associational oversight took on the form of interchurch discipline. However, Baptists avoided using "discipline" verbiage as a reference to matters outside a congregation, lest one mistake this process for a local church's discipline toward its members. These words, penned in 1842 by David Shaver of the *Christian Index,* captured a typical associational posture: "If you will pursue a course contrary to that which we conceive the Scriptures prescribe; you must pursue it alone."[32] As Wills argues, the purity of the congregation originally stood as the primary objective for which churches endeavored. By the late nineteenth century, a vision for church efficiency usurped the pure church impetus. This meant that churches strove for efficient systems and committees for church finance, activities, and the like. In turn, a church's primary goal was action. Impure orthodoxy became a secondary objective. This transition redefined discipline. Prior to 1850, corrective discipline was viewed as a component of formative discipline. Conversely, in this new era, formative discipline displaced corrective discipline. Quite simply, discipline no longer served to protect the purity of the local church. As efficiency trumped purity in the local church, the associations followed suit.

Offering a clear example of this transition, the Middle Association changed the title of its annual report from "State of Religion" to "Progress and Development of

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[31]Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 139.

[32]Ibid., 102.

Churches."[33] This new associational impetus had two foci. First, Baptists were giving more money to missions, clergy support, and church property improvement. Second, they developed new organizations to garner more efficient labor—namely, Sunday schools, young people's unions, women's missionary unions, and the like.[34]

Also in 2005, Englishmen Nigel Wright authored a work entitled *Free Church, Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision*. Wright believes that the same presence of Christ that makes each local church competent exists among the wider communion of churches. This wider collection yields authority and wisdom that should be regarded.[35] Wright adds that church competence never entailed omni-competence, removing the need for interdependence.[36] Article 36 of the Second London Confession presents a balanced understanding of autonomy and connection among churches. Churches, therefore, should hold fellowship with each other for the purpose of mutual support and correction. This fellowship should not usurp the freedoms or powers of any confederated church; nor should they allow one church to hold power over another.[37]

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[33]While seemingly subtle, this language change displays the aim and purpose of associations.

[34]Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 134.

[35]Nigel Wright, *Free Church, Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision* (Bletchley, UK: Paternoster, 2005), 183-98.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Ibid., 184. Wright considers the theology set forth by the Abington Association in 1652. They held that each church within the association ought to hold "firm communion with each other." They held that churches should manifest the same care (mutual support and correction) as there is between members of each church: "Churches may exhort, counsel, and assist each other and the love expressed between them is a sign to the world of that love which enables churches to be recognized as true churches." See also, B. R. White, ed., *Association Records of the Particular Baptists of England, Wales and Ireland to 1660*, vol. 3, *Abingdon Association* (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1971–1974), 126. Another source in a similar vein is Ian Birch, "'The Counsel and Help of One Another': The Origins and Concerns of Early Particular Baptist Churches in Association," *Baptist Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 4–29. Birch argues that that English Particular Baptists maintained local church independence while rejecting isolationism. While they greatly valued connection, they maintained the conviction that no authoritative structure exists above the local churches. Similar to this study, just a year later, Cullen T. Clark examined the formation, freedoms, limitations of freedom, and increased organization within associational life in England, through the example of the Yorkshire and Lancashire Baptist Associations from 1765–1865. Clark reveals that while associations continued to expand and grow more complex (from their organic beginnings) issues of authority were rarely points of contention. Clark clearly displays in his study of the

In 2009, British Baptists Brian Haymes, Ruth Gouldbourne, and Anthony R. Cross penned *On Being the Church: Revisioning Baptist Identity*. Within the work, a chapter considers autonomy and connection between local churches. The authors define autonomy as "self-rule."[38] Thus, each congregation stands wholly capable and free to gather in the name of Christ without an external structure. Perhaps reacting against other ecclesial systems—wherein concepts of hierarchy disseminate from a central platform that hold the church together and structure its being— Baptists have associated authority in relation to the wider church as symbolized and represented by a bishop, synod, presbytery, or pope. Any semblance of authority stems from this perception. Thus, many Baptists have regarded any entity above the local church as hierarchical or authoritarian. According to Haymes and his coauthors, a danger of this mindset is that it has the potential to undercut any suggestion that communities above the church have theological credence.[39] Reconfiguring this argument, the authors contend, will allow Baptists to conceive the local and wider body as different ways to express the community of the people of God. Neither group validates or gives authority to the other. Churches should be accountable to each other, not merely share a common missionary fund. Churches who avoid accountability are no less true, but they fail to reinforce the sense of being the church in covenant with others.[40]

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primary material that this lack of a power struggle was attributed to the fact that the association was viewed and functioned as a means to enhance the churches' objective to spread Evangelical convictions. Associations were continually viewed as voluntary societies, with churches free to join and leave as they pleased. He also notes that the most common reason for dismissal was the failure to participate (rather than theological issues or interpersonal conflict). Cullen T. Clark, "Association and Authority: Lancashire Baptists, 1765-1865," *Baptist Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (July 1, 2013): 132–42.

[38]Brian Haymes, Ruth M. B. Gouldbourne, and Anthony R. Cross, *On Being the Church: Revisioning Baptist Identity*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 197.

[39]Ibid.

[40]Ibid., 212.

**Essays**

In 1957, C. Earl Cooper wrote an essay that labeled the dilemma between freedom and association as one of the lingering issues that generated on-going problems in Baptist ecclesiological thought and practice. Cooper believed this tension did not rise to the forefront of Baptist life until the need for association became felt. He believed freedom had been subconsciously assumed.[41]

British theologian Stanley K. Fowler questioned, in 2005, the assumption that a strong doctrine of church autonomy is biblical, historically Baptist, and essential to the health of the church in his chapter of a Baptist history volume.[42] While many Baptists view local autonomy as the primary ecclesiological reality, he reveals that the Second London Confession, written in 1689, viewed local church autonomy as penultimate at best.[43] However, the Second London Confession communicated that association-level decisions cannot be authoritatively imposed on individual churches, but rather they offer moral persuasion and advice. Early American Baptists (like the Philadelphia tradition) followed this model. In regard to later Baptist associations in America, Fowler observes, "The focus of the local church does not constitute a denial of a universal church (that would soon enter Baptist life via Landmarkism), but it does amount to a denial that tangible association beyond the local church is essential to proper ecclesiological orientation."[44] Additionally, he argues that the Baptist Faith and Message considers inter-church connection to be purely voluntary and pragmatic. Associations exist for missional purposes, with no culture of accountability to the wider church. North American churches

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[41]C. Earl Cooper, "Baptist Dilemma: Freedom and Association," *Review and Expositor* 53, no. 4 (October 1, 1956): 512–24.

[42]Stanley K. Fowler, "Churches and the Church," in *Recycling the Past or Researching History? Studies in Baptist Histiography and Myths*, illustrated ed., ed. Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson (Bletchley, UK: Paternoster, 2005), 34.

[43]Ibid.

[44]Fowler, "Churches and the Church," 34.

have enacted a radical kind of local church independence in which the universal church is theoretically affirmed without functional significance.[45]

In 2007, Gerald Priest authored "The Philadelphia Baptist Association and the Question of Authority." In this essay, Priest argues that a study of the Philadelphia Association in early America reveals two major themes: "(1) Early American Baptist congregations were not purely autonomous as their polity statements would suggest; (2) they were willing to live with the tension of a two-tiered ecclesiastical authority—the one local, the other associational."[46] The Philadelphia Association considered itself an advisory body, but rather it possessed hierarchical features akin to Presbyterianism, wherein a synod of elders makes decisions on behalf of the churches.[47] The PBA existed as an autonomous entity that could censure and remove member churches; it practically functioned as a hovering entity that imposed a denominational agenda upon these churches.[48] This stipulation undercut local church autonomy. Such an arrangement, according to Priest, "Compromises, to some degree, the capability and responsibility of the local assembly to exercise a prerogative assigned to it by the New Testament."[49]

Also in 2007, Chad Brand penned a chapter in *The Mission of Today's Church* entitled, "Toward a Theology of Cooperation." Within this essay, Brand reminds readers that Baptists have historically regarded the Bible as the foundation, or more technically, the Regulative Principle for ecclesiological formulation and practice.[50] From this

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[45]Fowler, "Churches and the Church," 35.

[46]Gerald L. Priest, "The Philadelphia Baptist Association and the Question of Authority," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 12, no. 1 (Fall 2007): 53.

[47]Ibid., 61-68. Priest uses the analogy of "parent" and "child" to describe the association's relationship with a respective church.

[48]Ibid., 73. Later in this essay, Priest cites the precedent of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 to illustrate that intervention from sister churches is suitable. Although, in his opinion, these arrangements should function occasionally rather than permanently. He believes a permanent arrangement undercuts local church autonomy.

[49]Ibid., 80.

[50]Brand clarifies that Baptists have not always agreed about the means or extent of this

foundation, he presents several convictions. First, no one outside a church can instruct regarding its duties or internal structures. Second, autonomy means that the congregation has the responsibility of policing itself of heresy and carrying out normal functions of the church, evangelism, missions, worship, discipleship, and the like. If it fails to follow through in these functions, responsibility falls onto the church alone. Each church is fully a church; they exist as a microcosm of Christ's body. Pointing to the Second London Confession, he recognizes church interdependency as a Baptist precedent, reminding readers that these early Baptists cautioned against the overreach of an association.[51]

Based upon Baptists' high regard for the Regulative Principle, Brand asserts that Scripture, over and above Baptist tradition, must drive theological formulation in this matter. The book of Acts and the Pauline Epistles reveal that early churches were autonomous bodies under the Lordship of Christ, but they were not independent entities.[52] Instead, these churches aided one another in ministry, sought advice from one another in the face of difficult situations, and mutually provided financial aid. Additionally, if necessary, they assisted each other in pastoral training.[53]

Within the same volume, Jim Richards, Executive Director of the Southern Baptist Convention of Texas, penned an article in which he addresses article 14 of the

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Regulative Principle. All in all though, he argues that Baptists have generally agreed that churches ought to follow the biblical pattern set forth for the order, worship, polity, internal life, and mission of the church. Chad Owen Brand, "Toward a Theology of Cooperation," in *The Mission of Today's Church: Baptist Leaders Look at Modern Faith Issues*, ed. Ed Stetzer and Daniel Akin (Nashville: B and H Publishing, 2013), 156-62.

[51]Ibid., 162.

[52]Brand cites and expounds upon the following passages to support his argument, Acts 8:1-3, 17-39, 11:19-23, 15:1-31, 16:1-5, 20:20; Rom 15:26, 16:1-2; 1 Cor 16:1; 2 Cor 8-9; Phil 1:1; 2 Tim 2:2.

[53]Brand, "Toward a Theology of Cooperation," 172. Brand also cites examples throughout Baptist history wherein Baptists have abandoned congregational polity in favor of an unbiblical form of connectionalism, leaning toward a Presbyterian or Episcopalian expression. To this point, he cites the New Connection Baptists in England with Daniel Taylor; he includes the British Baptist Union under John Shakespeare, wherein superintendents were appointed over the local churches. Brand also notes that within the American Baptist Church, ordination is basically a regional matter, not one for the local church. Ibid., 172-73. In the closing paragraphs of this essay, Brand champions the necessity of cooperation based on a commitment to truth. Doctrinal affirmation yields robust connection.

Baptist Faith and Message, which treats cooperation beyond the church.[54] Specifically relevant to this study, ecclesial cooperation stems from the following statement from article 14:

> Christ's people should, as occasion requires, organize such associations and conventions as may best secure cooperation for the great objects of the Kingdom of God. Such organizations have no authority over one another or over the churches. They are voluntary and advisory bodies designed to elicit, combine, and direct the energies of our people in the most effective manner.[55]

Similar to May's 1969 monograph, Richards champions the effective nature of cooperation. In this vein, he provides three core values for future Southern Baptist cooperation; these include doctrinal affirmation, a missionary focus, and proportional funding through the SBC Cooperative Program.[56]

In 2015, Jonathan Leeman contributed to *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age*, a chapter titled "A Congregational Approach to

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[54]Richards surmises that the "Baptist Faith and Message" presents four levels of cooperation, namely, individual cooperation (each person through salvation), congregational cooperation (inner-church), ecclesial cooperation (inter-church), and moral cooperation (between various denominations). James W. Richards, "Cooperation among Southern Baptists as Set Forth in Article 14 of the 'Baptist Faith and Message,'" in *Mission of Today's Church*, ed. R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: B and H, 2007), 145-54.

[55]Ibid., 149.

[56]Ibid., 152–53. While Richards insists that doctrinal affinity should set cooperative parameters, he fails to mention if cooperation includes such elements as interchurch accountability and care. Perhaps readers should not expect these thoughts from Richards, as he is merely expositing the confessional document to which he ascribes. In 2010, a collection of Southern Baptists crafted a work entitled *Upon this Rock: The Baptist Understanding of the Church*. In the volume, Thomas White contributed a chapter titled, "The Universal and the Local Church." He states that the 109 uses of "church" in Scripture stem from three general categories. First, a general use refers to the church as Christ established it in his earthly ministry. Second, a local and concrete use points to one or many specific churches. Third, a future use points to a future and final Assembly of God's people in heaven, also labeled the universal church. White holds that Eph 5:27, Heb 12:23, and Rev 7:9 are biblical examples of the universal assembly. He argues that Scripture primarily focuses on the current, visible, and local congregation. Thomas White, "The Universal and Local Church," in *Upon This Rock: The Baptist Understanding of the Church*, ed. Jason G. Duesing, Thomas White, and Malcolm B. Yarnell III (Nashville: B and H Academic, 2010), 215-16. White notes that Baptist theologian Herschel Hobbs acknowledged the coming existence of the universal church, but said that the word "church" in the New Testament never refers to organized Christianity or to a group of churches. Hobbs believed it denotes a local body or all the redeemed through the ages. Herschel H. Hobbs, "Baptist Faith and Message" (Nashville: Convention Press, 1971), 146. (Hobbs was also the chief editor of the "Baptist Faith and Message, 1963").

Catholicity: Independence and Interdependence." There are two kinds of church unity that ground this discussion.

Leeman states,

> First, all churches and Christians are invisibly united by the apostolic gospel in the holiness of justification and faith. Second, local churches alone, as eschatological embassies of Christ's kingdom, are invisibly united by the apostolic gospel and visibly united by the apostolic authority of the keys of the kingdom. Christians possess the first type of unity by virtue of their relationship in the new covenant. The second type occurs when the new covenant is publicly ratified and administered before the on-looking nations with kingdom authority. Apostolic doctrine unites Christians and churches. Apostolic doctrine and apostolic office unite the church.[57]

Because the authority of the apostolic office and the keys of the kingdom reside in the local church, it entails the church's independence. In turn, churches possess authority over their own members and statements of faith. Akin to a national embassy, a local church does not make someone a citizen, but rather affirms someone's citizenship.[58] Shifting to interdependence, local churches possess the apostolic authority of the keys. In turn, fellow churches are called to cooperate to fulfill the Great Commission because they share the same God and a common apostolic authority. Clearly, New Testament churches were tightly integrated with one another. Churches are interdependent because they worship the same Christ, can unite using the same confession, and are called to the same Great Commission. While each local church is a self-operating "embassy," churches are interdependent because they work together to further the gospel of Jesus Christ. Leeman says, "They pray for, encourage, challenge, and support one another because all the success of one is the success of all, and the defeat of one is the sorrow of all."[59]

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[57]Jonathan Leeman, "A Congregational Approach to Catholicity: Independence and Interdependence," in *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age*, ed. Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman (Nashville: B and H Academic, 2015), 367.

[58]Ibid., 367–68. Leeman also offers a deeper consideration regarding this church as an embassy motif. Jonathan Leeman, *Political Church: The Local Assembly as Embassy of Christ's Rule* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016).

[59]This quote is based on the apostle Paul's words in 1 Cor 12:26. Leeman, "Congregational Approach to Catholicity," 368.

These sources reveal a long chronology—within various streams of Baptist life— toward an articulation of the associational relationship among Baptist churches. How then does this project fit within this stream of literature?

## Project Place within the Literature

Baptists in previous generations have also considered the local church connectivity within the denomination's practice; thus, this study seeks to interpret and contribute to previous literature. Surveying the writing reveals diversity regarding the purpose and action of associations, both chronologically and regionally. Within the purview of Baptists in America, specifically Southern Baptists, it seems local church autonomy sits at the center of any connectional discussion. While local church independence serves a central purpose in Baptist theology, it should not overshadow the biblical mandate for local church interdependence. In recent years, theologians like Leeman have emphasized this aspect, providing a Southern Baptist corrective. This study quests to build upon such efforts by further accentuating church interdependence and mutual accountability as exemplified in Scripture and historical Baptist thought and practice.

## Methodology

As a systematic theological endeavor situated within a specific theological and cultural tradition, this project attempts to offer constructive theology using exegetical and historical resources. As indicated prior, this study demonstrates the traditional function of Baptist associationalism. English Baptist immigrants transported these British entities to Colonial America. In this endeavor, the Philadelphia Baptist Association demands much treatment, although other influential associations also garner some attention. Additionally, this project considers both prescriptive (confessional statements) and descriptive (associational minutes and correspondences) sources in order to gain a

holistic historical perspective. In addition, right historiography clarifies philosophical influences that have undercut the traditional understanding of Baptist ecclesial connectivity.[60] Upon evaluating the manifestation of denominationalism and its effect on Southern Baptist associationalism, the study attempts constructive theological formulation.[61] Exegetical theology inaugurates the constructive consideration. Specifically, one chapter contemplates Pauline literature, namely, capturing the interaction and relationships between local churches. Furthermore, this study quests to retrieve and incorporate the balanced associational understanding set forth by early American Baptists prior to the early 1800s, in addition to consulting the broader church tradition.[62] To conclude, this project offers pertinent theological and pastoral implications for twenty-first century Southern Baptists.

## Limitations

Arguing from a specific theological tradition entails limitations to this study. First, the study does not present a "mere" ecclesiology, but rather this work assumes a Baptist understanding of the church, such as Allison's: "The church is a people of God who have been saved through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and have been incorporated into his body through baptism with the Holy Spirit."[63] Historically,

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[60]This portion of the dissertation will center around particularly influential Baptist figures who produced a significant impact on associational life. An example of a critical study of this nature is Hudson, *Baptists in Transition*. However, it seems Hudson does not draw enough distinction between different "brands" of individualism that were manifested in Southern Baptist life in the form of these significant figures. It is also possible that a study of this type may fall into a "great man fallacy," wherein one person defines an entire era. To combat this notion, the study will also explore how these views were manifested in the local churches and associational structures.

[61]In order to demonstrate this effect, the study will also consider how Baptists of this era treated ecclesiological terms, namely, the priesthood of believers, communion of saints, and Body of Christ. Perhaps the use of these terms will help elucidate this transition.

[62]This study will also incorporate other historical considerations from the broader Christian tradition. A few recent works will serve to guide this endeavor: Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015); W. David Buschart and Kent Eilers, *Theology as Retrieval: Receiving the Past, Renewing the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015).

[63]Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 29. The "people of God" also connotes the Apostle's Creed language of the "communion of Saints." The church is a people, specifically a New Covenant people

connectionalism or associationalism entails a specific type of connection, precisely, between churches of like faith and order.[64] Therefore, this study focuses on relationships between Baptist churches rather than those of different denominations. Furthermore, there are many Baptist associations and traditions throughout American history. In order to foster deep interaction, one particular association, the Philadelphia Association, serves as a case study for this project. This association proves representative for multiple reasons. First, it exists as the first and most prominent association in America. Its influence extended to Baptists throughout America, by establishing sister associations of like faith and order. Second, the specific theological framework and denominational trajectory set forth by the Philadelphia Association directly influenced what would later become the Southern Baptist Convention.[65] Upon tracing the Philadelphia tradition, the study narrows to a specific branch within Baptist life, the Southern Baptist denomination.

## Chapter Overview

Chapter 1 introduces the topic of Baptist church connectivity within an American context, from the 1700s to the present. By considering historical monographs and dissertations, the chapter surveys the development of this doctrine.[66] The chapter puts forth the dissertation's thesis, theological methodology, assumptions, and limitations.

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of God. The church consists of two interrelated elements, the "universal" and "local" churches. Allison notes, "The universal church is the company of all Christians stretching from its inception." Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 29. Additionally, according to Leeman, local churches are local expressions of the universal, and are led by qualified and publically recognized men who are called pastors (elders), served by deacons and deaconesses, governed by the congregation, and ultimately ruled by Jesus Christ. Leeman, "Congregational Approach to Catholicity," 367.

[64]It should be noted that due to differing theological stances, General and Particular Baptist churches did not form mutual associations. Each developed distinctive attributes that defined their respective traditions. For example, Robert Gardner's research illustrates that associations were defined by their theological expression and proximity was secondary. The Philadelphia Association included members from Connecticut all the way to Virginia. Furthermore, the constituents of the Ketocton Association hailed from Pennsylvania, as well as North Carolina. Robert Gardner, *Baptists of Early America: A Statistical History, 1639-1790* (Atlanta: Georgia Baptist Historical Society, 1983), 142–43.

[65]This topic will be discussed in more detail in chap. 2.

[66]This impetus to consider the trajectory of associational life stems from the striking differences between the original Philadelphia Confession's ecclesiological language and that of the "Baptist Faith and Message, 1925," continued in 1963, and echoed in 2000. Chap. 1 focuses on the Philadelphia

Chapter 2 describes how early American Baptist associations, as children of British Baptist ancestry, demonstrated a commitment to encourage doctrinal health and mutual care among partnering churches. The association and church interacted regarding the internal matters of local churches. In their view, such activities did not infringe upon the autonomy or self-government of each local congregation. This chapter uses prescriptive (confessions) and descriptive (associational minutes) examples to elucidate Philadelphia's scriptural and theological argumentation. This chapter also reveals that outward issues, such as missions and educational endeavors, emerged as a concern for the Philadelphia Baptist Association.

The third chapter describes the development of Baptist associations following the early nineteenth century, illustrating a new concept of association within Baptist life that was affected by denominational expansion. While the Philadelphia Association offered some continuity with the previous era during the nineteenth century, less direct interaction between the association and local churches defined this era. Outward endeavors became central for the Philadelphia Association, controlling most of its time and energy. This development eroded one of the Association's foundational concerns, the doctrinal health of member churches.

Chapter 4 also explicates the vast developments within Baptist life in America during the nineteenth century. From a Southern Baptist perspective, the advent of state conventions, a national convention, and the Cooperative Program must inform any discussion of associational life within this tradition. This chapter considers the Southern Baptist Convention's prominence and its specific effect upon Baptist Association; denominational centralization affected these stalwart assemblies.

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Associational confession found with the associational minutes. A. D. Gillette, ed., *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, 1707 to 1807: Being the First One Hundred Years of Its Existence* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2002). Chap. 2 also draws from other prominent associations, namely the Warren, Ketocton, and Charleston groups in order to capture traditional pattern of these entities as sister associations of the PBA.

The fifth chapter evaluates the concept and practice of associationalism throughout each era. This section considers each conception's biblical fidelity, faithfulness toward historical Christian orthodoxy and Baptist theology. This chapter assesses the Association's fidelity toward key ecclesiological concepts within the purview of the study. These concepts include the independence of the local church, communion among local churches, and cooperation toward fulfilling the church's gospel mission.

Chapter 6 offers constructive biblical and theological formulation, stemming from the assumption that proper systematic theological work demands reappraisal. Standing on the shoulders of the ecumenical counsels, as well as Baptist and Reformed theology, this chapter attempts to recover historic Baptist connectional theology for the twenty-first century. It offers a connectionalism that assumes inter-connectivity and accountability while maintaining the biblical and historical foundations for local church self-governance.[67]

The final chapter offers theological and ministerial implications. The chapter considers how this associational structure impacts specific aspects of Southern Baptist church life. This study explores areas for future study, particularly, church connectivity beyond denominational bounds.

[67]Inherent to this point, this chapter must also address current debate regarding the Baptist place within the larger ecclesiological landscape, or the universal church. Also, the chapter considers how locality and emplacement contribute to right church connectivity.

# CHAPTER 2

# THE TRADITIONAL BAPTIST ASSOCIATIONAL CULTURE AS DEMONSTRATED BY THE PHILADELPHIA BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

## Introduction

In 1707, a group of five Baptist churches in Pennsylvania and New Jersey decided to select capable men to represent them as messengers for a newly formed yearly meeting. This meeting marked the inaugural occasion of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, which was formed for the purpose of consulting about the things "wanting in the churches and to set them in order."[1] This chapter will demonstrate how the Philadelphia Baptist Association, as a child of British Baptist and Reformed ancestry, demonstrated a commitment to encourage doctrinal health and spiritual unity among Baptists within their local churches, between member churches and the association, and among associations.[2] Through this advice and mutual care, they attempted to preserve autonomy within each local congregation. While, at points, some confusion existed regarding the Association's advisory role, the Philadelphia Association maintained its commitment to the centrality of the local church.[3] This chapter will illustrate this claim

[1]A. D. Gillette, ed., *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, 1707 to 1807: Being the First One Hundred Years of Its Existence* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2003), 12.

[2]This chapter and the next use the Philadelphia Baptist Association as a case study for associational life in early America.

[3]This aspect follows prominent works in this area, namely, Walter B. Shurden, "Associationalism among Baptists in America, 1707-1814" (ThD thesis, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1967), 151–56. See also Francis W. Sacks, *The Philadelphia Baptist Tradition of Church and Church Authority, 1707-1814: An Ecumenical Analysis and Theological Interpretation*, Studies in American Religion 48 (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1989).

by considering the heritage, ecclesiological and theological framework, and practice of this prominent early American Baptist association.[4]

## Philadelphia Tradition and Baptist Life

William Brackney asserts that by the mid-eighteenth century, the Philadelphia Association had established itself as the de facto capital of Baptist life in America.[5] Its statements of faith and associational essays became so engrained in eighteenth century

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[4]The Philadelphia Association largely established the associational culture in America, not just by observation, but also through transference. In 1749, Oliver Hart was commissioned from Baptists in Philadelphia to pastor First Baptist Church, Charleston, SC. Shortly after Hart's arrival in Charleston, in 1751, FBC Charleston, along with sister churches, established the Charleston Baptist Association, organizing the first Baptist association in the South. Joe Madison King, *History of South Carolina Baptists* (Columbia, SC: General Board of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, 1964), 17–18. In the North, four churches initially joined the coalition; four more joined the following year with four additional churches added in 1769. Like Philadelphia, the Warren Association stressed communion among local bodies of Christ in order to protect the doctrinal fidelity, as well as supporting struggling churches. Warren Baptist Association, *Annual Meeting Minutes* (Warren, MA: Warren Baptist Association, 1769), 3. Furthermore, churches appointed messengers that fittingly professed the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and practice to ensure that every opinion found scriptural ground. In proper Baptist fashion, the Warren Association proclaimed the independency and power of particular churches, by asserting that associations serve no greater purpose than an advisory council, "Utterly disclaiming superiority, jurisdiction, coercive right, and infallibility." Warren Baptist Association, *Annual Meeting Minutes*, 3. The Ketocton Association in Virginia was also established through the Philadelphia Association's influence. It was formed by four remote churches in Virginia, who were unable to attend the annual meeting due to travel inconveniences. These churches requested to form a distinct and separate association and were granted such in 1766. By 1808, the Ketocton contained forty churches throughout much of Virginia. Among their purpose and intention stood the intent to equip churches in a "widowed state" by nominating preachers to encourage and teach; it also offered opportunity for an erroneous church to receive intelligence from the assembly regarding morality and Christian character. Furthermore, the association served to provide advisory council when the church inquired into matters of mystery, etc. The association itself stated, "The association gives her opinion and advice, but never attempts to enforce her measure so as to infringe on the independence of the church." William Fristoe, *The History of the Ketocton Baptist Association, 1766-1808* (Winchester, VA: W. G. Fletcher, 1978), 7–8. In 1784, Baptists in Georgia constituted the Georgia Baptist Association. In his historical volume, Jesse Mercer stated that the association had no power to infringe on the internal rights of the churches. In the same manner, the association served to provide general union for the churches, to keep correspondence with those of like faith and order, to maintain unity and preserve communication between the member churches. Jesse Mercer, *History of the Georgia Baptist Association* (1848; repr., Washington, GA: Georgia Baptist Association, 1980), 22–23. Describing the breadth of the Philadelphia tradition, May said, "Early important associations like the Charleston, Ketocton, and Kehukee in the South; the Warren in the East, and the Elkhorn and Salem on the Kentucky frontier reflected and perpetuated the essential pattern established by the mother association in Pennsylvania." Lynn E. May, *The Work of the Baptist Association: An Integrative Study*, Historical Research Project, nos. 69-136 (Nashville: Southern Baptist Convention, Inter-Agency Council, 1969), 5–6. Scant records prevent much in-depth study of General Baptists in America. This group was much smaller and less influential than the Regular Baptists from the Philadelphia tradition. May surmised through the example of the Rhode Island Baptists, readers can gather the threefold purpose of General Baptist Associations: fellowship, discipline, and advice. These characteristics match well with the Philadelphia tradition. May, *Work of the Baptist Association*, 5.

[5]William H. Brackney, *Baptists in North America: An Historical Perspective*, Religious Life in America (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 20.

Baptist life that it was often called "the Baptist Confession" in America.[6] While Philadelphia's confession of faith initially served churches within the Delaware River valley, it soon garnered an encompassing adherence as churches and associations from New England to the Deep South (and many regions in between) adopted its language. The Ketocton Association of Virginia was the first, outside Philadelphia, to ascribe to the confession in 1766, followed by the Warren Association of Rhode Island in 1767. That same year, the Charleston Association of South Carolina adopted the influential document.[7] Many in the frontier regions were leery of confessions, though the prominent Elkhorn Association of Kentucky and the Holston Association of Tennessee adopted it in 1785 and 1788, respectively. Even more unlikely, Separate Baptists in Virginia, who once rejected all confessions, adopted it in 1783.[8] The Philadelphia Confession had wide-ranging impact upon Baptist life, beginning in eastern Pennsylvania and extending throughout the American colonies and frontier settlements.[9]

In addition to its wide-ranging influence, Baptist historians Winthrop Hudson

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[6]William Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 2nd rev. ed., rev. Bill J. Leonard (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2011), 369.

[7]Lumpkin points out that the Philadelphia Confession had an overwhelming impact in South Carolina. He states, "Indeed in that region it influenced Baptist thought generally and has been perhaps the most influential of all confessions. Local church covenants still reflect its outlook and summarize its doctrines. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 368. Many associations formulated adapted versions of the confession. In a few cases (Charleston and many Virginia associations, for example) they withdrew the section, "Laying on of Hands." Despite these caveats, the ecclesiological understanding (i.e., local churches and associations) was not altered.

[8]It should be noted that they accepted the Confession, although with the caveat that they did not intend for it to be superior or equal to the Scriptures in issues of faith and practice. They said, "We think it the best composition of the kind now extant." Robert B. Semple, *History of the Baptists in Virginia*, (1810; repr., Lafayette, TN: Church History Research and Archives, 1976), 68. Lumpkin notes that this confession became the basis of union between Separate and Regular Baptists of Virginia in 1787. It was also adopted by several in Virginia from 1800-1802. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 362-63.

[9]Defending Philadelphia as a representative understanding of church connectivity in America, Hudson states, "Since the Philadelphia Association was the earliest of the Associations and since the others were formed on the Philadelphia plan, the PBA may be regarded as more or less normative and may serve as a case-study of the associational pattern among Baptists." Winthrop Hudson, "The Associational Principle among Baptists," *Foundations: A Baptist Journal of History and Theology* 1, no. 1 (January 1958): 4. To this point, Shurden adds that given the many associations that sprung from the PBA, they had effectively created a Baptist identity throughout the country; many associations, as late as 1814, were strikingly similar. Shurden, "Associationalism among Baptists in America," 217.

and Walter Shurden recognize that the Philadelphia Association best captured the nature, function, and scope of church connectivity in early America.[10] While the Philadelphia Baptist Association does not wholly account for Baptist associational life, it serves to sufficiently demonstrate vibrant involvement between the association and member churches.[11]

## Roots of Early American Baptist Associations

From the outset, Baptists have valued connection between churches.[12] While their presence in Britain is well chronicled, mystery surrounds the precise date and location of their origin. Historians initially proposed that the associational motif derived from a seventeenth-century English military concept by which several counties associated together to defend themselves against Royalist predatory attacks.[13] B. R. White challenged this thesis, downplaying the military influence. According to Bill Leonard, White insisted that these wartime associations had little in common with the inter-congregational connectivity of Baptists. Baptists seldom used the term "association" in the 1640s opting for the term "general meeting." White surmised that the associational concept originated from language found within the 1644 Confession of Faith.[14]

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[10]Hudson, "Associational Principle among Baptists," 15. See also Shurden, "Associationalism among Baptists in America."

[11]Because this dissertation leads to systematic theological construction, a detailed historical treatment of associations is not attainable. For this reason, the first two chapters predominately use the Philadelphia Association as a case study to illustrate that associations possessed vibrant involvement with and care for the health of local churches. As this chapter illustrates, the PBA serves as a good model because its minutes reveal consistent interaction with churches. One can make the case that it is presumptive to assume that all associations behaved like Philadelphia. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to illustrate that Philadelphia's activity was prominent activity among Baptists in early America. Additionally, using Philadelphia as a model proves fruitful because they were the only association to craft a specific theological treatise regarding their relationship with churches. Using Philadelphia serves the unique purpose of observing the Association's use of their own theological treatise.

[12]Shurden, "Associationalism among Baptists in America," 1.

[13]William Thomas Whitley, *A History of British Baptists* (London: Charles Griffin and Co., 1923), 91–92. See also Shurden, "Associationalism among Baptists in America," 7-8.

[14]Bill Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), 53.

Regardless of its specific origin, Baptists realized a desire for connectivity in order to provide stability and encouragement among churches, assigning the name "association" to these meetings.[15] In England, the earliest and first prominent association was the Berkshire Baptist Association, formed in 1652. This organization became a model for such bodies throughout the region, so much so, that by 1655 associationalism was part of early British Baptist polity.[16] William T. Whitley captured the mindset of this era when he asserted, "From the beginning Baptists were not 'Independents'; they always sought for fellowship between the different churches and they were very successful in arranging for permanent organization."[17]

Furthermore, Baptists have always been a theologically diverse people. A full understanding of the nature of associations requires an orientation toward the unique theological climate inside British Baptist life. Within the British Isles, there were multiple groups that defined Baptist life in England, namely, General Baptists and Particular Baptists, so named for their view of the extent of Christ's atonement.[18] General Baptists began as a faction within the stream of Calvinistic Puritanism and Separatism, but rejected the distinctive features of Calvinism and became identified more closely with the anti-Augustinianism of the Anabaptists.[19] General Baptists viewed associations as a more authoritative organization. Raymond Parker asserted that General Baptist associations so endeavored to exercise authority over local churches that the situation approached the point of undermining local church autonomy.[20] They also placed more stress on forming a

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[15]May, *Work of the Baptist Association*, 1.

[16]Shurden, "Associationalism among Baptists in America," 8.

[17]Whitley, *History of British Baptists*, 53.

[18]English Baptists consisted of other smaller groups, including Seventh Day Baptists, Fifth Monarchists, and Leg of Mutton. These groups organized over specific points of doctrine. For a discussion on this matter see Brackney, *Baptists in North America*, 10–11.

[19]Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 57.

[20]Raymond A. Parker, "Church Polity of the Seventeenth Century English General Baptists"

general or national assembly of congregations than did the Particular stream.[21] Particular Baptists, on the other hand, explicitly denied the idea that associations could wield authority over the local church. They spawned from the context of the Separatists in England and credited them for much of their ecclesiology. [22]

The Second London Confession of Faith, written in 1689, stated, "These messengers assembled, are not entrusted with any Church-power properly so called; or with any jurisdiction over the Churches themselves, to exercise any censures either over any Churches or Persons: or to impose their determination on the Churches, or Officers."[23] The majority of this statement formed the prominent First London Confession.[24] Unlike the General Baptists, the Particular Baptists cautioned against forming a national organization of churches. They believed power should remain within a regional context. Clearly, there was a strong theological divide among Baptists in England. Because of their differing theological stances, General and Particular Baptists churches did not form mutual associations. This mindset was also translated to American colonial Baptist life.

## Early American Associational Culture Observed through Philadelphia

Following their British forefathers, Baptist churches in the new world quickly grasped the need for unity and accountability. Within the records of early associations, these groups attempted to define their nature and purpose. Early in the 1700s, the Philadelphia Association often reiterated a common reality: "The elders, messengers, and

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(ThD diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1958), 123.

[21]Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1963), 55–56.

[22]Shurden, "Associationalism among Baptists in America," 9.

[23]Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 289.

[24]Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory*, 58.

ministers of the baptized congregations . . . met in associations."[25] Due to the English influence in American immigration, much of the ecclesial culture traveled from Britain to the colonies. Brackney posited that the original types of seventeenth-century English Baptists provided the basic varieties of the colonial context, namely, General, Particular (Regular), as well as Seventh Day Baptists.[26]

Following the "planting" phase of Baptist churches in America, there was quite an expanse of congregations. Like the young British Baptist churches before, those in America needed unity and organization. To this end, historians note that the General Baptists of New England held a primitive association meeting as early as 1626.[27] Concurrently, Seventh Day Baptists in Rhode Island and Connecticut gathered in some form. In the 1680s, a handful of Calvinistic Baptists in the Delaware River valley gathered together to consult in matters of polity and ministry. Like their English brethren, like-minded colonial Baptists quickly realized the inherent need for association. In the early years, valuable churchman came to the PBA from South Wales and west of England. These wise preachers and laymen played an important role in stabilizing the Philadelphia Association.[28]

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[25]William Wright Barnes, *The Southern Baptist Convention, 1845-1953* (Nashville: B and H Academic, 1954), 17–18.

[26]Brackney, *Baptists in North America*, 21.

[27]Shurden, "Associationalism among Baptists in America," 6.

[28]Ibid., 7-8.

## Ecclesiological Structure that Yielded Associations

### Local Church Consists of Regenerate Individuals United as Local Independent Bodies

In order to properly capture the ecclesiological concept and structure of early Baptists in America, setting the context stands paramount; it reveals that early American Baptists of the Philadelphia tradition emerged from the greater Protestant tradition to form a uniquely Baptist concept. The Westminster Confession of Faith chapter 25, section 1, states, "The universal church consists of the whole number of the elect that have been and shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof."[29] In section 3, it states, "This catholic visible Church hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God." A. A. Hodge noted that within section 3, God has given to the universal church, (1) the inspired Scriptures as a rule of faith and practice; (2) the gospel ministry—by the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit; and (3) the ordinances, which include preaching, prayer, singing of praise, and the holy sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as well as discipline.[30] Upon interacting with section 3 of the Westminster Confession, the Congregationalist's Savoy Confession (from which the First and Second London Confession originated) separated from their fellow Calvinists. While Savoy maintained the phrase "visible Catholic Church of Christ" (in reference to the universal church), it avoided placing any authority on this entity to administer ordinances and the like. In this discussion, Savoy adds, "It (universal church) is not entrusted with the administration of any ordinances, or have any officers to rule or govern in, or over the whole body."[31]

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[29]A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1869), 310. Section 2 deals with the nature of the church as consisting of believers and their children. This is obviously a point at which Baptists would depart from the Reformed tradition, but it is outside the bounds of this study.

[30]Ibid., 313.

[31]Sacks, *Philadelphia Baptist Tradition of Church and Church Authority*, 220.

The London Confession (which carried over to the Second London Confession) presented further adaptation of this understanding. They asserted, "All persons throughout the World . . . are and may be called visible Saints: and of such ought all particular Congregations to be constituted."[32] This language reveals a shift from "the whole body" to "all persons" or from visible body to visible saints. Like the Savoy Confession, this shift seated the power within each local church. Unlike its predecessor, though, the London Confession did not use the language of a "visible catholic church" in reference to the universal body, but affirmed it "as an invisible kingdom of Christ over the hearts of the visible saints who professed his lordship."[33] This nuance helped Baptists clearly assert that the local church possessed the central activity and responsibility for governance.

Seating this discussion within the larger Reformed context helped illustrate that Baptists shared, with their Protestant forefathers, a concern and desire that reached beyond the local church. The First London and Second London Confession's discussion of the universal church fell within a larger Protestant context, as Baptists interacted with prior confessions of faith in order to craft their documents. While the Baptists within the Philadelphia tradition were clear in separating themselves from prior Reformed ecclesiological language, they left room for a belief in the universal church. With this context in place, it is helpful to observe the specificities of the Second London Confession as it relates to associations.

Baptists in early America imported the Second London Confession from their native England. Originally written in 1677, this document offered a strong response to Episcopalians who sought to achieve complete uniformity in religion. This document appealed to the theology of the Protestant Reformation and expressed religious freedom

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[32]Lumpkin, *Baptist Confession of Faith*, 157.

[33]Sacks, *Philadelphia Baptist Tradition of Church and Church Authority*, 230–31.

in the midst of turmoil. This robust confession contains thirty-two chapters of doctrine, with each chapter containing multiple sub-points. Chapter 26 is a detailed articulation of the doctrine of the church. It contains fifteen interior points, consistently backed with Scripture.

The first article defines the universal church as follows, "The Catholic or universal church, which may be called invisible, consist of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of him that fills all in all."[34] Closely related to the first article, the second provides further clarity regarding the universal church. It states, "All persons throughout the world, professing the faith of the gospel, and obedience unto God by Christ, according into it; not destroying their own profession by any errors diverting the foundation or the unholiness of conversion are and may be called visible Saints; and of such ought all particular congregations to be constituted."[35] For the Philadelphia Association, individuals formed the body of Christ, and as a church body, associated with other like-minded churches. Robert Handy noted that the Philadelphia tradition was strongly church-centered.[36] Philadelphia desired that the people of God cultivate particular visible churches.

Within the 1743 Philadelphia Baptist Association annual meeting minutes, associational leader, Benjamin Griffith penned an essay stating the power and duty of associations. Griffith argued that each particular church has complete power and authority from Jesus Christ to administer all gospel ordinances.[37] Griffith asserted that the

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[34]Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 283.

[35]Ibid.

[36]Robert Theodore Handy, "The Philadelphia Confession," in *Baptist Concepts of the Church: A Survey of the Historical and Theological Issues Which Have Produced Changes in Church Order*, ed. Winthrop Still Hudson (Chicago: Judson Press, 1959), 32.

[37]Benjamin Griffith, "Essay: Power and Duty of Associations," in *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, 1707 to 1807: Being the First One Hundred Years of Its Existence*, ed. A. D. Gillette (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2003), 59. Griffith's essay was published within the annual

church had freedom from any exterior human control. This freedom was not libertarian; it was a freedom only to follow Christ.[38] Handy concluded the Philadelphia mindset with these words, "The whole life of the church was to be conducted in response to divine command and under divine guidance according to Scripture. With such a firm conviction, these Baptists were bound to take their churchmanship with deep seriousness."[39]

This era also emphasized the connection between a calling from God and admission into his church. Christians are individually united to Christ through God's election; they are, in turn, united as Christ's elect to form churches. The Philadelphia Discipline of 1743 submitted, "Those thus called, he commandeth to walk together in particular societies, or churches, for their mutual edification and the due performance of public worship, for which you requireth of them in the world."[40] Therefore, within this tradition, the local church serves as a visible expression of the body of the Christ. Being united locally, existing within the local expression of Christ's body, Christians are mutually edified when they connect and cooperate with other like-minded bodies.[41]

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meeting minutes in 1749. James Clark also adopts this format in his work on the PBA. James L. Clark, *To Set Them in Order: Some Influences of the Philadelphia Baptist Association upon Baptists of America to 1814* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2001), 127–29.

[38]Griffith, "Essay," 60.

[39]Handy, "Philadelphia Confession," 37. This understanding of the church reveals particular theological and ecclesiological underpinnings that grounded their mindset; however, a detailed discussion of these underpinning are outside the bounds of this paper. For example, one can observe a natural propensity toward a strong doctrine of God's election of believers. The Discipline of 1798 captures this tendency, when it says, "A gospel church consist of such persons, as have been *called* out of the state of nature into a state of grace, *called* with an effectual calling, *called* out of the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear son, or are judged in charity to be so-*called*" (ibid). While it is beyond the scope of this work, further study would serve well to detail disintegration of a Reformed understanding of election and the authority of Scripture in Baptist life and its effect on the trajectory of the ecclesiological understanding set forth by Philadelphia. Gregory Wills does well to emphasize the demise of church discipline and its effect on Baptist church life. See Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900*, Religion in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[40]Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 57.

[41]Handy, "Philadelphia Confession," 43.

**Local Churches Unite as Associations**

Shurden argues that the Baptist articulation of the relationship between the local and universal church provided a doctrinal underpinning for the associational structure. Article 47 of the Second London Confession states,

> And although the particular Congregations be distinct and severall bodies, every one a compact and knit Citie in it selfe, yet are they all to walk by one and the same Rule, and by all meanes convenient to have the counsell and help one another in all needfull affaires of the Church, as members of one body in the common faith under Christ their onely head.[42]

In reference to the local and universal church, two points emerge. First, local congregations are distinct and form a visible church body. Second, local church bodies together exhibit the universal body of Christ. As the previous excerpt also indicates, this understanding also illustrates that Baptists saw the need for mutual connectivity. Robert Torbet echoed this point by acknowledging that Baptists emphasized the need for a broader fellowship with other autonomous visible churches; they lived under the conviction that mutual connectivity was an essential expression of the universal church.[43] These Baptists understood that a local body could not rightly define itself as a church if it lived a completely separated life. Ernest Payne summarized,

> The seventeenth century Baptists have regarded the visible Church as finding expression in local communities of believers who constitute themselves churches . . . who find an extension and expression of their life in free association, first, with other churches of their own faith and order.[44]

This framework allowed the Philadelphia Baptists to cultivate what they called the "associational principle," wherein each church was bound to pray for the good and prosperity of all of Christ's churches, and was privileged to hold communion among themselves for their mutual peace. In turn, churches could consult together about such

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[42]Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 157.

[43]Torbet, *History of the Baptists*, 31.

[44]Ernest A. Payne, *The Fellowship of Believers: Baptist Thought and Practice Yesterday and Today*, enlarged ed. (London: Kingsgate Press, 1952), 36. For a similar articulation, see Brackney, *Baptists in North America*, 71–73.

things that were lacking and take the proper steps to set themselves in order.[45] All in all, Baptists of the Philadelphia tradition understood that individual Christians existed within local churches as a united body of Christ. Upon this unity, God had granted each local church authority to govern itself. In turn, each church associated with other like-minded churches.[46]

**Associations Unite Together**

The Philadelphia Baptist Association sought to cultivate visible expressions of unity among all Baptists in America. Some Baptists, as early as the mid-eighteenth century, thought a broader organization to be more desirable that a collection of associations. These views were formally expressed in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Samuel Jones, clerk for the Philadelphia Association and pastor of Pennepack Church wrote these words to James Manning, President of the newly formed Baptist College of Rhode Island:

> For, as particular members are collected together in united in one body, which we call a particular church to answer those ends and purposes which could not be accomplished by any single member, so a collection and union of churches into one associational body may easily be conceived capable of answering those still greater purposes which any particular church could not be equal to. And, by the same reason, a union of associations will still increase the body in weight and strength, and make good that a threefold cord is not easily broken.[47]

Morgan Edwards, who was commissioned as the Association's first itinerant minister, penned a "plan of union" for Baptists in 1770. His plan stated,

> By the said union is meant, an union of individuals into churches so that no baptized believers abide loose and scattered . . . as is now the case in some places; also, an

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[45]Handy, "Philadelphia Confession," 45–47.

[46]John Hammett is helpful in presenting this language, as he notices Philadelphia's commitment to "church competence." John S. Hammett, "From Church Competence to Soul Competence: The Devolution of Baptist Ecclesiology," *Journal of Baptist Theology and Ministry* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 145.

[47]David Spencer, *The Early Baptists of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: W. Syckelmoore, 1877), 95.

> union of those churches (and of other churches which have hitherto stood by themselves) into associations in proper vicinities, which associations may be multiplied so as to have one in every province; and likewise, an union of those associations (like that of Ketocton and Warren) to the association of Philadelphia. By the fore mentioned means of intercourse are to be understood, letters and messengers from the churches to their respective associations to their common center [Philadelphia]; and from center back to the associations, and thence to the churches, and so to individuals. These means will not only be useful for 'knitting together' the several parts of the visible Baptist church on this continent, as the parts of the natural body are by 'joints and bands' Gal 2:19.[48]

This passage reveals a vibrant concern for a visible and tight-knit connection among Baptists throughout America. Edwards' bold vision is no mere partnership "in name only," but rather a carefully conceived plan to visibly connect Baptist churches in America. He desired "that all the Baptist churches from Nova Scotia to Georgia be made sufficiently known to one another."[49] Reflecting Philadelphia's ecclesiological structure, Edwards envisioned a denominational structure that emphasizes all levels of connection, from the individual to a broad network of associations.

While Edwards sought to develop a deep connection among Baptists throughout America, his plan also envisioned a broad national constituency of Baptists in America. Edwards proposed that this union between Baptist churches possess broad parameters so as not to preclude "any Baptist church of fair character, though differing in unessential points of faith or order."[50]

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[48]Morgan Edwards, *Materials toward a History of the Baptists in Pennsylvania Both British and German*, vol. 1, *Materials Toward a History of the American Baptists* (1770; repr., Enid, OK: Regular Baptist Publishing, 1998), 124–25. Additionally, Edwards proposed a public statement be put forth regarding the nature of associations as advisory bodies: "Disclaiming all jurisdiction and power and everything else which may clash with the rights of particular churches or those of private judgment" (ibid.) See also Clark, *To Set Them in Order*, 357.

[49]Edwards, *Materials toward a History of the Baptists in Pennsylvania*, 125.

[50]Ibid., 126–27. This vision of a larger theological "tent" shows parallels the broad national denominations seen in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially the Southern Baptists gathered around the "Baptist Faith and Message" in 1923 and following. This broad type of unity was difficult to attain during this era. Historians, though, have observed state and regional unity among Baptists during the mid to late eighteenth century. Within Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, and New England, an organization named the General Committee of Correspondence broadened Baptist efforts within a larger region. Shurden surmises that the primary objective of a General Committee was to "act as a bond of union and center of information for Baptists in a particular area." Shurden, "Associationalism among Baptists in America," 219. These groups served as a pre-curser for Baptist state conventions.

## Practice of Early American Baptist Associational Life

Having considered the ecclesiological structure of the Philadelphia Baptists, it is necessary to also analyze the practice of early Baptist associations, within the Philadelphia tradition. The question in this section is, "How did the association interact with churches within their membership, and what was the nature of their connection?" The bulk of this section will consider associational minutes and other primary sources in order to capture the Association's involvement in the affairs of the churches,[51] in which the Association provided advice and accountability to member churches regarding essential aspects of the local church.[52] In doing so, the Association attempted to maintain and promote the centrality and power of each local church.

### Mutual Advice and Aid Promoting Purity and Unity

The first one hundred years of the Philadelphia Association reflected a desire for ecclesial unity manifested through a commitment to care for and encourage churches within their fellowship. For instance, in 1707, several congregations within the Delaware Valley sought to maintain unity among churches in the region. Like their British predecessors, these churches sent particular brethren to meet together yearly in order to "consult about such things that were wanting in the churches and to set them in order."[53] The Association sought to aid the cultivation of healthy member churches. For this reason, individuals unrelated to a conjoining church were welcomed to attend these

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[51]The aspects detailed herein do not intend to serve as a treatment of every facet of the Association's relationship with member churches. For instance, the association also exhibited fellowship through corporate worship services during the associational meetings. While not all-encompassing, the characteristics illustrate the argument that the Association was deeply involved in essential matters and functions of the church.

[52]In order to illustrate this claim, this dissertation considers two primary aspects, prescribed in Scripture, as essential in the life of the local church, namely, doctrinal purity (1 Tim 4:16; 2 Tim 4:2-3; Titus 1:9, 2:1; Jude 3) and unity among the body (Eph 4:11-13; 1 Cor 1:10, 12:1-21; Col 3:13-14).

[53]Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 4.

meetings; only church representatives were permitted to preach or offer advice.[54] In order to ensure this process, the Association required a letter of recommendation for each messenger. The first century of the Association reveals a commitment to doctrinal health as well as unity within and among partnering churches, as evidenced by these words from a 1757 associational sermon: "Dear Brethren and fellow members of the mystical body of which Jesus Christ is the head, we, your delegates, have, according to the appointment, met in gospel peace and unity, and conferred together, in our usual manner, about the affairs of churches."[55]

From the outset, the Philadelphia Association served as an essential source for church counsel and encouragement. The Association gathered yearly around the preaching and teaching of scriptural and theological issues, to maintain orderly churches, but also to consider the unique needs of member churches. To this end, the Philadelphia Association minutes display the Association's involvement in essential church matters. Observing the minutes reveals two aspects of this involvement: (1) accountability toward doctrinal purity and church order, and (2) protection of unity among local congregations.

The minutes reveal a variety of examples of churches concerned with doctrinal purity and church order. For instance, churches sought council regarding how to choose elders, how to function without a minister, how they might deal with delinquent and disorderly members, how to navigate theological error within their body, and the like. This section considers these types of examples from the early decades of the Association.

In 1723 a query came from the church at Brandywine recommending advice on operating without an ordained minister. In response, the Association recommended that the church meet together as often as they were able; they should exercise corporate

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[54]Minutes from later in the eighteenth century reveal some transition in this regard. Chap. 3 considers this transition.

[55]Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 75.

activities namely, Scripture reading, singing, and prayer. The church was encouraged to maintain order and decency in the exercise of these gifts as well as consider future leaders to shepherd the body.[56]

Similarly, in 1728, Hopewell Church requested advice for choosing their elders. The Association responded,

> We answer, that a church wanting ruling elders or deacons, as in other cases, should set a day apart, and by fasting and prayer, seek the guidance and direction of God, and then unanimously pitch upon one or more of their brethren to act upon trial in the office of ruling elder or deacon; and our judgment is, that persons called upon trial in the said offices, may act by authority of the church, with principal power as if completely qualified; but not so teaching elders as ministers of the word and ordinances.[57]

These words reveal the Association's concern for healthy churches—those composed of deliberate and spiritually disciplined members.

Additionally, in 1735, some within the Association meeting sought aid regarding local church membership. They pondered if their church should grant membership to a faithful attender who lived considerable distance from the church. Citing chapter 27 of their confession of faith, the Association reasoned that the practice was contrary to the intention to institute particular local churches.[58] Also concerning membership, in 1739, the church at Great Valley mentioned delinquent church members who failed to give reason for their absence. Unable to reach them, the church consulted the Association to provide insight and wisdom in this mysterious situation. The delegates advised them to pursue contact once more, and if no resolution occurred, then they should

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[56]Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 27. In light of the situation, the Associational leaders bemoaned their own neglect in examining all gifted brother and administers who came to the region, and quested to improve its commitment to protect each other.

[57]Ibid., 29. The 1729 minutes also report that the delegates were refreshed to hear "of the welfare of churches in general; also, in hearing the sweet and comfortable truths of the gospel declared among us." Regarding church unity, the 1730 minutes reveal an inquiry involving suspending the membership of a former member who left to lead a Seventh Day Adventist church. Ibid., 33.

[58]Ibid., 37.

treat the unresponsive members as covenant breakers who despised the authority granted to Christ's church.[59]

When the Association convened in 1744, the church of Bethlehem presented the following query, "Suppose a person baptized by a man, takes upon him to preach the gospel, and administers ordinances without a regular call coordination from any church."[60] They asked if this person should be granted leadership within the church. The Association frowned upon these proceedings; they believed it yielded unhealthy and doctrinally unsound consequences. Pointedly the Association stated, "We therefore give our sentiments that such administrations are irregular, invalid, and of no effect."[61]

Similarly, in 1746, the church at Philadelphia asked whether the Association considered it suitable for someone who had not been ordained to preach publically. In response, the Association stated that Scripture prescribes only ordained men of God preach to the Lord's people. Citing 1 Timothy 3:10, the delegates noted that when the apostle Paul referred to deacons, he said they must first be proved. They added, "We may here argue from the less to greater; for if the deacons, who are concerned but with the outward affairs of the churches, must be proved, how much more ministers, who are stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Tim 5:22)."[62]

A few years later, in 1752, the church at Kingwood pursued advice regarding

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[59]Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 40.

[60]Ibid., 49.

[61]Ibid.

[62]Ibid., 50-51. In addition, the Association spent a considerable amount of space looking at the case of Paul and Barnabas, who were teachers before their ordination. In this context (the infancy of the early church and Paul's apostolic status) it was not unlawful for them to preach without ordination. The delegates perceived that in the modern Christian context, a time of testing and trial is proper. Also, the call, choice, and ordination of her own officers is a special privilege Christ has granted to the church during this era. They added, "It must be an entrenchment upon her [church] liberty and privilege, for any to use means to force or constrain a church, either to put a person on trial or to hasten his ordination." These acts ought to be the free and joyful choice of local churches. During that same year, the church in Philadelphia consulted the Association regarding transient communion of members from other churches. Seeking to emphasize the importance of unity and doctrinal fidelity, the Association mentioned that they should seek to attain both aspects. Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 54.

the relationship between theological error and church membership. In their case, a member denied unconditional election, the doctrine of original sin, and the final perseverance of the saints, all the while attempting to persuade others of his own doctrinal beliefs. Should this man maintain full communion with the church? The Association articulated and affirmed a robust biblical defense of these fundamental Christian doctrines. Questing to protect doctrinal purity they added, "We adopt, and would that all churches belonging to the Baptist Association be well grounded in accordance to our confession of faith in catechism, and cannot allow that any are true members of our churches who deny the said principles."[63] The following year, the same church at Kingwood requested further theological advice. This time it regarded a sensitive pastoral care need within their body. The church asked whether assurance of faith stands absolutely necessary for admission to baptism. The Association carefully replied,

> It appears to us, both from scripture and experience, that true saving faith may subsist where there is no assurance of faith. Therefore . . . a person in sound judgment, professing his faith of reliance on Christ for mercy and salvation, accompanied with a gospel conversation ought to be baptized.[64]

Within the same year, readers observe another aspect of associational involvement in the essential function of churches: "Any brother called by any of our churches to exercise his gift, when approved of at home, should, before his ordination, visit other churches, and preach among them, in obtaining from those churches concurring evidence of their approbation, that is proper and convenient that such may be ordained."[65] The Philadelphia Association believed local churches should support each other by testing potential elder candidates before ordination. However, the responsibility

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[63]Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 57.

[64]Ibid., 70.

[65]Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 70.

for, and course of, this ecclesial action was seated firmly within local congregation.[66]

### Example of Mutual Advise and Aid in Later Years

In the latter half of the first century of the Association, readers continue to observe the PBA's commitment to provide support and accountability for local churches within their constituency. In 1765, the Church at Smith Creek inquired as to whether it was proper for their church to receive a person into membership who had been baptized by immersion by a minister in the Church of England. The Association answered in the affirmative, so long as the baptism was coupled with a profession of faith and repentance.[67] In 1771, the Association asserted, "No man shall be allowed to preach among the Associated churches, except that he produce credentials of his being in communion with his church, and of his having been licensed to preach."[68] Revealing continuity over several decades, the Association first transcribed this stipulation within the inaugural 1707 minutes.

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[66]In his 1932 historical address of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, Gavin Thomas provided insight regarding the Association's role in ordination. He said, "Candidates were reported to have a competent share of learning and other prerequisites for the sacred office. It was suggested that a brother exercising his gifts in one church should also preach in sister churches before the question of his ordination should be taken up. Bishops or elders were to be chosen by the common suffrage of the church and set apart by fasting and prayer, with the imposition of hands by the eldership of the church. One church called on three brethren to exercise their gifts and three years later set one apart for the ministry, two brethren from another church assisting in the ceremony . . . . Ordinations affirmed by the Association were not uncommon. The form of ordination was dignified, the questions asked definite and comprehensive, the laying on of hands impressive. Development in ordination has been along the lines of raising the standard and keeping out the incompetent, both of which are rather difficult in a congregational form of government." Gavin Morton Walker, *Philadelphia Baptist Development in Two Centuries and a Quarter. Historical Address, Philadelphia Baptist Association, October 5, 1932, First Baptist Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1932), 12.

[67]Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 95. Displaying the Association's quest for church unity, they received a request from congregants of the New Mills Church in 1768. The church requested help regarding a dispute between them and their minister. The Association sent Isaac Eaton, Samuel Jones, James Mott, and John Stout to visit them a month after the Association's meeting. Ibid., 104.

[68]Ibid., 121. Critics, like Priest, have criticized these types of actions as an infringement upon local church autonomy. Gerald L. Priest, "The Philadelphia Baptist Association and the Question of Authority," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 12, no. 1 (Fall 2007): 53. These critiques will be addressed in chap. 4, wherein the first two centuries of the PBA will be evaluated in regard to church interaction.

The 1785 minutes reveal a continued commitment to aid churches in maintaining doctrinal purity. The Philadelphia church requested aid regarding the proper administration of the Lord's Supper. The church stated, "However numerous they may be in any one place, during the period of their remaining unorganized or unconstituted as distinct regular church by themselves."[69] After deliberation, the messengers decided this matter demanded more thorough consideration. At the next annual meeting, the reply was two-fold. First, they emphasized that the Lord's Supper ought not to be administered to persons who are not members of any church, even if baptized. Second, they put forth that the ordinance should not be administered to church members in a scattered situation, without the consent of the churches where these scattered members lived. Following consent, they should proceed. Herein readers observe a later example of the Association's commitment to support churches in essential functions of the local church.

Fifteen years later, minutes reveal care for member churches exhibited not only in their presence, but also in their absence. The messengers indicated that no communication had been received from certain member churches; thus the Association initiated contact with the churches in Knowlton and Coram. Furthermore, the Association enacted a resolution to drop off any church's name from the minutes, which failed to maintain communication for three consecutive years.[70] Unlike previous interactions, this occasion does not demonstrate mutual advice or aid between the assembly and the member churches; however, these actions illustrate the Association's concern for the churches within their assembly.

Observing this broad series of interchanges illustrates the Association's commitment to promote theological fidelity among the confederating local churches. Reciprocally, readers observe that many churches took initiative to seek aid from the

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[69]Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 286.

[70]Ibid., 349.

associational leaders. This posture illustrates the churches' true dependence on the Association to provide valuable advice for the essential operations and welfare of the church. Regarding the first hundred years of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, Hudson noted,

> The association was not a peripheral body. It not only cared for and implemented the common outward concerns of the churches; it was an expression of their inward communion in Christ, and it assumed responsibility for preserving their unity in faith and practice, curbing the 'wanton abuse of church-power' and affording assistance and advice in all difficult cases.[71]

Hudson also emphasized the importance of churches' participation in the early years of the Philadelphia Association when he said, "If an association were to act on behalf of the churches, the churches must be represented in the association."[72]

**Relationship between Associations**

Baptists in early America exhibited broad visible unity. In 1751, following the example of the Philadelphia Association, four churches in South Carolina joined for the purpose of promoting, "The Kingdom of the Redeemer through maintenance of love and fellowship, by mutual contribution for peace and welfare of the churches."[73] Leaders from Philadelphia, including Oliver Hart, were instrumental in establishing what would become the Charleston Baptist Association. Not long after, churches in New England gathered in Warren, Rhode Island to consider the value in forming their own association. In addition, the Virginia Association (Ketocton) took shape in 1766. In concert with Charleston, these associations held deep doctrinal and practical ties with the Philadelphia Association; many of their initial messengers formerly participated with the Philadelphia

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[71]Hudson, "Stumbling into Disorder," 13.

[72]Ibid., 22.

[73]Wood Furman, ed., *A History of the Charleston Association of Baptist Churches in the State of South Carolina with an Appendix Containing the Principal Circular Letters to the Churches* (Charleston, SC: J. Hoff, 1811), 8.

assembly.[74] The minutes of the 1769 meeting reveal the first year that letters from other associations were read in the assembly, from the Warren and Virginia Associations, respectively. Following its annual meeting, the PBA sent reciprocal correspondence to these associations. These associations also welcomed messengers from the sister entities to attend their annual gathering. Every year following, the Philadelphia Association meeting included interaction and representation from other assemblies.[75]

Following Morgan Edwards' influence toward a broader denominational establishment, the PBA called for denominational unity in 1799. The minutes from that year include the following:

> Apprehensive that many advantages may result from a general conference, composed of one or more members from each Association, to be held every one, two, or three years . . . this Association respectfully invites the different Associations in the United States to favor them with their view on the subject.[76]

This call received little interest, as only three sister associations preferred the idea of a general conference.[77] In 1802, the PBA conceded that a national general conference was not "likely to be accomplished."[78] Thus, the PBA neglected to continue their pursuit of national denominational efforts. Shurden offers three suggestions to explain this failed endeavor. First, the PBA never clearly defined their objective or vision for this type of

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[74]As previously mentioned, Hart was commissioned by the PBA south to pastor FBC Charleston, SC, in 1751. They maintained consistent correspondence, and also adopted the PBA doctrinal statement.

[75]In that same year, 1769, the Philadelphia Association (and others) joined the churches of the Warren Association in their fight for religious liberty. The recorded minutes say, "Voted, that this association will not only join that of Warren, in seeking relief for our oppressed brethren, but will also solicit the concurrence of the Associations of Virginia and Carolina in the design, if need be." Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 108. Readers observe support for the churches in New England in the 1774 annual meeting minutes as well. Ibid., 141. Cordial interactions were consistent throughout the first hundred years of the PBA, and beyond, as each year delegates from sister associations attended the PBA annual meeting. The PBA also sent representatives to these sister associations.

[76]Ibid., 343.

[77]Ibid., 349. The Charleston, New York, and Warwick Associations were the lone proponents of this plan.

[78]Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 371–72.

union. Baptists in this era had proven they would unite in order to achieve specific and needed goals. For instance, Baptists throughout America united in the fight for religious liberty. In the coming era, Baptists organized around domestic and foreign mission efforts. The Philadelphia conception, however, lacked clarity toward a specific purpose.[79] Second, Baptists in many states were preoccupied with the aforementioned statewide organizations. They did not want to neglect these efforts by turning their attention elsewhere. Third, several Baptists feared that a conference or convention of any kind would encroach upon local church independence and stifle the affairs of local churches.[80]

Through the first hundred years of the PBA, readers observe the Association's desire to connect Baptists throughout America. While they achieved a vibrant camaraderie and connection with sister associations, they failed to establish a national Baptist organization during this era.

**Maintaining Authority within the Local Church: Considering Benjamin Griffith's Essay**

The organic formulation of Baptist associations in America meant that no explicit literature had been crafted clarifying the end and purpose of the association's relationship with a local church. Led by Benjamin Griffith, pastor of the Montgomery Baptist Church of Bucks County, the PBA formulated a theological statement regarding the association's power and duty as related to a local church. Satisfied with this work, messengers at the 1749 annual meeting "unanimously approved and agreed to an essay of Benjamin Griffith."[81] Griffith's essay began by denying an association's "superior

[79]Shurden points out that neither the Shaftsbury Association in Vermont, nor the Danbury Association in Connecticut cooperated because they failed to see the "utility of such a combination." Shurden, "Associationalism among Baptists in America," 223.

[80]Ibid., 224. The following era will present similar concerns, especially from Baptists in New England regarding national missionary entities.

[81]Griffith, "Essay," 60.

judicature" over a conjoining church. He said that each particular church possesses complete power and authority from Jesus Christ; they are granted particular privileges. Provided churches have duly qualified officers, they possess sufficient power to baptize, take the Lord's Supper, receive and cast out those from the assembly, as well as ordain their own officers. They exercise every part of discipline and church government independent of any other church or assembly.[82] Griffith continued,

> And that several such independent churches, where Providence gives them their situation convenient, may, and ought, for their mutual strength and counsel, and other valuable advantages, by their voluntary and free consent, to enter into an agreement and confederation . . . . Such churches there must be agreeing in doctrine and practice and independent in their authority and church power, before they can enter into a confederation.[83]

Simply put, doctrinally sound independent churches joined the association. In no way did joining an association remove their independence to govern their own affairs and act according to the ecclesial power granted by Jesus Christ.

**Real but Restricted Power**
**as Observed in the Essay**

The Philadelphia Baptist Association possessed ingrained power, but also maintained the centrality of local churches. Within his essay, Griffith stated that the Association grounds its power in the granted consent of the cooperating churches. He presented four aspects of the Association's power. First, the Association possessed the right to withdraw from unsound or disorderly churches. Griffith held that if sound doctrine served as the Association's primary motive and foundation for gathering, then a defection in doctrine would be sufficient to exclude churches from fellowship. Along this line, the Association protected other congregations by reserving the right to advertise their defection to all the confederating churches. Second, the Association advised

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[82]Ibid., 61.

[83]Ibid.

partnering churches to remove themselves from fellowship with a delinquent member. Griffith and the other co-signers believed that withdrawing from a disorderly church was a general duty incumbent on all orthodox persons, and churches to do, regardless of confederation.[84] Lest one assume an association exerts superior power over churches, Griffith augmented his argument by saying that the duty to withdraw can do no more than absolve fellowship between the Association and the defective members or churches; this withdrawal served only to cease from future endeavors. However, the Association held no power to excommunicate or deliver them to Satan. As an independent church, no outside earthly entity could alter their status as a church of Jesus Christ. Third, the Association could aid its members in declaring a specific person or group within a church as morally unsound. Griffith argued that these actions appear regular and justifiable given the nature of confederations and civil entities; these groups had certain rules to exclude delinquent members from their assembly. Fourth, the Association, without exceeding its authority, could advise a church on how to best approach a specific issue "according to the rule of gospel discipline."[85]

The example of the Jerusalem Counsel in Acts 15 undergirded Griffith's concept of the power possessed by an association. Griffith retrieved specific observations from this biblical church counsel. From this text he gathered that the council was justified to disown erroneous teachers (Acts 15:25). Additionally, the counsel delegated able persons, with Paul and Barnabas, to affirm their decision (Acts 15:24). Furthermore, they delivered decrees to the other churches, in addition to the church of Antioch initially mentioned in chapter 14.[86] Finally, if necessary, the Association could aid the church as

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[84]Griffith, "Essay," 62. Griffith used 2 Cor 6:16-17 and 2 Tim 3:5 as biblical precedent for this statement. Also, he stated that this action is justifiable by the light and law of nature, as is apparent in the conduct and practice of all regular civil and political organizations. He added that they all had certain rules to exclude delinquents from their societies.

[85]Ibid.

[86]Griffith, "Essay," 63.

to the appropriate steps of applying proper correction. Griffith surmised, "An Association of delegates of Confederate churches may doctrinally declare any person or party in a church, who are defective in principles or disorderly and practice, to be censurable . . . without exceeding the bounds of their power and duty, to advise the church that such belong unto, how to deal with such, according to the rule of gospel discipline."[87]

Continuing in step with the Acts 15 precedent, Griffith expressed freedom for member churches to advise deviating churches toward right Christian doctrine and practice. Regarding the Association's role in aiding needy churches, Griffith continued, "Associations strengthen such a church, and assist her, if need be, by sending able men of their own number to help the church in executing the power vested in her by the ordinance of Jesus Christ, and to stand by her, and to defend her against the insults of such offending persons or parties."[88] With this essay, Griffith avowed a clear role, citing Scripture, for associations to aid and council sister churches within their membership. Griffith balanced these assertions within an independent church structure. All in all, Griffith's essay portrays Philadelphia's commitment to maintain a posture of connectivity; they sought to protect each other from doctrinal threats and help churches in need. While each local church stood independent, this truth did not disregard vibrant and visible connection.

### Examples of Local Church Authority

Associational minutes reveal the Philadelphia Association's commitment to maintain church power and independence. In Griffith's 1741 treatise, he used the word "advise" to describe the Association's role in the life of the church.[89] This term was first

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[87]Ibid.

[88]Ibid.

[89]Griffith, "Essay," 38. However, the 1736 minutes reveal that while no query appeared, the Association did nominate delegates to visit and "conciliate matters between them" at the Montgomery

enacted in the minutes of the 1726 annual meeting; it was used more regularly after 1733. In the 1739 minutes, readers also observe a commitment to church centrality. The Montgomery Baptist Church questioned the possibility that the word "advise" may signify superior associational authority over the churches. The messengers suggested that the proposed language should remain for that current year and concluded, "If the churches desire a method of the Association altered, let them consult unanimously, and insert the same in next year's letters."[90] The Association once again conceded to the primacy of local churches within the assembly. Any associational power was granted, and could be removed, by the churches within the fellowship.

In 1741, Great Valley Baptist Church reported to the Association that two of their members were at odds and brought the issue before the assembly. They asked what could be done. The Association responded, "We judge the contending person worthy of reproof, because he, having submitted and preferred the matter to the church for final determination, yet contrary to what might be expected from him as a Christian, refused to comply with the churches determination."[91] This church also reported that one of the sanctioned members confessed to the fault and sought reconciliation. Some within the church, though, were not convinced of his contrition. The Association advised the church to exercise prolonged discernment, methodically contemplating the matter while examining the disciplined party as well as the dissatisfied group. The Association recommended, "At your monthly meeting, urge such persons to produce sufficient reasons for their dissatisfaction."[92] If these members failed to provide such reasons, then the church could deal with the disorderly persons who were disturbing the unity of the

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church upon hearing of discord among the body. Some might consider this action a usurpation of church independence. This issue will be discussed in chap. 4 of this study.

[90]Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 40.

[91]Ibid., 44.

[92]Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 45.

body. The Association's posture toward this case illustrates a true care for the welfare and unity of this local church; however the Association deferred any ruling to the churches.

During the 1746 meeting, the Association responded to the Church of Philadelphia's inquiry regarding ordination as a pre-requisite for preaching. While answering in the affirmative, the Association also added that the call, choice, and ordination of her own officers are special privileges Christ has granted to churches during this era. Additionally, they said, "It must be an entrenchment upon her [church] liberty and privilege, for any to use means to force or constrain a church, either to put a person on trial or to hasten his ordination."[93] These acts ought to be the free and joyful choice of local churches. While the Association sought to promote and exude right doctrinal preaching, it understood that a church should determine those whom are called and qualified to minister to God's people.[94]

In 1766, the Philadelphia Association encountered an interesting series of events. An excommunicated person from one of the member churches asked the Philadelphia Association to consider this case. Given the complexities of the matter, the Association decided to postpone the question until the following year. At the 1767 meeting, the Association recommended that the excommunicated member appeal his case before the church. In the following months, confusion arose among the member churches regarding the nature of the recommendation to appeal. In the following year, the Association remembered its commitment to "claim no jurisdiction, nor a power to repeal anything settled by any church period."[95] Seemingly overstepping their bounds, they agreed that if the church requested assistance in the matter, then they would provide

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[93]Ibid., 51.

[94]Ibid., 51-52.

[95]Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 102.

counsel.[96]

A few years later, the Church of Newtown asked to set a time and appoint ministers to ordain Nicholas Cox. The Association agreed that the occasion and oversight belongs to the church.[97] The Coram Church in New York provided a similar request in 1775. The church desired to ordain Ebenezer Ward as their itinerant minister. In response, the Association claimed "no such right," indicating that this responsibility fell to the local church.[98] In 1794, two further inquiries stood before the Philadelphia messengers, both regarding the independence of the local church. First, the question of whether a non-member could bring forth evidence against a member arose. The Association set forth, "It be left to every church to judge for themselves in every instance of this nature."[99] Second, the assembly considered a church's right to withdraw and unite with another association. In response the Association said,

> It is considered and decided that the churches have an undoubted right to depart from this Association, and join any other they may see fit; but this Association, having been happy in their connection . . . they can; but if they choose to withdraw enjoying any other, we consent.[100]

Observations from the 1800 and 1805 meetings reveal some missteps regarding church independency. In the prior year, the Association stated that its regular business was to consider matters brought forth by the churches, yet they saw fit to "take up any matter of consequence introduced by an individual member."[101] Conversely, in 1805, an individual's question was brought up and the Association responded that it could

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[96]Ibid., 99, 101–2, 105.

[97]Ibid., 119.

[98]Ibid., 148–49. See also Clark, *To Set Them in Order,* 123-24.

[99]Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 297.

[100]Ibid. The churches of Cow Marsh, Welch Tract, Duck Creek, and Wilmington (all from Delaware) asked to join another association. See also Clark, *To Set Them in Order*, 124.

[101]Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 349.

not respond to an individual's question without interfering with the autonomy of the church.[102] While seemingly overstepping their bounds as an advisory body, the Philadelphia Association voluntarily corrected its action in an effort to protect church independence while maintaining vibrant support and aid for member churches.

The previous material displays the Philadelphia Association's commitment to protect and preserve local church independence while providing mutual care and aid for partnering churches. Griffith's essay portrays the power engrained within the Association; however this power was seated firmly within the centrality of the local church.

## Concluding Thoughts Regarding Church Independence within Associational Structure

Throughout the first hundred years of its existence, the Philadelphia Association strove to protect the independence of the local churches within their constituency. In his substantial 1813 Baptist history work, David Benedict put forth, "It has now been in operation 106 years, and I do not find that it was ever complained of for infringing on the independency of any church."[103] In addition, Clark agrees that associational records throughout the eighteenth century readily display that the body was "fairly consistent in not assuming power over the churches."[104]

However, historians say that Philadelphia was not without its detractors. Torbet, for instance, says, "As the Philadelphia Association grew in prestige and membership . . . its leadership did not go unchallenged. Some churches attacked the

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[102]Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 349.

[103]David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America, and Other Parts of the World* (1813; repr., Gallatin, TN: Church History Research and Archives, 1985), 596.

[104]Clark, *To Set Them in Order*, 125. Clark admits that at times, the Association over-stepped their bounds in isolated instances (as seen above). However, all in all, he argues that they were consistent in deferring to church authority in these matters.

principle of associational organization unreservedly and withheld financial support from the Association."[105] Torbet credits these objections to theological differences, as General Baptists in New England, New York, and New Jersey were disturbed that the Association had adopted a Calvinistic doctrinal statement in 1742.[106] He references a letter dated September 23, 1787, from Southampton Baptist Church in Pennsylvania stating, "Should an Association forget her Bounds and assume a power to do the Business peculiar to the Churches of Christ, the Connection would no longer be desirable."[107] These detractions aside, Torbet holds that the Philadelphia Association's significance cannot be overemphasized. "For without violating Baptist church autonomy it provided a source of guidance and unity at a critical period of organization in the denomination," he says.[108]

## Emerging Concerns as the Century Progressed

The Philadelphia Baptist Association played a prominent role in maintaining the health and unity of Baptist churches in early America. Mirroring the growth of the young denomination, the Philadelphia Association began as a small collection of eight churches, but grew to a burgeoning group of nearly forty churches in 1807, not including the many churches that left the Philadelphia group to begin new associations. Hence, Philadelphia played a vital role in establishing Baptist church connectivity throughout the newly formed American states. Philadelphia's first century also illustrates other emerging concerns; in addition to the health and unity of local churches, education and missionary

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[105]Torbet, *History of the Baptists*, 232.

[106]Shurden also notes that the Warren Association in Massachusetts was known as the most conservative group in terms of exerting influence over member churches. Perhaps there could be some reaction against the PBA in this case. Shurden, "Associationalism among Baptists in America," 136-37.

[107]Torbet, *History of the Baptists*, 232.

[108]Ibid. He immediately adds, "In addition, it's afforded a pattern of democratic polity which was destined to be well received in the liberty-loving colonies." This statement will prove relevant as the discussion moves to the following generation of American Baptist associations (post-1800).

endeavors became new areas of emphasis.[109]

**Educational Efforts**

In 1722, English Baptist and businessman Thomas Hollis, established four scholarships at Harvard College in order to train young Baptists for Christian ministry. He asked the PBA to consider a worthy candidate to be awarded the first scholarship. The PBA appointed Abel Morgan to identify capable young men to take part in this opportunity.[110] While promising, this arrangement failed to yield positive results.[111] After this plan failed to materialize, the PBA attempted little education efforts over the next three decades.

In 1756, the PBA agreed to collect money to establish a Latin grammar school in Hopewell, New Jersey, founded by Isaac Eaton, a pastor. Like many schools of its day, it was primarily established to train young men for the pastorate; it also served to train for other professions. By all accounts, the Hopewell School was a success. Many men who trained there eventually pastored churches within the PBA. Additionally, many of Hopewell's graduates became prominent leaders throughout America: pastors, civic leaders, lawyers, and physicians, among other professions. The school's success convinced many Baptists of the great usefulness of a wider holistic education to better equip pastors for the work of the gospel ministry.[112]

The school's triumph also set the stage for a larger educational endeavor—the

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[109]While religious liberty was a concern for many Baptists in America, it was more prominent in Massachusetts and Virginia than in Philadelphia.

[110]Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Association*, 27.

[111]Historians who chronicle Hollis' educational endeavor are unaware why this plan failed to materialize as they expected. The annual meeting minutes only mention Morgan's task. Torbet and Clark both mention the endeavor's lack of success. Robert G. Torbet, *Social History of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, 1707-1940* (Philadelphia: Westbrook, 1945), 67; Clark, *To Set Them in Order*, 31.

[112]Clark, *To Set Them in Order*, 33. Clark depends much on Henry M. King, "Education Among the Baptists of This Country During the Last Hundred Years," *Baptist Quarterly* 10 (October 1876): 449.

Rhode Island College (later Brown University), established in 1764. The PBA minutes reveal the Association's strong support of this venture. During Rhode Island College's inaugural year, the PBA informed the churches of its establishment and advised them, "Be liberal in contributing towards carrying the same into execution."[113] Two years later, the Association again recommended that the churches support the efforts of the college, explaining that the school had "promising youths under the tuition of President Manning."[114]

In 1773, John Gano visited the Charleston Association as a messenger from Philadelphia. During the Charleston meeting, he chaired a committee with Oliver Hart and Francis Pelot in order to discuss a plan for financial cooperation and contribution to Rhode Island College.[115] Educational fundraising efforts gained a broader focus as two of the most prominent Associations spurred Baptists to support the young collegiate institution. Progressing the educational cause, the Philadelphia Association established an official education fund in 1789. They explained,

> After conferring upon the necessity and importance of raising a fund for the education of pious and promising young men for the ministry—we, the members present, do engage to promote subscriptions in our respective churches and congregations, for said purpose and to bring in the moneys raised, with the subscription papers to the next Association, to be at their disposal.[116]

Regarding this fund, Clark offers, "The education fund instituted by the Philadelphia Association proved to be more than a noble experiment. The interest from this fund enabled at least a dozen men to carry on their studies at Rhode Island College and enabled several others to secure private instruction."[117] Instrumental to the early history

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[113]Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 91.

[114]Ibid., 99, 101.

[115]Furman, *History of the Charleston Association*, 14–15. See also Clark, *To Set Them in Order*, 43.

[116]Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 246.

[117]Clark, *To Set Them in Order*, 55.

of Baptist education in America, the Philadelphia Association offered significant contributions toward its establishment and flourishing. These actions signaled a move beyond the concerns of single churches, to a broader Baptist effort. Education served as an emerging concern for Baptists in Philadelphia during the mid to late eighteenth century. These efforts became an ever-growing emphasis for Baptists in the coming decades of the nineteenth century.[118]

**Missionary Endeavors**

Events in 1770 presented an evangelistic impetus among the PBA, as Morgan Edwards urged the delegation to send an evangelist to travel and preach throughout the colonies.[119] In 1771, the Association commissioned Gano and Edwards to the South.[120] Likewise, the next year associational delegate David Jones reported to the Association that he "intended to visit the western tribes of Indians the next winter." Granting his request, the Association quested to gain support among the churches in order to fund the evangelist effort.[121] These actions signaled an outward focus that would rise to the forefront for Philadelphia Baptists, as well as the growing group of other Baptists in

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[118]Torbet agrees with Clark regarding the PBA's influence on education. He surmises that they served as the "nucleus and motivating center for this early educational movement." He also adds, "In this period, more than the following era of consolidation and expansion, this body played its most important role." Torbet, *Social History of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 71.

[119]Scholars debate as to the point at which the PBA turned toward outward missionary endeavors. In 1755, the PBA began to send delegates from Philadelphia to other colonies, commissioning P. P. Van Horn and Benjamin Miller to North Carolina. Torbet believes this event marked a missionary impetus for the PBA. Torbet, *History of the Baptists*, 262. However, the 1755 PBA minutes reveal that these men were sent to North Carolina in order to "visit several vacancies the ensuing year." Ibid.

[120]The minutes reveal that Gano fulfilled the office of traveling evangelist in 1793, when it was declined by Edwards. He was the last evangelist appointed by the PBA. Clark, *To Set Them in Order*, 19. Brackney also draws a 1791 quote from the Shaftesbury Association in Vermont. They put forth that a Baptist association was "no more than a number of churches in sister relation, mutually agreeing to meet by their delegates . . . for the free conscience on those matters that concern the general good of the churches." Brackney, *Baptists in North America*, 71. This quote reveals that the Philadelphia Association's expanding focus garnered attention from other Baptists in America.

[121]Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 124. See also Clark, *To Set Them in Order*, 19.

America. The Philadelphia Baptist Mission Society, established in 1802, sent T. G. Jones to Ohio in 1792. His service proved instrumental in establishing a new congregation in Lisbon.[122] The Association celebrated with Jones as he led new believers into the covenant family of God through water baptism.[123] Other associations, such as Charleston, followed Philadelphia's lead in providing ministry programs to carry the gospel to surrounding regions.[124] As seen, these outward efforts focused on domestic missions.

Brackney argues that one particular event triggered a new beginning for the Baptist organizational concept; Baptists began striving toward international missions. In 1791, William Carey exhorted British Baptists toward evangelization across the world. He expected his comrades to respond with zeal for the cause. Instead, they agreed to support local causes, namely, a fund for poor ministers and the antislavery crusade. Any discussion regarding world missions was continually postponed to later meetings. This cumbersome process spurred Carey and his long-time friend Andrew Fuller to establish the "Particular Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to the Heathen" in October of 1792—in order to ensure a focused ministry effort.[125]

Baptists in America closely observed the advent of this group, pondering the possibility of importation.[126] The first response to this British development was an interdenominational missionary society formed by New York City churches in 1796.

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[122]Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 283.

[123]Ibid., 431.

[124]Lynn May points to the Shaftsbury Association of Vermont, who composed an elected committee within their association; they worked similarly (on a smaller scale) to the later established Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Candidates were chosen and appointed. May, *Work of the Baptist Association*, 13.

[125]Brackney, *Baptists*, 74-75. For more insight regarding Carey's work, see Michael A. G. Haykin, *Ardent Love to Jesus: English Baptists and the Experience of Revival in the Long Eighteen Century* (Bridgend, Wales: Bryntirion Press, 2013).

[126]Torbet, *History of the Baptists*, 265. Brackney also makes this observation. Brackney, *Baptists*, 76. Chap. 3 further engages this point, revealing how the American Baptists advanced foreign missions in a manner similar to Carey.

Eventually, the Baptist Missionary Society was founded in the same city. Multiple entities of this kind spawned in the coming years. These organizations spread across the young American landscape.[127] Championing these efforts, one observer proclaimed, "The time has come for action and if we permit the present opportunity to pass away, we may never cease to regret it, nor our children to express their astonishment at our folly."[128]

This society model introduced a new type of Baptist organization in America.[129] These organizations differed from prior efforts because society models were sustained through individual gifts, independent from local churches and associations. In other words, anyone could unite around and contribute to a specific missionary cause.[130] As the eighteenth century came to a close, the growing Baptist denomination in America began to sense the need for a united and corporate missionary effort. This novel type of connection brought forth a new era for the Philadelphia Baptist Association, as well Baptists throughout America.[131]

In 1807, the PBA celebrated its centennial year. The prior year, Samuel Jones preached the associational sermon commemorating this milestone. The sermon reflects

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[127]The famed American Baptist Home Mission Society was a prime example of a single purpose–general society. It was founded during the 1832 Baptist Triennial Convention in New York City. Societies such as the New Hampshire Baptist Antislavery Society shed light as to the brutal treatment of slaves in South Carolina and other states. Auxiliary societies formed a network of interest, accountability, and support for the general societies. Between 1796 and 1890, Baptists in the United States created well over 100 voluntary single-purpose societies.

[128]Brackney, *Baptists*, 78. In light of this mindset, Brackney commentates, "Bolstered by their own post-Revolutionary success and energized by the Second Great Awakening, Baptists found the voluntary society well-suited for their ethos." Ibid.

[129]Ibid. Baptist volunteer societies consisted as four basic types: single-purpose–general, single purpose–local, single purpose–institutional, and auxiliary–regional.

[130]Brackney puts forth that the society model, to some extent, stemmed from a growing concern among churches of the increasing power of the associations. He points to the Southhampton Church (PA) which corresponded with the Philadelphia Association. The church stated, "Should an association forget her bounds and assume a power to do the business peculiar to the churches of Christ; this connection would be no longer desirable." Brackney, *Baptists*, 79. The question of authority regarding the society and convention model and their relation to association will be considered more fully in chap. 4 of this dissertation.

[131]By the early nineteenth century, societies represented most of the missionary efforts in America. Associations assisted them by collecting funds and recruiting missionaries, but the societies directed the operation. May, *Work of the Baptist Association*, 11.

the emerging missionary impetus among this Association and Baptists throughout America. For the sermon's Scripture text, Jones chose Isaiah 59:2-3: "Enlarge the place of thy tents, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left." After presenting this text, Jones explained its referent, implanting the gospel to the Gentiles. He then drew a more contextualized implication, by saying,

> But we are not to speak more particularly of the work of the Lord, and the spread of religion in our Society during the last century, and especially within the bounds of this Association: to show that there has been a fulfillment of the prophesy in the text among us.[132]

Jones then traced the establishment of this Association from an informal meeting of local churches as early as 1688, its official establishment in 1707, culminating as a burgeoning connection of Baptists in America. He also recounted influential ministers, referring to them as "the venerable fathers who were the instruments of propagating the gospel in these parts of the new world."[133] He mentioned that the original group of five churches extended to include 38. In addition, multiple associations had been formed throughout the young republic. Jones reflected, "Thus have we spread to the North and South, to the East and West, and have seen the text [Isa 59:2-3] abundantly verified among us. Doubtless it is the Lord's doings, and to him be all the glory."[134] Jones seems to recount the Association's history through the lens of outward missionary endeavors. Additionally, he mentioned recent growth in Virginia, Massachusetts, and New York.[135] Throughout the rest of the sermon, Jones continued to champion Baptist expansion. To conclude, he thanked God for progress.[136] In addition, he spurred Baptists to further action, by saying,

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[132]Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 454.

[133]Ibid., 455.

[134]Ibid., 457.

[135]Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 459.

[136]Ibid., 468.

"Such contemplation may be of advantage to us, not only for present satisfaction, but because it tends to call forth into exercise the best powers and faculties of the soul, and to excite to action the graces of the Spirit there implanted."[137] As illustrated, Jones' commemorative sermon reflected a singular focus on Baptist expansion throughout America during the eighteenth century.

## Conclusion

This chapter traces the interaction between the Philadelphia Baptist Association and its member churches during the first century of its existence. Given the influence and structure of this Association, it serves as a proper case study for Baptist connectivity in Early America.[138] This chapter argues that as a child of British Baptist and Reformed ancestry, the Philadelphia Baptist Association demonstrated a commitment to encourage doctrinal health and spiritual unity among Baptists within their local churches, between member churches and association, and among associations. Through this advice and mutual care, they attempted to preserve autonomy within each local congregation. As the denomination grew during the latter portion of the eighteenth century, additional concerns emerged among the Philadelphia Baptists, including educational ventures and missions. The next chapter will consider the following generation of the Philadelphia Association; it serves to contemplate the effect of growing denominational efforts and a rising emphasis beyond the local church.

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[137]Ibid.

[138]Observing Philadelphia's influence (confessional and procedural) on other like bodies supports this claim. Also, tracing Philadelphia's direct influence in establishing associations throughout the early American landscape, and their commitment to maintain correspondence and connection with them, proves significant as well.

# CHAPTER 3

# PROGRESSION OF BAPTIST ASSOCIATION IN AMERICA AS OBSERVED BY THE PHILADELPHIA BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

## Introduction

This chapter will describe the development of the Philadelphia Baptist Association during the nineteenth century; it seeks to illustrate a changing relationship between the Association and its member churches. The primary source material reveals the Association's disengagement from some central functions within the member churches. As the nineteenth century progressed, the Philadelphia Baptist Association mirrored Baptist churches, in general, by shifting its focus toward missionary and educational needs at the expense of one of its founding hallmarks. This outward focus received much of the Association's time and resources, and it overshadowed the once common interchange between the Association and its member churches regarding internal church matters. This outward shift began to define the nature of cooperation among Baptists in Philadelphia, as well as Southern Baptists in later generations. However, this shift was neither unprecedented nor unexpected, as Baptists seemed positioned toward this trajectory during the closing decades of the eighteenth century. This chapter substantiates this claim by tracing the Philadelphia Association annual meeting minutes, paying special attention to the frequency and tone of the Association's interaction with its member churches. In addition, the chapter will provide a contextual framework that situates the trajectory within broader American Baptist life by tracing the continued rise of denominational efforts and the fissure between Northern and Southern Baptists. The chapter will then trace the Philadelphia tradition's legacy among Baptists in the South;

Southern Baptists continued this trajectory following the establishment and development of the denomination.

## Setting the Context for this Era: Burgeoning American Baptists

As the nineteenth century transpired in the newly formed United States of America, changes abounded across the nation. Once a modest collection of British colonies, the United States burgeoned into a flourishing independent nation.[1] The Baptist congregational form of polity harmonized with the popular democratic sentiment of the new nation. Robert Torbet says, "In many respects the time was ripe for the successful spread of religious groups which were democratic in spirit and which made their appeal to the common people."[2] At the same time, America saw a trend toward the establishment of independent national church organizations.[3] This reality seemed a natural outgrowth of the separation of church and state. Because churches were voluntarily supported (rather than state-funded), they needed a central organization that could efficiently disseminate funds, particularly for missionary efforts. Furthermore, the evangelical enthusiasm produced from the Second Great Awakening combined with the newfound organizational efforts to yield a significant expansion within the vast new continent. By 1844 there were 720,046 Baptists in America, with 9,385 churches and 6,364 ministers. This expansion

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[1]Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1963), 262. Torbet adds that the structure of the new nation, more specifically the Constitution, included no religious test clause. Winthrop Hudson adds that one indispensable prerequisite to Baptist success was whole-hearted support of the American Revolution. Reciprocally, the Anglicans and Quakers suffered from a lack of such whole-hearted identification. This unpopular stance reduced their members, thus granting more favor for Baptists among those seeking liberty from the British crown. In essence, Baptists championed the same sentiments of the emerging nation, to their great benefit. Winthrop S. Hudson, "Baptists, the Pilgrim Fathers, and the American Revolution," in *Baptists and the American Experience*, ed. James E. Wood, Jr. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1976), 34-35.

[2]Torbet, *History of the Baptists*, 262.

[3]Torbet argues that this reality reflected the national consciousness of the young republic in the political sphere. Ibid., 263.

entailed a 360 percent increase in thirty years, which was more than double the United States population increase over the same period.[4]

## Continued Rise of Denominational Efforts: New Models for a New Era

Growing denominational efforts enacted a new era in Baptist volunteer activity. As the nineteenth century progressed, Baptists successfully organized outward missionary and educational endeavors.[5] By the turn of the new century, various societies were flourishing throughout the young nation. However, these societies existed as separate and isolated entities, claiming the attention of individual American Baptists. Officially, churches and associations stood as the broadest form of union. While some, like Morgan Edwards of Philadelphia, had encouraged a broader corporate Baptist union as early as 1770, nothing materialized.[6] This separation stemmed from competing ideological and ecclesiological mindsets within Baptist life. Baptists in the north, New England especially, believed any connection among Baptists should possess a singular purpose; individual financial contributions grounded connectional efforts. The New Englanders believed this concept best maintained local church autonomy. Any broader connections could threaten the consciences of local churches. This conviction led them to

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[4]Torbet offers a collection of factors that signaled Baptist growth in America. This formative period was characterized by "(1) A great missionary zeal; (2) a limited leadership, chiefly from such urban centers as Charleston, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston; (3) a strong appeal to the plain people of the agrarian areas through the zealous ministry of preacher and evangelists of limited training; (4) a missionary enthusiasm which led to local, state, and national organizations; (5) a dual interest in home and foreign missions; (6) a preference for denominational work; (7) an increasing concern for education; and (8) a vision for winning the West for Protestantism." Torbet, *History of the Baptists*, 271.

[5]In addition to missionary and educational societies, one society engaged in the publication and distribution of tracts, namely the Evangelical Tract Society. Raymond Hargus Taylor, "The Triennial Convention, 1814-1845: A Study in Baptist Co-Operation and Conflict" (ThD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1960), 33.

[6]Chap. 2 asserts this point, under "Relationship between Associations." Edwards envisioned a broad Baptist fellowship throughout the states, as outlined in his 1770 Plan of Union. Morgan Edwards, *Materials toward a History of the Baptists in Pennsylvania Both British and German*, vol. 1, *Materials Toward a History of the American Baptists* (1770; repr., Enid, OK: Regular Baptist Publishing, 1998), 124–25.

champion the society model. However, from Philadelphia southward, the associational brand of connectionalism was prominent. In the association, a union of churches who shared a common faith and order defined membership.[7] While these two models attempted efforts at compromise, this conceptual divide perpetually remained.

## Catalyst toward Greater Denominational Efforts

In the early 1810s, William Carey's ministry in India enthused Christians to establish foreign mission societies. He reminded Baptists of the need for missions to faraway corners of the earth. Following Carey, two unlikely Baptist missionaries rose to the forefront. These men further ignited Baptists toward mission efforts.

Luther Rice and Adoniram Judson grew up with little Baptist influence.[8] In fact, neither embraced Baptist theology until their first missionary voyage in 1812.[9] Letters of Judson's theological shift reached American soil in January of the following year. In March of 1813, Rice (a new Baptist advocate) returned to America from Calcutta anxious to orchestrate more extensive Baptist missionary participation. Rice's efforts yielded a meeting at the First Baptist Church of Philadelphia on May 18, 1814. Given Philadelphia's history and influence among American Baptists, it was an optimal

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[7]John Samuel Hammett, "Selected Parachurch Groups and Southern Baptists: An Ecclesiological Debate" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1991), 63.

[8]Luther Rice (1783-1836) traveled with Judson to Calcutta, India, where he became convinced of Baptist theology. Instead of traveling to Burma with Judson, he returned to the US and played a pivotal role in rallying Baptists to missions and establishing the General Missionary Convention (Triennial Convention) in 1814. Adoniram Judson (1788-1850) initially traveled to India with the support of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. He moved to Burma in 1813, with the support of the Baptist General Missionary Convention. In three years he learned the Burmese language and produced tracts and portions of Scripture for the mission effort. He developed the Burmese Bible in 1834 and devoted much of his life to translation efforts. William H. Brackney, *The Baptists* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 203–4; 249–50.

[9]Sources reveal that both Rice and Judson, previously non-Baptists, had studied anew the doctrine of believer's baptism on their missionary journeys in 1812. Observers believe they studied Baptist thought in order to offer a suitable defense against it when they arrived in India. Raymond Taylor notes that the fullest account of Judson's transition is found in letters written by Judson's wife, Ann, to her friends. Rice wrote to Thomas Baldwin in October of 1812, wherein he expressed his change of mind. Taylor notes that extracts of letters pertaining to both men were published in the Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine in March of 1813. Taylor, "Triennial Convention," 37.

location. Prominent South Carolina Baptist Richard Furman chaired the meeting; Thomas Baldwin served as the meeting's secretary. [10] Philadelphia pastor William Staughton offered another prominent voice during the proceedings.[11] All in all, thirty-three delegates from eleven states and the District of Columbia attended this inaugural event.[12] Robert Baker confirms this meeting's palpable momentum toward Baptist connection. He states,

> Perhaps no event has ever taken place among the Baptist denomination in America which has excited more lively interest, than the late missionary Convention held in the city of Philadelphia . . . . It was indeed no less novel than interesting to behold brethren who had hitherto been unknown to each other by face, collecting from north to south, from nearly all the States from Massachusetts to Georgia, for the important purpose of forming a General Convention, in order to concentrate the energies, and direct the efforts of the whole denomination throughout the United States, in sending the gospel to the Heathen.[13]

Following the proceedings, delegates tasked Furman, Baldwin, and Staughton to articulate the Baptist vision for missions that would be disseminated among churches nationwide.

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[10]Brackney, *Baptists*, 171. Richard Furman (1755-1825) was the pastor of First Baptist Church, Charleston, SC. He was a masterful orator and statesmen who made a number of tours throughout the American states on behalf of denominational involvement and organization. He heartily sympathized with the English Baptist Missionary movement and led the Charleston Association toward greater missionary involvement. He presided over the General Missionary Convention from 1814-1820. During the time of the General Missionary Convention's inception, Furman was considered the foremost Baptist in the United States. In addition to missionary endeavors, Furman also advocated for the development of a Baptist plan for higher education.

[11]Ibid., 264. William Staughton (1770-1829) was born in England and attended the prominent Bristol College in the line of Andrew Fuller and William Carey. Brackney labels him "the missing link in the continuity of Baptist organization in Britain to the US." He offered the idea of a comprehensive missionary organization in response to Judson and Rice's efforts. He was commissioned to relocate to the US when Furman requested assistance from his British Baptist brethren in 1793. He pastored First Baptist Church in Philadelphia beginning in 1806, and later pastored the Sansom Street Church in Philadelphia (1814).

[12]Ibid., 129-30. Thomas Baldwin (1753-1825) served as the pastor of Second Baptist Church, Boston. He was, perhaps, the most prolific Baptist author in 1814, also serving as the chief editor of *The Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine*.

[13]Robert Andrew Baker, *A Baptist Source Book, with Particular Reference to Southern Baptists* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1966), 62.

**Baptist General (Triennial) Convention**

The catalytic efforts of 1814 formed "The General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America." The name was later shortened to the General Missionary Convention. This triennial convention produced a board of twenty-one commissioners who possessed considerable responsibility. They employed missionaries, determining their mission field and compensation; the commissioners also supervised missionary conduct, possessing the power to dismiss them from their service if necessary. Additionally, the board crafted an annual publication to communicate the Convention's proceedings.[14] Striking a balance between the society model in the north and the church-based connection in the south, this group was neither a mere collection of individuals nor church representatives; the constituents consisted of delegates from each of the existing missionary societies as well as other religious bodies within Baptist life. In order to stave off the perception that the local congregation had been disenfranchised, Furman assured delegates that this development would maintain church independence. He argued that churches—which freely chose to associate—would now elect delegates from the associations. In addition, individuals who had joined local societies would also send delegates to the larger body.[15]

**Competing Ways Forward:**
**Centralization or Isolated Focus?**

Channeling the vision of Morgan Edwards, men like Furman, Staughton, Rice, and others believed the single-purpose convention would be a temporary fixture; Baptists needed to expand their centralized efforts. Furman believed the convention would grow to encompass, as he said, "The promotion of interests of the churches at home . . . and the

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[14]Baker, *Baptist Source Book*, 63. These items are taken from the Constitution of the General Missionary Convention.

[15]Ibid.

origination of educational societies and if possible . . . a general theological seminary."[16] Rapidly expanding its efforts, the General Convention extended its scope to include home missions. Between 1820 and 1825 domestic mission efforts, particularly Native American missions, became a central concern. The Convention employed at least thirty-six domestic missionaries during this period.[17]

In 1817, the Convention also prioritized education.[18] In concluding the initial convention proceedings, Staughton emphasized the need for "the improvement of the minds of pious youth who are called to gospel ministry."[19] He continued by asserting that the convention must "labor to help our young men by our contributions, by the origination of education Societies, and if possible, by a general theological seminary . . . which learning and mature studies can afford, to qualify for acting the part of men who are set for the defense of the gospel."[20]

The first decade of this convention saw a revival of the connectional mindset desired by forerunners in the Philadelphia tradition. Taylor believes, "It appeared as if the Baptists in the United States were on the threshold of unity in one great national organization, embracing all benevolent objects for which the denomination was showing increasing concern."[21] However, ideological differences yielded disagreement and dissention, illustrating ingrained ecclesiological differences among Baptists in America. Baptists in New England, who preferred the traditional society model, argued that this connectional trajectory would produce a contrived volunteerism.[22] Including education

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[16]Baker, *Baptist Source Book*, 65.

[17]Taylor, "Triennial Convention," 53.

[18]Taylor traces the trajectory of this convention in his 1960 dissertation. Ibid.

[19]Baker, *Baptist Source Book*, 65.

[20]Ibid., 65.

[21]Taylor, "Triennial Convention," 94.

[22]Ibid. Adding domestic missionary concerns to the Convention's purview departed from the society model's isolated preference, however it did not produce significant conflict because it maintained

within the Convention's purview signaled an overreaching trajectory. Chief detractor, Francis Wayland, complained,

> It is truly a violation of the independence of the churches, and the right to private judgment when several hundred brethren meet in some public convention, and manufacture public opinion, and adopt courses which their brethren are called upon to follow, on pain of the displeasure of the majority, as when they establish a formal representation, to whose decision all the constituency must submit.[23]

Wayland believed that each church or individual should possess the freedom to connect to these broader efforts as they saw fit. The centralized convention approach, he warned, would allow a select few to determine the trajectory of all churches, negating true independence. While Wayland saw the benefits of a broad Baptist connectionalism, the manner and pace by which the General Convention had broadened its scope placed local churches in a weak position.[24] In Wayland's mind, the General Convention needed strong state-level cooperation to bridge the regional (associations) and national levels. This tension among competing streams within Baptist life reversed the Convention's path. In 1826, the General Baptist Convention abruptly returned to a society-based model. Stemming from disunity, the young entity faced extreme financial difficulties by the mid-1820s. These setbacks yielded decentralization. In 1826, the General Convention disassociated itself from education and relocated its headquarters to Boston. This move signaled a return to the established societal model. In surveying Baptist connectionalism during the opening decades of the nineteenth century, Carol Crawford Holcomb aptly surmises the anticlimax that defined this era:

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the convention's essential missionary aim.

[23]Francis Wayland, *Notes on the Principles and Practices of Baptist Churches* (Boston: Sheldon, Blakeman and Co., 1857), 143.

[24]In 1824, Wayland described a system wherein the associations, state conventions, and a national entity unite to channel the energies and organization of Baptists. In these letters he also stood in favor of denominational education endeavors. Like many Baptists of his day, Wayland saw collecting resources and addressing outward concerns as the sole reason for connection beyond local churches. Baker, *Baptist Source Book*, 67–71.

> The passion for missions dragged American Baptists into the depths of denominational organization, perhaps before they were fully prepared to swim. The growing pains suffered by the Triennial Convention resulted from the frenetic pace of institutional development.[25]

Nonetheless, Holcomb argues, the Convention marked a pivotal turn for Baptists in America; she states, "It catapulted them from the rural margins of American religion into the mainstream of the 'Great Century' of world missions."[26]

**Emergence of State Conventions**

While expansion toward a multi-faceted national denominational structure proved unsuccessful during the early nineteenth century, Baptist leaders contrived a more modest proposal. Loyal denominationalist, Furman, and his South Carolina brethren sought to expand cooperation efforts to the state level. Furman and others within the Charleston Baptist Association called for delegates to meet in Columbia, South Carolina on December 4, 1821, to organize the South Carolina State Convention. According to Joe Madison King, this Convention's first constitution presented three primary objectives; not surprisingly, these were religious education, support of mission work, and the cultivation of unity among the churches.[27]

Brackney argues that the state conventions arose to fill a need that guaranteed their survival and contributed to their success. He states,

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[25]Michael Edward Williams, Walter B. Shurden, and Carol Crawford Holcomb, "Baptist Missions and the Turn toward Denominational Organizations: The Baptist Missionary Society and the Triennial Convention: 1792/1812," in *Turning Points in Baptist History: A Festschrift in Honor of Harry Leon McBeth*, ed. Leon McBeth, Michael E. Williams, and Walter B. Shurden (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008), 126. Holcomb also adds that these efforts yielded lasting consequences. In the ensuing years Baptists would struggle with consistency as they attempted to harmonize their need for a unified organization with their suspicion of hierarchy. Wayland also offered proposals for why the "great reversal" occurred: (1) concern that establishing Columbian College under the General Convention took away from the missionary focus; (2) disadvantages in having a few men managing several different organizations; (3) the familiar societal system was more efficient and expedient for the important objective at hand. It seems these reasons related to a rushed denominational establishment. Taylor, "Triennial Convention," 115–20.

[26]Williams, Shurden, and Holcomb, "Baptist Missions and the Turn toward Denominational Organizations," 126.

[27]Joe Madison King, *A History of South Carolina Baptists* (Columbia, SC: General Board of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, 1964), 173.

> If associations were limited in scope and territory, the state bodies broadened both. Also, where the national General Convention was perceived as distant, the state convention met annually and reflected the interests of a consistent and loyal body. Moreover, state conventions and associations cooperated in joint missionary and educational projects of heightened value to local churches.[28]

The state convention concept was well received throughout the American Baptist landscape, as others followed the South Carolinians' lead. The editors of *American Baptist Magazine and Missionary Intelligencer* in New England, a region that notably recoiled at the idea of large denominational structures, even pronounced,

> We cannot but remark, that our brethren in the South have in this as in many other cases, presented us with an example worthy of imitation . . . . That our denomination may have all the influence that we could desire, all that is needed is, a cordial co-operation with each other. Our Associations unite our churches; why should not a Convention unite our associations?[29]

In this matter, the editors concluded, "These considerations direct us to united, as well as vigorous exertions in the cause of God."[30] With rapid Baptist growth during the early 1800s, consensus action had proven difficult to attain. State conventions provided an intermediate entity between the association and the national organization that could better ensure united action. This stable foundation established greater communication between Baptist entities, as well as a better mechanism for denominational efforts.

In summary, the progression of Baptist cooperation during the first quarter of the nineteenth century reveals a transformation; this once modest sect of British settlers became a burgeoning denomination attempting to reach the corners of their expansive nation and enormous world. While fervor for missions nearly produced a national institution, the breakneck pace of expansion proved unfruitful. However, despite this setback, Baptists developed a sustainable denominational model that would serve them

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[28]Brackney, *Baptists*, 82.

[29]As cited in Baker, *Baptist Source Book*, 76–77. Within this article, the editor was also complimentary of other denominations that possessed state level connection. For the original source, see "Baptist State Convention of South Carolina," *American Baptist Magazine and Missionary Intelligencer*, January, 1821, 435.

[30]Baker, *Baptist Source Book*, 76–77.

well as they rose to meet a plethora of missionary, educational, and other benevolent efforts throughout the nineteenth century and beyond.

## Considering the Philadelphia Baptist Association

Philadelphia Baptist Association's trajectory mirrored broader denominational expansion. Baptists realized the need to unite to extend Christ's gospel to unreached people, both domestically and internationally. Additionally, American Baptists had realized their collective power to further Christianity within their expanding republic through educational, evangelistic, social causes, etc. The following section considers how these emerging emphases affected the Association's relationship with member churches. This section will consider areas in which the Association maintained the founding generation's posture, as well as differences that emerged during this era.

### In Step with its Tradition: Surveying Association Interaction Regarding Internal Church Matters

According to primary source material, the Philadelphia Association mirrors nineteenth-century Baptist denominational expansion. The following will survey material from the Philadelphia Association's second century of existence, pertaining to the Association's interaction regarding the internal matters of member churches. The material reveals some consistent treatments of these matters in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. While a shift occurred toward outward matters as the denomination expanded, readers should not lose sight of the obvious continuity with the previous era regarding church interaction.

Association minutes from the early nineteenth century reveal some direct interaction with internal church matters. For instance, akin to the previous era, the Association counted it their duty to guard member churches against imminent danger, preserving local church unity and health. The first case, referenced in 1817, involved an

impious minister named William White. He pastored Second Baptist Church, Philadelphia. The Association recorded the following,

> [White] is excluded from said church for contempt of the church and for refusing to meet certain charges brought against him. Reported, that they have reason to believe that said William White is continuing a career of unparalleled immorality, *which renders it the duty of the Association to caution the churches and the public against encouraging him* [emphasis added]. It is alleged on good authority, that the said William White is traveling with a woman whom he calls his wife, while his wife and family are now in Philadelphia.[31]

The Second Baptist Church summoned the Association to help them expose the sinfulness of their former pastor, in the hopes of warning and protecting other churches.

Also in 1817, the Association indicated tension between its body and First Baptist Church of Philadelphia.[32] Two years later, the Philadelphia Association penned a letter to sister associations detailing the origin of this conflict. As they described the ordeal, two issues emerged which had strained the relationship between the church and the Association. The initial conflict occurred in 1816, when FBC Philadelphia hosted an event, but objected to the Association's meeting procedure.[33] The Association honored the Domestic Mission Society by granting them the pulpit for the evening; furthermore, the Society requested donations to support ministry efforts. Unhappy with this arrangement, Henry Holcombe, pastor of the hosting congregation, blocked the nominated preacher from entering the pulpit. The Association reminded Holcombe that he had witnessed and affirmed this decision, which was made years prior. In spite of overwhelming opposition, FBC Philadelphia, led by Holcombe, singlehandedly disrupted the assembly's otherwise seemingly unified action. Sadly, the church continually refused to defer to an overwhelming majority, sowing further discord. To this end, Holcombe

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[31]Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Annual Meeting Minutes, 1817" (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Baptist Association, 1707-1938), 6, SBTS Special Collections Baptist Minutes, James P. Boyce Centennial Library, Louisville, KY.

[32]Ibid.

[33]Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1819, 7.

penned an inflammatory memorandum that accused the Association of unfair procedure and authoritarian usurpation; he doubted their doctrinal integrity.[34] The Association claimed, "The paper was filled with unfounded accusations and virulence."[35] A year later, Lewis Baldwin penned a rejoinder disputing Holcombe's explosive pamphlet. Baldwin assumed Holcombe's accusations toward the Association were "merely defensive measures against your very offensive proceedings, loudly indicated, that you came to traduce and insult them, rather than to effect a reconciliation."[36]

In the following year, the Association hoped the church would seek restoration. Instead, Holcombe remained obstinate. Following these disorderly actions, the body surmised to remove the disruptive church from its fellowship.[37] To summarize, the Association stated,

> It were to be supposed, without any investigation of the subject, the religious public would have no hesitation in determining that we were in the right, when it recollected on the one side there is but a single church, however respectable she may have been, and on the other side no less than twenty-five churches, as respectable for their piety and soundness in the faith, as she who, after allowing her two years to reconsider, united in the act of excluding her from the body.[38]

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[34]First Baptist Church (Philadelphia). *A Statement by the First Baptist Church of Philadelphia Exhibiting the Grounds on which She Withdrew from the Philadelphia Baptist Association* (Philadelphia: M. Carey and Son, 1818), 25. Holcombe believed the Association silenced him unjustly. The Association responded by comparing the situation to limiting the comments of a church member who is the sole vote and does not represent the heart and vision of the body. Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1819, 13. Tom Nettles offers a helpful discussion of this letter and the interaction between Holcombe, Baldwin, and the Association. Thomas J. Nettles, "William Staughton," in *A Noble Company: Biographical Essays on Notable Particular-Regular Baptists in America*, ed. Terry Wolever (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2016), 7:85–140.

[35]Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1819, 13.

[36]Lewis Baldwin, *A Candid Development of Facts, tending to exhibit the real Grounds of Difference Existing between the First Baptist Church of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Association; also, between the Baptist Board of Foreign Mission and their Late Vice-Presidents in Letters to Henry Holcombe, D. D. William Rogers, D. D. of Philadelphia, and the Reverend Daniel Dodge* (Philadelphia: Anderson and Meehan, 1819), 51.

[37]Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1819, 16.

[38]Ibid.

Regardless of this church's regional prominence, the Association refused to allow a disgruntled and misguided faction to undercut its unity.[39]

Throughout this ordeal, FBC Philadelphia postured itself a champion for church independence in the midst of perceived organizational overreach. While unfounded, these strident accusations provided the Association an opportunity to reassess the nature of its relationship with member churches. Regarding church independence and associational membership, the PBA asserted,

> We now solemnly aver, that we are firm advocates for the independence of churches . . . and in this transaction we have neither abridged, nor sought to abridge hers. We do not deny her independence as a church—do not interfere with her internal concerns—and claim no authority over her in these respects. On the contrary, it was the endeavor of this Association to preserve the independence of one of her churches, that gave rise to these unhappy differences with the First Baptist Church in Philadelphia. It is universally understood, and obvious to common sense, that every associational body is constituted of distinct members, either of other bodies by their delegates or of individuals: that such an association must have laws and rules to govern them, and preserve order; and that when any one constituent part will not submit to these regulations, but become disorderly, and persist in their violation, that body does possess the right and has the power to eject such member, and refuse it a seat amongst them. This was precisely the conduct of this association toward the church in question.[40]

The Philadelphia Association quested to balance individual churches' self-governance and the ingrained power of an association to monitor and protect its membership. The Association's response also reveals a desire for ecclesial unity in faith and practice among member churches. They said,

> Though we do not attempt here to animadvert upon, or expose the many misrepresentations contained in this pamphlet alluded to . . . yet we feel incumbent to say that, notwithstanding the boast of that church for antiquity and purity of doctrine, we as an association, stand, in point of time, the first on the continent; and we now appeal to you all, whether in our predecessors, or in our own capacity, we have ever acted on such a vain and unwarrantable ground—and we deserve the censure cast upon us, for dereliction in doctrine, discipline, or morals . . . . From the disaffection of this one church, many have been led to suppose that the Baptist

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[39]Nettles elucidates that associational leader Staughton conducted himself with utmost respect and affection, despite Holcombe's demeaning accusations. Nettles credits Staughton's posture as a catalyst in maintaining unity among member churches. Nettles, "William Staughton," 120-21.

[40]Ibid.

> churches, particularly in the city of Philadelphia, are divided among themselves: we would wish to correct that error, by assuring our brethren that the utmost harmony prevails amongst them, with the exception of the First Church, which stands by itself.[41]

This unfortunate ordeal revealed that unity among member churches remained a hallmark concern for the Philadelphia Association. The Association refused to allow a troubled church neither disrupt their cohesion nor prevent them from serving the needs of member churches and furthering Christian causes in America and abroad.

Eight years following this lengthy exchange, in 1826, a unique situation emerged, in which several brethren applied for admission to the Association under the name "First Baptist Church in Philadelphia." This contingent withdrew from the church long known by that name due to a perceived departure from important principles contained in the 1749 Philadelphia Confession of Faith, which the original church had adopted upon its establishment. The Association commended the group's doctrinal fidelity and sympathized with their actions.[42] The Association recommended that each group choose six judicious representatives, along with one neutral party, to communicate their respective differences and grievances. Remaining as one united congregation, the Association urged, should be the chief aim of their efforts. If resolution proved impossible, then they should acknowledge each other as independent Baptist churches, "mutually dismissing and receiving members, in the manner common among Churches of our denomination."[43] This interchange illustrated the Association's long-standing commitment to church unity and health, coupled with a willingness to provide

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[41]Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1819, 17.

[42]In response to the group's exit, the original church passed a resolution re-affirming the Confession of Faith. These actions did not seem to satisfy the displaced members, as they believed the pastor's actions were not genuine. This re-affirmation, they insisted, must also define the preaching and other aspects of the church. Following this presentation, the Association offered the following, "We do not feel at liberty to pursue a course, which would imply that we disbelieve the sincerity of these acts in reference to this subject." Ibid., 13.

[43]Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes" 1834, 7. The Association also provided insight regarding property, reminding the two factions that whoever kept the property should provide equitable consideration for the other.

accountability and advice. The Association welcomed the former members without reservation. Affirming church unity, the Association longed for the historic church to remain a doctrinally sound and united body, regardless of past interaction. The Association also realized the possibility that the fissure between this faction and their local church may be beyond repair. In this case, the Association offered to support the First Baptist Church of Philadelphia, and perhaps a new congregation, regardless of the outcome.

In that same year, 1826, a question arose from the Church at Montgomery regarding membership matters. They asked if it would be advisable for the Association, in cases of membership transfer, to write to a church in order to confirm that a member had been received. The Association replied,

> This Association earnestly recommends to the churches composing this body, to make it their invariable practice, to transmit returns of the reception of persons by letter, to the churches by which they are dismissed. The same is also affectionately recommended to the churches of other associations . . . . It is, moreover, the opinion of this Association, the members received upon letters of dismissal, should regard it as their duty to see that such returns be made.[44]

While a seemingly non-descript response, these words illustrate another long-standing associational principle: the authority and centrality of the local congregation. While the Association valued and encouraged proper communication regarding the transfer of church members, they believed this responsibility fell to the churches, as churches should govern their own affairs.

In 1834, Second Baptist Church sought council from the assembly. They inquired, “When the ministry becomes corrupt, that is contrary to the sentiments and practice adopted at the constitution, when do obligations cease?” In other words, at what point should members consider removing themselves from fellowship? In response, the Association compiled a committee of delegates in order to hear the messengers’ concerns

[44]Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes" 1834, 7.

and council them toward proper action.[45]

Direct interaction between the Association and member churches became scarcer as the nineteenth century progressed. However, readers observe some later examples akin to the previous era.[46] Herein, the Association sought to preserve the unity of the member churches. For instance, in 1841, the Chestnut Hill Church approached the Association to air their grievances within the assembly. The associational body sensed an unhealthy tone in these proceedings and, after examining the case, determined to remove it from consideration. They replied,

> Any particular act by which the church may have supposed itself aggrieved, and examine the question in its general bearing on the interests of Zion, and the peace and harmony of this Association, in particular. The directions left by our blessed Master are so clear and direct, that the way-fairing man many err therein, unless, enticed of his corrupt nature, the law of love is sufficient, it in exercise, not only to preserve the integrity of the Churches, but that harmonious action, constant effort, and enlightened zeal, which becometh those who own one Lord, one faith, and one baptism.[47]

Another example occurred in 1842, when the Spruce Street Church presented the following resolution pertaining to protecting the integrity of pastoral ordination:

> Resolved: That it be recommended to the several churches in union with this body, to incorporate in their discipline, the following regulations: In all cases of licensing and ordaining ministers, and of constituting new churches, several neighboring churches shall be requested to appoint two or more delegates, who shall constitute a Council of advice and assistance. The Philadelphia Baptist Association, shall

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[45]Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes" 1834, 7.

[46]In addition to this example, readers observe some similar occurrences. For instance, in 1834, the Association suspended connection with North Seventh Street Church in Philadelphia because they called a pastor who was excluded from a church within the Association and was previously denied a seat within the associational meeting. The pastor assumed that because he was now pastor of the new church that he would be re-admitted to the associational body. While this example does not deal directly with the internal matters of a member church, it reveals a direct interaction with the Association, and an effort to maintain unity within the assembly. Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1834, 7. Furthermore, in 1839, the Association received communication from the Moyamensing Church and the Union African Church requesting council. In response, the Association referred this letter to a committee of brethren from member churches to offer preaching supply. In later years, readers observe similar examples. For instance, in 1859, the Association received a query from the Marcus Hook Church; no details were given except that the Association recommended a church council. Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1859, 20. An identical case happened in 1861. Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1861, 15.

[47]Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1841, 10–11.

> annually appoint five Ministering brethren, who shall be invited to attend on such occasions, and compose part of said Council.[48]

Echoing the plea from the previous year's call to churches, the Spruce Street Church expressed a similar concern to maintain strong theological leadership within member churches. The Association unanimously adopted the resolution. Channeling the concerns of the founding members of the Philadelphia body, the Association sought to protect the theological fidelity of member churches by soliciting aid from the collective wisdom of elders and church leaders among member churches.[49]

As illustrated, primary source material reveals direct interaction between the Association and member churches. The Association maintained its commitment to local church independence, while they also willingly aided churches that requested their assistance. Compared to the previous generation, direct church interaction became less prominent within the Association's annual meeting. As the next section illustrates, this scarcity did not insinuate that the Association no longer promoted church unity or doctrinal fidelity. This era's material reveals a general call for churches to cling to their founding concerns.

## Philadelphia Association Examines its History: A Call to Embrace its Heritage

One benefit of tracing the trajectory of an organization with a long history is being able to observe self-reflection from its members. Such is the case with the Philadelphia Association. In 1828, the PBA re-published its famous work, "Essay on the Power and Duty of Associations," originally penned eighty years earlier.[50] As seen in the

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[48]Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1842, 17. In the 1838 minutes, readers observe a similar resolution. Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1838, 21. In their discussions, they balanced this proposal with the independence of each local congregation.

[49]Similar to the queries of previous years, in 1859, the church at Lower Merion requested guidance pertaining to water baptism. They asked the assembly if baptism should be examined before the church or a mixed assembly. Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1859, 20.

[50]This exchange does not pertain to the internal matters of a particular church, but directly portrays the Association's relationship to the churches within their membership. Also, given the shift in associational focus, this material represents core material from this era that reflects interaction regarding

previous generation, this essay served a foundational purpose for discerning the Association's appropriate power and limitations. Moderator Thomas Kitts offered high praise for the original work and its framers. In addition to commemorating the work's anniversary, Kitts exhorted the churches' delegates to maintain continuity with their ancestors. Like the generation before him, Kitts recalled the Association's desire "to prevent any future generation from claiming more power then they ought: lording it over God's heritage."[51] After mentioning the expansive growth of associationalism in America he recounted its relationship with member churches:

> It must distinctly be seen that every association originates in the voluntary confederation of the churches themselves. No more constraint is employed in their construction, than in the reception of a baptized believer into a particular church; and though, after such union is formed, certain rules of conduct, and spheres of duty, and claims of relationship, are necessarily implied; the churches, as the election of delegates is annual, have it in their power to keep from the body, any man or men, whom they may suspect of being lover of pre-eminence, and send in their place, persons whom they better approve.[52]

Kitts echoed the ecclesial conception of the Association's founders. As Baptists communicated in the original Philadelphia Confession (borrowed from the Second London Confession), redeemed individuals unite to form local churches. These churches form the foundation of any association's effort. Each church controls who represents them before the assembly; this reality seats authority within the local church. Thus, the association stands only as strong as its member churches.

Upon defending the nature of their fellowship, Kitts reminded the delegates that this confession bound their fellowship still. The Association upheld the confession in this document, thus its words demanded attention. Kitts bemoaned the lack of accountability shown by many absent member churches. These churches had severed

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internal church matters. Also, the Association's renewal of one of its core documents is an effective way to trace the Association's trajectory.

[51]Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1828, 9.

[52]Ibid., 8.

fellowship without any complaint or communication. Kitts conceded the fact that the Association's vast expansion had yielded some disagreement on the particular points of judgment and council. However, he asserted, "A resolute separation from an associational body, is as inconsistent with the duty of any of its parts, as it is of the body itself, to permit such an act without regarding and treating it in the light which the original principles of the confederacy require."[53] Finally, Kitts called for these absent churches to reconsider their actions and embrace a posture of unity and accountability. He said,

> We do most sincerely hope that our dear brethren, who have seceded from us, will review their conduct in the spirit of the gospel, and under the influence of the precept and example of our loved Lord Jesus. We shall be happy to bury the recollections of the past . . . and exchange as heretofore, the hand of holy and glowing fellowship.[54]

Two particular aspects emerge which bind this conception to the previous generation's view of the relationship between churches and the association.[55] First, Kitts reflected a posture of accountability that existed during the first generation. Kitts expected churches to promote mutual council and care in order to ensure healthy congregations. If the Association was founded with an expectation to "set the churches in order," then churches must desire vibrant fellowship. Absent and unreceptive churches disrupted this foundational aspect of their existence. Second, readers observe accountability toward established confessional statements. Identifying with the previous generation, Kitts reminded the delegates that these documents were not merely intended for historical observation or appreciation; they were integral to the Association's practice. Kitts also displayed a strong desire for unity among member churches. Not only did he call the absent churches to reunite with the Association, he encouraged member churches to welcome them back with care and compassion, assuming they complied with the

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[53]Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1828, 10.

[54]Ibid.

[55]Kibbs' presentation may not represent the sole views during this era; however as the moderator of the Association, his view is represented in the available published material.

Association's doctrine. Viewing the association as a vibrant collection of healthy churches entails a mutual desire for each other's welfare. Thus, this 1828 publication echoed the previous generation's concern for the health and welfare of member churches. Kitts' instruction signaled an attempt to retrieve the partnership that promoted healthy independent and well-connected local churches.

In 1841, a circular letter was published that captured a deep concern for church health and doctrine. Similar to the 1828 account, this letter harkened back to the Association's heritage. The writer described one of the Association's founding concerns: "It is evident from their proceedings that they diligently aimed to effect in the churches under their care what Titus was instructed by Paul to perform in the Churches of Crete, namely, 'To set things in order the things that were wanting,' or to establish a strict conformity in faith and practice."[56] Relating the content to his present context, the author stated,

> To this subject dear brethren, we call your serious attention in this letter. Numerous churches have been added recently to this Association, and we have all rejoiced in the increase of converts, and in the prevalence of our sentiments as a denomination. But amidst our joy, is it not wise to pause and inquire whether all things are as they should be, or whether some things ought not to be set in order in the churches?[57]

The author proposed eight concerns that appeared to be wanting within the member churches. First, he called for a consistent piety among member churches. The author celebrated the Baptists' commitment to reaching sinners with the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, he cautioned,

> But is the Church were it should be . . . . If sinners are converted by our means, they will be influenced by our example, they will become like unto us; therefore, what we desire sinners to become we ought first to manifest in all things, day by day . . . . They have proof of our zeal abroad, for their conversion; were they now to visit us would they have equal proof of our piety at home?[58]

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[56]Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1841, 3.

[57]Ibid., 3-4.

[58]Ibid., 4.

Poignantly, the author indicated the futility of missionary zeal without a pious heart toward God.

Secondly, he observed that the exercise of discipline waned among member churches. Churches, he feared, had replaced a burden for their members' spiritual care in favor of a spirit of reckless independence. He lamented, "Church members do what is right in their own eyes, and the church makes but little account of what is done, right or wrong."[59] Members had neglected basic aspects of church life, namely, participating in the Lord's Supper and even consistently gathering for weekly worship. To this point, he noted, "Members are absent months, and even years, without being sought after, and go places of amusement, become offended, remain unreconciled, and discipline is dormant. Surely these things need to be set in order."[60]

Thirdly, he observed that little uniformity existed in forming new churches. He upheld church independence and self-governance; neither civil nor ecclesiastical authority could dictate or control the local body. However, the author observed in the New Testament that the first churches acted in concert and respected each other's judgment and perspective. He continued,

> It is the general opinion, and it seems reasonable, that in constituting a new church in the bounds of churches corresponding in sentiment and practice, that from these, brethren should be respectfully invited to attend and sit in council with the constituents in a measure of so much importance and mutual interest, and that the union of the constituents should be publicly recognized by appropriate religious services—thus shall confusion be prevented, and then all the churches walking by the same rule, this thing will be set in order.[61]

To set the churches in order, then, involved a balanced understanding of church independence coupled with a robust communication with and consideration for other local brethren. Heeding the call of generations past, this letter's tone parallels the

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[59]Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1841, 4.

[60]Ibid.

[61]Ibid, 4-5.

sentiment found within the famous 1749 essay written by associational statesmen Benjamin Griffith, as well as Kitts' words a little over a decade prior.

The letter also called for a more careful procedure for clerical ordination among member churches. The author indicated that often these important acts were performed in haste, yielding dreadful results. Improper motives, nepotism, and the like had elevated unqualified men into pastoral leadership. Seeking to reveal the regularity and breadth of this problem, the author reminded the delegates that the same subject was brought before the annual meeting thirteen years earlier. However, he reminded, "When a plan prepared by a committee was agreed upon, which it was believed would supply what was wanting, but a few of the churches dissenting, it was rescinded the following year."[62] The author implored the delegates to take action: "To restrain the evils arising from this source, and to promote harmony, it is very important that some general rule be acted upon, or if that cannot be, let each church and each minister more deeply feel that need of caution in a matter so important."[63] His fifth point, also related to pastors, addressed the frequent removal of ministers. The author pondered who stood as the most common offender, the pastor or the congregation. Regardless, he implored churches to appreciate their pastor through proper financial support and encouragement; in concert, he exhorted pastors to cultivate a deep commitment to their local body.[64]

Furthermore, he observed theological erosion within local churches. He reminded that preaching within member churches once emphasized the sovereignty of God, the covenant of grace, and a proper exposition of the person, nature, and offices of Christ. In describing his current context, he lamented,

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[62]Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1841, 5.

[63]Ibid.

[64]Ibid., 6.

> The churches now are blessed with a pious and zealous ministry, and the preaching generally is well adapted to arouse, convict, and convert, but probably not so well adapted to edify and instruct. Many sermons produce considerable emotion in the hearers and are regarded as splendid sermons, would perhaps be improved by partaking a little more of those precious truths which were dear to our fathers and which we profess sacredly to believe.[65]

With these words, the author tactfully addressed the tendency toward theologically shallow preaching. This style clashed with the doctrinal depth that characterized the previous generation. To this point, the author also mentioned a growing indifference toward the Association's confession of faith. He stated,

> Some, indeed, say they want no article of faith, that the Bible is their confession of faith. True, the Bible is the standard, and the only infallible standard; but what articles of faith, or great principles does it contain. The Universalist, the Campbellite, the Mormon, and all others that err from the truth say: 'Away with your creeds.'[66]

In response, the author implored churches to consider retrieving the concise theological statements that united Baptists of old with the orthodox Christian tradition for many generations.

Finally, to set churches in order, the author implored his hearers to renew benevolence and liberality. He cited the ancient church at Jerusalem, wherein "no man said aught that he had anything that was his own."[67] The primitive churches manifested this spirit, as church members made their possessions common to each other. At first consideration, one may assume that this deficiency in the member churches was due to the many Baptist missions and benevolence efforts. Philadelphia stood at the center of many of these societies and causes. However, it seems the author was proposing a different type of benevolence; rather than outward facing denominational programs, he advocated for a turn toward renewing vibrant connections and deep care between sister congregations.[68]

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[65]Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1841, 6.

[66]Ibid.

[67]Ibid.

[68]Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1841, 7.

This primary material reveals that the Philadelphia Baptist Association shared continuity with the ecclesial interchange found in the previous era. Compared to the previous era, however, interaction pertaining to internal church matters was less frequent. Nevertheless, readers observe the association's commitment to local church unity and a call for churches to maintain doctrinal fidelity; they also held fast to local church independence within the connectional framework.

### "A Shell of Itself": Death of Church Interaction in the Mid- to Late-Nineteenth Century

In the mid-nineteenth century, readers observe a transition in the Association's interaction with churches. As the Baptist denomination grew within the American landscape, the Philadelphia Association meeting minutes reflect less church material akin to the previous generation. [69] Two characteristics illustrate this transition. First, church queries became less frequent and offered less detail. During the first generation of the Philadelphia Association, church queries garnered a significant share of time and energy from the annual assembly. Most years, the minutes contained multiple queries; wherein churches invited the associational assembly to offer input regarding internal ecclesial matters. Furthermore, these queries offered contextual insight; they allowed the assembly to conceive a fuller perspective toward member churches' needs and requests.[70] As the nineteenth century unfolded, fewer queries appeared in the annual meeting records. For

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[69]One subtle indication of a transition in the Association's posture toward church participation occurred in 1831. A delegate presented the following resolution calling for a revision of the Association's bylaws: "Resolved, That the rule requiring 'that a Church not communicating with this body for two years, be stricken off,' be suspended till some future order shall be taken upon it." However, the Association did not readdress the issue. This motion reflects lowered concern for maintaining connection between churches. Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1831, 10.

[70]Throughout the first generation of the PBA, multiple requests occurred nearly every year. Furthermore, the Association's response often yielded a lengthy exchange—200-500 word responses in some cases. A. D. Gillette, ed., *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, 1707 to 1807: Being the First One Hundred Years of Its Existence* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2002). This point is important considering that the Association contained far fewer churches during the founding generation than the ones that followed.

instance, from 1828-1850, the minutes contained no more than two church queries per year. Often no queries appeared for two or three years.[71] Additionally, the Association routinely offered little detail regarding these requests. In certain cases, the Association appointed councils to aid churches without providing information to the assembly.[72]

Second, as a corollary, pre-composed church letters became a primary window into the life of member churches. Missing from this presentation was a church's direct interaction with the association of churches.[73] An excerpt from a letter penned in 1833 by the Church at Southampton provides an example of a typical church letter within the annual meeting minutes: "In her letter expresses 'gratitude to God's continued favor as a church—they have had several additions by baptism during the year' and 'the brethren are actuated by the spirit of Christ and love one another, which preserves peace and fellowship.'"[74] Given the indicative content, these words offer little opportunity for associational input and discussion. Church interaction, once presented with an "open-hand" of fellowship, became predominately a sealed letter of statement.[75]

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[71]Readers observe no requests in 1832, 1837, 1839-1845, 1858-1860. Readers also notice a similar gap from 1864-1867, and 1869-1871.

[72]Between 1830 and 1860, readers observe this tendency on multiple occasions (specifically, 1829, 1831, 1833, 1846 and 1861). This is noteworthy because they represent a departure from the traditional protocol.

[73]To clarify, presenting church letters was not a new occurrence within the Association's proceedings. In many cases, delegates would read letters sent from their churches. Also, some churches would send a letter in absentia for the delegates to recite during the meeting.

[74]Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1838, 7. Many other churches penned letters in the same vein. Some letters, including a letter from the New Britain Church, were self-criticizing. In 1834, they wrote, "Notwithstanding the lukewarmness and inactivity of the members of this church, their congregations are large, solemn and attentive; and they trust there is some slight evidence of a shaking among the dry bones." Ibid. Many of these letters call for and celebrate doctrinal purity and reform as they inform the Association regarding the life of the church.

[75]Though fully answering why this change occurred sits beyond the scope of this chapter's argument, it seems apparent that increased outward focus, on missions and education, eventually encroached on church interaction.

Continuing a trajectory toward decreasing interaction concerning church matters, delegates petitioned to minimize church letters in 1860. The Montgomery Church petitioned,

> Would it not save much precious time, and dispense with an onerous formality, without diminishing the interest of associational anniversaries, if when churches have nothing of general interest to communicate, they be relieved from the necessity of preparing letters, and be merely required to supply the clerk with statistics to be inserted in the minutes?[76]

While the Montgomery Church sought to promote order and bring organization to the annual meeting, their request would further minimize church involvement. In the years following, many churches echoed this sentiment.[77]

## Outward Concerns Rise to the Forefront

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Philadelphia Baptist Association annual meeting content became more outwardly focused. [78] These initiatives demanded much of the Association's time and energy. The 1826 minutes capture this shift, which would define the Philadelphia Baptist Association for years to come. Noah Davis from the Baptist General Tract Society urged churches within the Philadelphia Association to form auxiliary societies in order to establish new methods of disseminating gospel truth, giving it "the attention and aid which it deserves."[79] Given Philadelphia's influence within the denomination, it proved to be a pivotal platform for communicating rising denominational efforts.[80] Following, the 1840 annual meeting minutes revealed the

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[76]Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1860, 19.

[77]While several churches neglected to send letters, many churches still provided these letters. However, the Montgomery Church motion and the resulting effect illustrate additional separation between the Association and the member churches.

[78]To maintain continuity with the previous chapter, it should be noted that the Association sent and received yearly corresponding letters from sister associations. These letters reflected the happenings within the associations and their respective dealings with mission organizations and the like.

[79]Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1826, 8.

[80]The annual meeting minutes reveal this building transition. In 1832, a resolution was adopted to take up a contribution for missionary purposes at the end of the every evening during the annual meeting session. In 1833, the Association began to include a "Mission Business Report," wherein they detailed the

Association's involvement with additional organizations, including the Domestic and Foreign Mission Boards, and the newly formed Sunday School Board. This trend continued throughout the following years as additional denominational activity rose to the forefront.[81]

Within many assemblies, delegates propose resolutions intended to steer the assembly's direction.[82] These resolutions reveal the preferences of the members who proposed them. Tracing every resolution proposed to the PBA from 1830 until 1850 confirms the Association's shift toward outward denominational concerns. In fact, during this twenty year span the annual meeting minutes contain 121 resolutions aimed toward denominational expansion, garnering support for these efforts. During the same period, a mere twenty-five resolutions sought to promote local church health and stability; none were present following 1846.[83] The 1853 annual meeting minutes portray the Association as committed to gathering pious and gifted workers to enter the mission field, both nationally and globally. One delegate offered,

> As the oldest Association in the union and the largest in our state, it is right that we should be foremost in every good word and work. And we verily believe the great work now before us, in common with Pennsylvania Baptists, is to provide for the destitute within our borders a pure Gospel and to raise up an efficient ministry.[84]

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financial status of missionary operations across the country and abroad. Considering the presented resolutions, twelve of fifteen in 1839 and all of the resolutions in 1840 dealt directly with missions and educational desires. Predominately, these resolutions considered the expansion of the Home Mission Board and children's education endeavors. Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1839, 12-15; 1840, 16-19.

[81]From 1829 to 1853, annual meeting minutes deal predominately with denominational activity; every year during that era at least fifty percent of the resolutions related to denominational issues. In most years, however, the majority of the content was overwhelmingly tied to denominational activities.

[82]Because very few direct church queries exist from the 1830s-1850s, resolutions will illustrate the Association's shift with the material present during the era.

[83]Church queries remained less prominent throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, meaning there was no change in the trajectory. However, church queries were not absent as the century progressed.

[84]Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1853, 11.

The emerging impetus toward denominational expansion had reached a crescendo for Baptists in Philadelphia. As a prominent and founding Baptist entity, the PBA considered it their duty to promote the rising benevolence and missionary needs throughout their growing nation.[85]

**PBA Again Reflects on its History**

In 1857, the Philadelphia Baptist Association celebrated 150 years of existence. This and other significant milestones afforded the PBA multiple opportunities to commemorate their history and look toward the future. During the associational meeting that year Benjamin Griffith delivered a sermon entitled, "Duties of the Churches Respecting the Future."[86] Within this presentation, Griffith appreciated the Association's rich history and put forth a vision for the future. At the onset of the sermon, Griffith commemorated the labor of his forefathers. He then focused on the Association's denominational efforts, which had yielded a plethora of institutional structures, like mission agencies and educational endeavors.[87] Griffith's presentation illustrates a shift in the Association's self-identity and a vision for the future of American Baptist connectionalism.

Griffith described the Association's "field," offering a familiar farming

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[85]Outside Philadelphia, the Charleston Baptist Association in South Carolina offers a similar trajectory. The annual meeting minutes from 1828-1871 reveal a declining trend in church queries. For instance, 1828 through the 1835 meetings offered from one to three requests a year. In the following decades these become less frequent. By 1871, church queries were even rarer. Charleston Baptist Association, *Annual Meeting Minutes* (Charleston, SC: Charleston Baptist Association, 1817). Closer to Philadelphia, East Association in New Jersey drew up a "Plan of Association Action," proclaiming that this Association hold itself to be "distinctly a missionary body." These minutes are unpublished and were retrieved from the following source: Winthrop Hudson, "Documents on the Association of Churches," in *Baptists, the Bible, Church Order and the Churches: Essays from Foundations, a Baptist Journal of History and Theology*, ed. Edwin S. Gaustad (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 331.

[86]It should be noted that he is not related to the prominent associational leader from the previous century who shares his name. Terry Wolever, e-mail to author, November 4, 2016. Wolever is a reputable historian on Particular Baptists in the Mid-Atlantic region.

[87]His introduction reveals a narrow treatment of the Association's history. While it is legitimate to argue that other aspects of the Association's history are outside the purview of his presentation, the point stands that Griffith reveals his primary concerns and duties for the churches of the Association. Self-reflective material serves well the purpose of comparing one era to another.

metaphor that Jesus used to highlight the many peoples who would need his gospel. Focusing on his young nation, Griffith emphasized the rapid growth of America's prominent cities and, therefore, the evangelistic effect Baptists could have on the expanding nation. This growth and potential necessitated the need for a vibrant mission effort. Griffith stated, "The great duty of the churches composing this body is to do their full portion toward the complete cultivation of this field."[88] After he stated the goal, he set forth to explain how the churches could accomplish the mission. Like a good Baptist preacher, Griffith offered three steps churches should take to accomplish this goal, revealing his outward focus, as each step toward this goal signaled an outward facing posture. In other words, Griffith gave primacy to the missionary call for Baptists in America. What follows will consider each aspect of this commemoration sermon.

First, Griffith implored the churches to increase their purity and power by exercising spiritual disciplines. He lamented, "The churches are morally weak . . . . The speedy separation of these, however painful, is an imperative necessity." Churches lacked careful consideration in receiving members. Griffith reminded the delegates, "How slow and careful, therefore, should we be in deciding upon the reality of conversion; especially as the salvation of the candidate and the purity of the church are involved in the decision."[89] Furthermore, churches had neglected proper congregational training following membership inception. He passionately stated,

> Means must be employed by the churches which will cause the germs of Christian character to expand and mature, until their recipients shall cease to be children, and attain to the full stature and acquire the full strength, stability, and firmness of perfect men of Christ . . . . When this is done, when the churches in their membership shall have come up to this measure of sanctification demanded alike by the voice of scripture, and the condition of the dying world when they thus clothe themselves in the robes of righteousness, and become luminous with the light of

[88]Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1857, 60.

[89]Ibid., 62. In addition, Griffith noted that due to their regenerate model of church membership, they had the advantage of being "the purest churches of all the churches of Christ."

> heaven, and charged with the moral forces of holiness, then will they be prepared to go forth over this field conquering, and to conquer.[90]

Griffith's aim was clear. Twice within this portion Griffith mentioned "efficiency" in relation to the call for holiness. For instance, as Griffith called for churches to pursue congregational purity, he added, "We can never be efficient without it."[91] Following, he offered a military metaphor to illustrate his point. Essentially, he posited, without healthy soldiers no war is won. In the same vein, a spiritually stagnant or decaying congregation cannot effectively fight its cosmic enemy. Later in the section, Griffith reiterated this concern regarding a spiritually weak membership by saying, "Now, it is clear that such members, however numerous, can contribute no part of the efficiency requisite for the work before us."[92] Again, he drew the connection between moral purity and its contribution to efficiency for the task. In addition to efficiency, Griffith extended his spiritual warfare theme. Church members must acquire full strength and stability in order to conquer the enemy and reach the "field" for Christ. These aims further reveal Griffith's outward emphasis: spiritual strength cultivated spiritually-equipped soldiers who could reach those outside the church.

The second means by which the associational churches could properly engage this "field" involved cultivating greater denominational unity. Griffith suggested, "If we would discharge our duties to the future, we must become more true to our principles and to one another. Denominational sympathy such as will make us a band of brothers, of one heart, standing by and working for and with each other to advance the Redeemer's Kingdom."[93] Griffith's desire reflected his outward emphasis. He continued,

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[90]Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1857, 62.

[91]Ibid.

[92]Ibid.

[93]Ibid., 65. Seeking to stave off sectarianism, Griffith encouraged Baptists not to ignore non-Baptist means of benevolence and mercy. He stated, "Nothing is more beautiful than brotherly affection in the members of God's family. But, while Christian sympathy rises high in our hearts, let denominational sympathy be thereunto added, and so rise higher." Ibid., 62.

"Denominational feeling should cement us all into one body, with one heart concentrating all our energies for harmonies, combined and mighty action."[94] In line with his previous concerns, the product of denominational unity terminates outside the walls of the church, as Baptists band together to reach the world.

In Griffith's culminating point, he posited, "The power imparted by scriptural piety and concentrated by denominational sympathy, should expend itself in aggressive action." Griffith believed the Association lacked this. Challenging the Association to consider its path forward, Griffith challenged the Association to take action, claiming that Baptists in Philadelphia should retrieve their founding purpose:

> Are these the great ends for which associations were originally formed? These were not the labors of the 'other men'—our fathers. They met to council and form aggressive plans, to be executed during that year. They were emphatically a missionary body, and their missionaries went North and South, East and West, preaching the Word. Pastors arranged for the holding of special meetings at important points, and through this concerted action, many of our best churches were planted. And if we, my brethren, would fulfill our high destiny, would become equal to our field, and gather the mighty harvests ripening before us, we must 'enter into their labors.' The hours usually consumed in grave discussions of petty questions, must be given to earnest thought and inquiry respecting the wants and supplies of our field, until our annual meeting shall present sublime scene of an assemblage of Christian men at work, maturing plans for united, well directed missionary efforts, within our borders.[95]

Griffith's statement exposes some of the foundational objectives for the Philadelphia Association. The Association longed to spread the gospel and theological education to those in the frontier regions of America, as well as abroad. However, Griffith's historiography fails to capture a foundational component of the Philadelphia Association's foundation. Instead he seems to over-emphasize the rising denominational impetus that emerged during the late eighteenth century and continued into the next. While the founding generation welcomed growth through new churches and broader

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[94]Philadelphia Baptist Association, "Minutes," 1857, 66. This statement seems a precursor to what Baptists pen in the 1922 rendering of the "Baptist Faith and Message". This point will be discussed in the following chapter.

[95]Ibid., 67.

ministerial efforts as the century passed, mere growth was not their founding objective. In 1707, the Association established itself to consult about the things "wanting in the churches and [to] set them in order." Providing fellowship, council and aid for member churches captured much of the Association's posture toward churches during the first several decades of the assembly. While missionary endeavors concerned the Association, their first domestic missionary efforts were not commissioned until 1770.[96] Griffith seemed to interpret the Association's history through the lens of rising denominational expansion that had captured the efforts and vision of Baptists in America.

## Conclusion

Considering the Philadelphia Baptist Association during the nineteenth century reveals a measure of both continuity and discontinuity with the previous era. Much of the transition follows a chronological pattern; as the century progressed, the Association presented less interaction with member congregations regarding internal church matters. Following the 1830s, these typical patterns of interaction, while already more scarce than the previous era, became even less frequent. Prescribed church letters, as opposed to in-person queries, became a more common means of connection between the Association and member churches. While these letters offered insight into church health and growth, they possessed a declarative posture, leaving little space for advising member churches. However, this transition does not indicate neglect toward local church health and doctrinal fidelity. On several occasions, associational leaders called churches to embrace their theological and connectional heritage. As the century progressed, however, the continued rise of outward denominational concerns ascended to a prominent position within the associational proceedings. By the mid-1850s, the Association's interaction regarding specific church matters became less frequent and offered less connection with

[96]The previous chapter states and illustrates this assertion.

and advice toward the internal matters of member churches. All in all, considering the Philadelphia Baptist Association during the nineteenth century portrays rising denominational concerns that demanded much of the assembly's time and energy. This development decreased time and energy for interaction regarding internal church matters.

# CHAPTER 4

## ASSOCIATIONALISM IN SOUTHERN BAPTIST LIFE AFTER DENOMINATIONAL ESTABLISHMENT

Baptist life in America underwent significant transition during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Once a small sect of British immigrants, the Baptists became one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States. In addition to expansive missionary and educational endeavors, Baptists in America also experienced a fissure during this time; in 1845 Northern and Southern Baptists separated to form their own denominations. Situating this study within a Southern Baptist context, the following chapter traces associational progress during the late nineteenth century, and continues through the twentieth century, in concert with the general trajectory of the denomination. In continuity with the previous chapters, this chapter argues that like the Philadelphia Baptist Association, denominational growth turned associations toward activity beyond their initial function of supporting the health and unity of member churches. Specifically, Southern Baptist denominational establishment and centralization—this culminated in the early twentieth century—affected the identity of local Baptist associations. Associations became vital instruments for denominational promotion and overall Southern Baptist cooperation. All in all, Baptist associations supported the inward health of member churches through inter-church relationships. However, as a result of the association's altered relationship with the burgeoning denominational entities, Baptist cooperation toward denominational pursuits became a significant aspect of associational life.[1] This

[1]The purpose of this chapter is not to offer an exhaustive study of SBC associationalism, but rather it seeks to illustrate its continuity with the traditional associational functions, as well as the nineteenth century developments that stemmed from denominational growth. In turn, this chapter will

chapter illustrates this thesis in an effort to trace historical and confessional trajectories. It captures the Southern Baptist associational landscape through prominent nineteenth and twentieth century Southern Baptists sources. Additionally, this work illustrates doctrinal development, namely, the Baptist Faith and Message, as compared to previous Baptist confessions. First, however, the chapter situates the context and trajectory of Southern Baptist associationalism after the advent of the convention in 1845.

## Northern and Southern Divide: Denominational Transition in the Mid-Nineteenth Century

By the 1830s, divisions had arisen between Baptists in the northern United States and those in the South. Some of the early controversy stemmed from the distribution of missionary funds. The major missionary societies, along with the General Convention, were based in northern cities: the General Convention in Boston, the publication society in Philadelphia, and the Home Mission Society in New York. This reality meant that northern Baptists garnered more influence in policy direction. Additionally, northern Baptists held more control by virtue of higher financial contributions. This arrangement alienated Baptists in the South. Southerners complained that the Home Mission Society offered insufficient prudence toward the missionary needs of the southern states. To their point, statistics reveal that between 1832 and 1842, 66 percent of missionaries were sent to the Northwestern territories in Canada, Illinois, Ohio, Wisconsin, Indiana, and Iowa. During that same time, only 20 percent of the missionaries were commissioned to the more southern states of Arkansas, Missouri, Tennessee, and Texas, with 12 percent going to Missouri. Furthermore, during the late 1830s, Baptists in Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia provided 20 percent of the society's budget while only receiving around 2 percent of the appointed

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illustrate that as the denomination solidified itself as a broad organizational structure—stemming from local church to national executive boards, the association developed a multi-faceted identity.

missionaries.[2] Carl Bodiford argues these differences over the allocation of evangelical resources "created a fissure among Baptists that the polarizing abolitionist issue dramatically worsened."[3] While the missionary concerns produced division, a deeper societal division split Northern and Southern Baptists.

Slavery had not been a major point of concern for the generation that formed the first Baptist mission societies. Slaveholders and non-slaveholders participated in common missionary endeavors. Initially, American Baptists portrayed a more moderate attitude towards slavery, and attempted to preserve societal mission efforts. However, British Baptist ministers observed the elimination of slavery in the West Indies, and they encouraged their American brethren to enact similar legislation within their young nation. In addition, revivalist preachers cultivated abolitionist fervor among northern Baptists. To this end, a growing number of churches and associations issued formal statements that asserted the moral incompatibility between the institution of slavery and basic Christian doctrine. In November of 1844, both the General Baptist Convention and the Home Mission Society officially adopted an abolitionist stance. This fundamental distinction between North and South caused even staunch denominationalists to lose sympathy for united missionary causes.[4] Bodiford posits, "Individuals on both sides of the issue regarded abolitionism or the support of slavery as a definitive measure of individual faith. Each group openly questioned the 'Christianity' of the other."[5] Northern and Southern

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[2]Carl Wayne Bodiford, "The Process of Denominational Cohesion within the Southern Baptist Convention, 1845-1927" (PhD diss., Texas Christian University, 1998), 6.

[3]Ibid., 6–7.

[4]Two particular instances in 1844 signaled that separation was inevitable. Georgia Baptists appointed James Reeve, a slaveholder, as a missionary in the South. The Convention's negative response toward the applicant brought Georgia Baptists to the edge of separation. See Robert Andrew Baker, *A Baptist Source Book, with Particular Reference to Southern Baptists* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1966), 107–08. In conjunction, during the same meeting, Alabama Baptists requested assurance that slaveholders would receive the same treatment as others. In response, the Foreign Mission Board determined that they would not appoint a slaveholder to serve in a missionary capacity. This action proved to be the united convention's breaking point. The same year, Baptists in Virginia spearheaded action toward a Convention in the southern United States. Ibid., 108–10.

[5]Bodiford, "Process of Denominational Cohesion," 11.

Baptists stood at an impasse; thus the vibrancy of the Baptist missionary movement demanded that each side fulfill their missionary mandate independently.[6] While they disagreed sharply, Northern and Southern Baptists peaceably separated. The April 1845 issue of the *New York Baptist Register* expressed a popular sentiment:

> For ourselves we deplore the necessity of division, but when things reach such a crisis as they appear to have done, deplore it as we may, there is no prospect of peace or comfort in the continuance, and weakness rather than wisdom would yield to efforts to effect it . . . . Why is it not best that our Southern brethren take their position on one side of the line, and we take ours on the other, and engage in various departments of benevolent effort with renewed zeal and increased liberality?[7]

Baptists in the South convened on May 8, 1845 in Augusta, Georgia. Representatives from Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, Kentucky, and the District of Columbia attended the activities—293 in sum. Delegates from Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas, and Florida sent letters.[8] Thus the Southern Baptist Convention was born.

**Denominational Structure for the New Southern Baptist Convention**

During the Augusta assembly, debate ensued over the structure of this new organization. The delegates appointed William B. Johnson as first president of the Southern Baptist Convention, and he crafted the young denomination's constitution. Johnson was no stranger to denominational activities, as he served during the first Triennial Convention in 1814 and had presided over the national meeting from 1841-1844. Johnson, a South Carolinian, descended from the Calvinist line of Baptists—he followed such men as Benjamin Griffith, Oliver Hart, William Staughton, and most

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[6]Ibid.

[7]William Wright Barnes, *The Southern Baptist Convention, 1845-1953* (Nashville: B and H Academic, 1954), 25.

[8]Robert Andrew Baker, *Relations between Northern and Southern Baptists* (Fort Worth, TX: Seminary Hill Press, 1948), 89.

directly, Richard Furman.[9] Once it became clear that the North and South would sever their relationship, he toiled to arrange state delegations in order to ground the new Southern Baptist Convention.[10] As a descendent of the Philadelphia tradition, Johnson and the other delegates sought to "carry into effect the benevolent intentions of our constituents, by organizing a plan for eliciting, combining and directing the energies of the whole denomination in one sacred effort."[11] To this end, Southern Baptists immediately established a Domestic Mission Board in Richmond, Virginia. Similarly, Marion, Alabama served as the headquarters for the Foreign Mission Board. To this end, Robert Baker states,

> The new convention transferred the financial basis of the society method, however it retained it fundamental principle—one society for each kind of benevolence was rejected . . . . Separate boards were named to function for each benevolent task and to act during the recess of the convention.[12]

Thus, the Southern Baptist Convention's initial structure resembled the General Baptist Convention from which it stemmed—a group of narrowly focused missions and evangelistic entities. In concert, Johnson implored the convention to form additional denominational entities. Article five of the newly minted constitution stated that the convention "shall elect as many managers, as in its judgment will be necessary for carrying out the benevolent objects it may determine to promote."[13] With the framework in place, Southern Baptists swiftly established additional organizations. At this juncture,

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[9]These men display the continuity between the Philadelphia Baptist Association and the Southern Baptist founders. For further discussion, see John Samuel Hammett, "Selected Parachurch Groups and Southern Baptists: An Ecclesiological Debate" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1991), 56–80.

[10]William H. Brackney, *The Baptists* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 201–02.

[11]Baker, *Baptist Source Book*, 116. The connectional ideology of this new convention dates back to Morgan Edwards' vision in 1770 for a more centralized Baptist structure. This echoes Furman's and Staughton's pattern for the General Convention during its first decade.

[12]Baker, *Relations between Northern and Southern Baptists*, 90.

[13]Baker, *Baptist Source Book*, 117.

the new denomination faced a question: how would this new arrangement coincide with the embedded ecclesiological framework?

## Historical Trajectory of Southern Baptist Associationalism

### Inward Emphasis: Associations Remain Distinct Entities Supporting Local Church Health

This section traces the historical trajectory of associations, in order to capture their relationship with broader denominational entities. Philadelphia Baptists illustrated that inter-church connection represented a founding concern for Baptists in America. While the advent of denominationalism altered church connection, this founding aspect persisted in associational life; Southern Baptists followed suit. From its inception, the SBC viewed each denominational entity as an independent partner for local churches. Southern Baptists maintained this arrangement even as the denomination flourished—they organized a centralized executive committee in the early twentieth century. During the 1926 annual meeting, the Convention affirmed,

> Very close relationship to certain other organizations, but over which it had no control. Among the most important are the following: The Women's Missionary Union, Auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention; the Conventions of the several states within the territory of the Convention, and the District of Columbia; the District Associations which co-operate with this Convention; and the churches.[14]

Nearly forty years later, an inter-denominational commission reaffirmed, "A Baptist association is a self-determining body whose authority is derived from the actions of messengers elected by the local Baptist churches."[15] Each entity within Baptist life possessed independence to cooperate in their preferred manner; associations continually possessed organizational autonomy.

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[14]Barnes, *Southern Baptist Convention*, 250.

[15]Lynn E. May, *The Work of the Baptist Association: An Integrative Study*, Historical Research Project, nos. 69-136 (Nashville: Southern Baptist Convention, Inter-Agency Council, 1969), 23.

Like previous generations, associations stood accountable to the needs of local churches. For instance, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the stalwart Charleston Association maintained a committee solely responsible for receiving queries for congregational aid. This arrangement represented a typical associational framework.[16] Furthermore, prominent Southern Baptist voices declared the necessity for relationships between churches, which built unity and offered theological support. One such voice was Duke McCall, former Southern Baptist Theological Seminary president and denominational statesman. He wrote,

> The local church is autonomous and capable of functioning fully as the church without dependence upon any human configuration beyond itself. It is not required, however, by its nature to remain independent and autonomous. Indeed the emphasis is not upon it as a discreet unit in society but, rather, upon the mind and purpose of God. Therefore, when circumstances permit, and to the degree they permit, each church will be associated in the larger fellowship of Christians. It must witness to the mind of Christ, yet listen with discrimination and concern to the witness of the larger fellowship. It must invite help and seek to give help to the larger fellowship.[17]

McCall implored Southern Baptists to embrace relationships with like-minded congregations. He boldly asserted that God has ordained church connection. While inherently self-sufficient, churches must posture themselves to welcome and provide mutual assistance.

Southern Baptists also expected associations to protect doctrinal fidelity within the denomination. In his 1960 training manual for associational leaders, S. W. Dowis stated,

> The association safeguards the regularity and doctrinal soundness of the affiliating churches, since every church applying for affiliation with the association must be examined as to how it was constituted, its regularity in observance of the

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[16]The Charleston Association has perpetually maintained this committee since its inception. The Georgia Baptist Association notes that the "state of religion" and the needs of local churches were still considered as denominational activity grew. Robert G. Gardner, *A History of the Georgia Baptist Association, 1784-1984* (Atlanta: Georgia Baptist Historical Society, 1988), 323–25.

[17]As quoted in Allen W. Graves, *Principles of Administration for Baptist Association* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1978), 17.

> ordinances, its soundness in doctrine and fellowship, and its desire for co-operation in our Baptist work.[18]

More recently, in 2005, James Draper promoted unity among local churches as a major priority for Southern Baptist associations. His words echo the priorities of the Philadelphia Association.[19] Draper proclaimed that unity in faith and practice grounds the fellowship within an association. He said, "There must be at the local level of Baptist life an organic unity of cooperating churches that in some ways sets benchmarks for what it means to be a Baptist."[20] Southern Baptist associations maintained a commitment to provide fellowship and care for local churches inherited from their British and Colonial forefathers. While emerging denominationalism affected associations' identity and relationship with local churches, these entities maintained a commitment to support the needs of local bodies of Christ.

**Outward Associational Focus in Southern Baptist Life**

As previously stated, denominational expansion changed the landscape of Baptist life in America. The previous chapter considers this reality from the perspective of the Philadelphia Association. While the association maintained church interaction and participation, readers observe the denomination's effect on the procedures of the associational body. No longer would Baptists exist as pockets of regional associations,

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[18]S. F. Dowis, *Associational Guidebook* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1960), 3. The SBC published this book in order to educate and train associational leaders.

[19]Draper also emphasized the emergence of outward concerns as an associational priority. He argued that the Philadelphia Association rightly realized outward needs (education, missions, etc.) in the middle of the eighteenth century and acted accordingly. He argued that an inevitable role of the association was to help churches look beyond themselves to the broken world around them. James Draper, "The Then and Now of Baptist Associations: The Present Power of Past Events," in *Turning Points in the History of Baptist Associations in America*, ed. Paul Stripling (Nashville: B and H Pub., 2006), 139.

[20]Ibid., 138. Draper echoes the mindset of the Philadelphia Association's eighteenth-century statement declaring their independence and responsibility to member churches. (See chap. 2 of this dissertation.) While any local church could opt out of fellowship, Draper believed, "The association of churches can certainly say who opts in." Throughout the address, Draper sought to draw continuity with the Philadelphia Association's founding concerns.

but rather they determined how these classic entities would exist within a broader denominational framework. A similar transition occurred during the formative years of the Southern Baptist Convention. As denominational expansion flourished, leaders within the associations viewed cooperation toward outward denominational efforts as a primary basis for connection among Baptist churches.

Baptists in Charleston established a new General Committee in 1791, the roots of denominational influence in the South; this entity subsisted within the Charleston Baptist Association. Like the PBA before it, the Charleston Association desired a platform to engage with newly conceived denominational causes—predominately theological education. With this plan, the associational delegates determined that the committee should possess "one member from each church to 'receive the collections' and 'examine candidates for the churches' bounty.'"[21] This committee functioned regularly until 1875. As time passed, this body evolved into the Association's missionary body, and combined efforts toward denominational activity.[22] The General Committee's formation predated the Association's outward shift toward denominational activity; this trajectory developed through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

**Outward Emphasis Expressed through Relationship with Broader Denominational Entities**

Thoughtful consideration of development of associationalism in the Baptist South requires a look at the assembly's relationship with other denominational entities. This section considers the association's relationship beyond itself, specifically at the state and national levels.

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[21]Charleston Baptist Association, *Annual Meeting Minutes* (Charleston, SC: Charleston Baptist Association, 1817), 15. See also Norman Wade Cox, ed., *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, s.v. "Charleston Association, General Committee of" (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), 248.

[22]*Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, 248.

**Associations and state conventions.** As mentioned in the previous chapter, Baptists formed state conventions in the early 1820s. These entities functioned as a regional manifestation of Baptist cooperation for mission, education, and other similar efforts. Spearheaded by denominational stalwarts, such as Furman, South Carolina formed the first state convention body in 1821.[23] Furman envisioned,

> A bond of union, a center of intelligence, and a means of vigorous united exertion in the cause of God, for the promotion of truth and righteousness; that so those energies, intellectual, moral, pecuniary, which God has bestowed upon the denomination in this state, might be concentrated, and brought into vigorous, useful operation.[24]

Furthermore, Furman explained the specific concerns and nature of the Convention's connection: "The Convention shall recognize the independence and liberty of the Churches of Christ . . . in regard to funds . . . discretion in their appropriation shall be exercised."[25] These men conceived an entity that would galvanize Baptists toward concerted action and benevolent causes while they maintained power within local churches. With the vision in place, these leaders encountered a daunting task; they must unite Baptists across the state to participate in a further centralized denominational effort, different from the familiar society-type structure. Given their strong relationship with local churches, the associations served a prominent role in this collaborative effort. For more than ten years, three sister associations—Charleston, Savannah River, and

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[23]South Carolina serves as a foundational location in the SBC's advent, and it also shares a deep connection to the Philadelphia tradition; therefore, South Carolina will serve to illustrate the relationship between the association, the state convention, and the Southern Baptist Convention. In the early 1750s, the Philadelphia Association commissioned Oliver Hart to establish the prominent Charleston Baptist Association. Charleston swiftly adopted the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, which established the doctrinal parameters for many of South Carolina's Baptist associations and member churches. Like the PBA, the Charleston Association showed early interest (prior to 1810) in broader denominational efforts, education, missions, and the like. Additionally, South Carolina produced Johnson and Furman—two of the most influential denominational statesmen in the Baptist South. These men followed the Philadelphia doctrinal tradition and shared Philadelphia stalwart, Morgan Edwards' broad denominational vision. Hammett, "Selected Parachurch Groups and Southern Baptists," 56–80; Joe Madison King, *A History of South Carolina Baptists* (Columbia, SC: General Board of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, 1964), 167–68.

[24]King, *History of South Carolina Baptists*, 173.

[25]Ibid., 173-74.

Edgefield—shouldered the young organization's burden.[26] Describing this context, Joe Madison King says, "These were the years of keen disappointment for those who were attempting to break through the barriers of ignorance and extreme sectionalism into a new day of statewide cooperation."[27]

In 1823, Johnson, along with Basil Manly, Sr. successfully convinced the Saluda Association to join the convention efforts. As an influential assembly in the western portion of the state, they offered hope to align South Carolina Baptists toward this effort. However, the following year, the Saluda Association withdrew from the delegation. During the 1824 meetings, delegates formed a society—supplementary to the Convention. This action allowed churches and associations to bestow isolated financial contributions without holistically supporting the Convention. In essence, efforts toward united denominational efforts bore limited fruit; this endeavor proved difficult over the next two decades.

Only six associations joined the coalition during the 1830s and 1840s. The 1850s saw promising growth as the Convention added six more associations as Saluda joined the Convention after a twenty-five year absence. The establishment of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845—with South Carolina playing a prominent role—exhibited that the state convention would remain a permanent organization. Vibrant expansion continued from 1860-1890. By 1890, thirty associations had pledged to cooperate with the Convention. By this time, the state convention emerged as a mature entity, and had cultivated a vibrant relationship with associations.

From this trajectory, an observation emerges. As a foundational aspect of church connection, associations served a primary role in the relationship between

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[26]King, *History of South Carolina Baptists*, 229. Given Charleston's prominence and propensity toward denominational effort, these assemblies (within the same region) seemed a natural fit.

[27]Ibid.

churches and state conventions. Baptist leaders realized that the association's influence upon member churches would determine the success of the state conventions. Decades earlier, Baptists in the South had observed the General Baptist Convention's failure to solidify local participation toward denominational efforts.[28] An expansive effort demanded a healthy and united structure, rooted in an established and trusted connectional framework. Associations provided such sustenance.

**Associations and the national entities**. In his historical treatment of associations in America, Elliott Smith asserts that the disparity of Baptist missions funding in the Southern states, which factored in the Northern and Southern divide, caused Baptists to employ different methods in their new denominational arrangement.[29] One of these methods provided a direct connection between associations and national denominational agencies. To this end, in 1847, the Charleston Baptist Association composed a committee to interact with the newly formed national missionary board located in Alabama. The national board supplemented provisions for destitute churches within the Association's purview.[30] Akin to its relationship with Charleston, in 1867, the Domestic Mission Board initiated a holistic plan of associational cooperation. Associations received representation on the domestic board. In turn, the Domestic Board welcomed input from associations as to their regional mission needs.[31] The Convention structure entailed that one central body coordinated all mission efforts; associations, thus, possessed power to designate or withdraw funding from the Convention. This development cultivated a cooperative culture between local associations and broader

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[28]W. B. Johnson and Richard Furman were key leaders in the 1814 establishment of the General Baptist Convention; see chap. 3 of this dissertation.

[29]Elliott Smith, *The Advance of Baptist Associations across America* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1979), 171–72.

[30]Ibid., 172–73.

[31]Barnes, *Southern Baptist Convention*, 252–53.

Baptist entities.[32] This partnership set the foundation for a holistic denominational partnership. Regional associations and the national structure had become mutually dependent. To ensure success, the national organization needed vibrant financial support from established regional entities. Reciprocally, funding from the national body offered enhanced resources for associations in need.

**Denominational centralization: Executive Committee, Seventy-Five Million Campaign, and the Cooperative Program.** The twentieth century brought significant development and transformation within the Southern Baptist Convention. The previous century was marked by fervor for missions, domestic and international. This passion spurred united efforts, and yielded a central denomination. However, the new century also bore challenges for the new structure. Arthur Farnsley argues that the earliest era of Southern Baptist life, from 1845 to about 1890, must be understood in terms of the "tenuous alliance and the organizational strain it created . . . the tension between its dependence on voluntary, designated contributions and its 'democratic' style of government grew."[33] He contends that selecting delegates merely based upon financial contributions troubled many churches and associations whose contributions were small; concurrently, the Landmark movement perpetually questioned the theological legitimacy of any decision making body beyond the local church. In addition, the Civil War had dampened momentum toward national efforts; in turn, various convention boards suffered greatly. Several state organizations focused on isolated activities, and neglected cooperative efforts.[34] In light of these developments, Farnsley believes, "By the turn of the century it was clear that Southern Baptists would need either to recognize some

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[32]Smith, *Advance of Baptist Associations across America*, 172–73.

[33]Arthur Emery Farnsley, *Southern Baptist Politics: Authority and Power in the Restructuring of an American Denomination* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 3–4.

[34]Bodiford, "Process of Denominational Cohesion," 44.

central authority and commit themselves to cooperative work, or to return to their earlier society structures."[35] By the end of the nineteenth century, the SBC may have possessed a united vision, through establishing and enhancing many organizations, however, their current structure could not guarantee long-term stability. There was no direct connection between the various boards and entities. Only the designation "Southern Baptist" in concert with biennial national meetings tethered the burgeoning structure.[36] There was no predicable continuity in funding, membership, or authority. The next thirty years ensured that the Southern Baptist Convention would become a centralized denomination and ensure long-term stability.[37]

By 1913, the loud dissenting voices of Landmarkism had largely subsided.[38] The Convention felt it could successfully move toward denominational centralization. That year the SBC appointed a Committee on Efficiency in order to study the following,

> The organization, plans and methods of this body, with a view to determine whether or not they were best adapted for electing, combining and directing the energies of Southern Baptists and for securing the highest efficiency of our forces and the fullest possible enlistment of our people for the work of the kingdom.[39]

While efficiency represented a chief objective, the denomination had to maintain autonomy within churches, associations and state conventions. Cognizant of this issue, Southern Baptists, in 1917, enacted a plan that would provide efficiency, but did not

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[35]Farnsley, *Southern Baptist Politics*, 4. Farnsley points to the denomination's tension between "church" and "sect" qualities. He adds that the denomination wanted "to be unified and to develop an organizational form capable of giving it shape and guidance, but at the same time it clung to the idea of independence and personal charisma."

[36]Ibid., 5. During the early years of the SBC, the meeting frequency was not consistent (triennially, then biennially in 1851, then annually in 1861).

[37]This period also yielded explosive growth, as membership in SBC churches grew by 111 percent from 1890 to 1916. Bodiford, "Process of Denominational Cohesion," 186.

[38]Ibid., 196. Bodiford points to a 1907 issue of the Virginia Baptist publication, *The Religious Herald*, which noted the "sublime hopefulness and enthusiasm" toward denominational efforts that emerged following the annual meeting in Richmond, VA.

[39]Farnsley, *Southern Baptist Politics*, 6. Farnsley quoted from the proceedings of the 1913 SBC annual meeting. This language is nearly verbatim to the language of the Baptist Faith and Message, penned a decade later.

compromise the existing structure. Thus, the Convention created a seven-member standing committee to conduct business between the annual meetings: the Executive Committee was formed. Promoting accountability, this board possessed no powers beyond those specifically delegated by the Convention. This plan, according to Bodiford, "Reconciled the conflict between the competing principles of congregational independence and missionary interdependence that had been the source of division since the Convention's inception."[40]

After the Executive Committee's inception, subsequent efforts enacted further centralization. After World War I, the SBC undertook an ambitious initiative entitled the "Seventy-Five Million Campaign."[41] With this plan, Southern Baptists quested to raise $75 million for missions, education, and benevolence within five years. Enthusiastically, Baptists quickly pledged over $92 million toward the effort. Prematurely confident, the denomination used this pledged amount to compose their upcoming budgets and staff resources. Sadly, deep financial turmoil resulted in much lower collections; receipts totaled only $58 million.[42] This setback tested Southern Baptist resolve, and nearly led to economic collapse. Showing resolution, Southern Baptists fought to recover their expansive denominational vision. This struggle caused many to ponder the need for further centralization. Several influential leaders considered this shortfall an organizational failure—rather than merely economic. These leaders believed the campaign had spread its decision-making authority too broadly. Even before the

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[40]Bodiford, "Process of Denominational Cohesion," 208.

[41]Ibid., 220. Bodiford points out that laymen possessed increased influence following World War I, bringing with them business-oriented methods. For instance, some Convention leaders predicted a gain in contributions as a result of war-driven inflated crop prices. Also, Southern Baptists believed the Prohibition would increase their cultural influence, thus generating greater revenue.

[42]Baker, *Baptist Source Book*, 193. Planners miscalculated the decline in crop and livestock prices that came with the return of a peacetime economy. B. D. Gray, secretary of the Home Mission Board, attributed the failure to plunged cotton prices, from forty to ten cents per pound. He said the Home Board was "experiencing a crisis such has not been known in all its history." Bodiford, "Process of Denominational Cohesion," 221, citing the proceedings of the 1925 SBC annual meeting.

campaign ended, many delegates called for greater denominational organization. Thus, denominational survival motivated many Southern Baptists toward galvanized cooperation, expressed through centralized and efficient fundraising efforts.[43]

With their most ambitious response to the fundraising failure, Baptists put forth the "Hundred Thousand Club." This plan petitioned one hundred thousand people to give one dollar a month toward the denominational cause. The Executive Committee anticipated this effort would "systematically reduce the indebtedness of the institutions, boards, and agencies of the Convention."[44] In turn, the Executive Committee organized a promotional agency to oversee the fundraising efforts. This agency, led by an appointed leader, recruited representatives from every aspect of Baptist life to champion the cause. In turn, leaders in each state, association, and church connected their respective group to the financial needs of the faltering denomination.[45] This efficient plan served to bolster denominational funding. Contributing toward this common cause helped instill a "Southern Baptist Spirit" of denominational identity and action.[46]

On the heels of calls for greater denominational fundraising efficiency, Southern Baptists established the Cooperative Program in 1925. Bill Leonard states,

> Its adoption ended any vestiges of the society method in the increasingly centralized convention organization. No longer would each agency be compelled to send

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[43]Ibid., 221-22. Furthermore, Andrew Christopher Smith presents an insightful consideration of the Seventy-Five Million Campaign's effect on the centralization or bureaucratization of the SBC's relationship with local churches. For instance, he offers multiple examples that illustrate how many within the denomination perceived obligation to contribute to relieve the debt. For instance, Smith draws parallels to landlords, rent, and tax payments. Andrew Christopher Smith, *Fundamentalism, Fundraising, and the Transformation of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1919-1925* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2016), 103-33.

[44]Baker, *Baptist Source Book*, 194.

[45]Ibid. J. C. Bradley agreed that the Seventy-Five Million Campaign and the ensuing fundraising served a key role in redefining Baptist associations as a portion of the denominational system. J. C. Bradley, *A Baptist Association: Churches on Mission Together* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1984), 28.

[46]Walter B. Shurden, "The Southern Baptist Synthesis: Is It Cracking?" *Baptist History and Heritage* 16, no. 2 (April 1981): 9. He coined this phrase when referring to the effect of the centralized entities on individual Southern Baptist churches and congregants.

> representatives, hat in hand, to individual churches. Through one collective program Baptists could fund all the agencies related to the convention. This not only streamlined the collection of funds but also solidified the centralization of the convention system began in 1845.[47]

Furthermore, this arrangement solidified the relationship between the national denomination and the state conventions. To this day, Cooperative Program funds go first to the state level; the states maintain a portion for their budgets before allocating an amount to the national Convention. In this conception, the denomination's financial success depends upon the national Convention's ability to convince states to share a greater portion of their Cooperative Program budget. Baker contends, "This fusion between the state programs and the Convention's activities brought a new denominational unity to Southern Baptists."[48] This denominational ethos trickled below the state level, impacting the association's relationship with broader organizations.

**A New Identity: Denominational Centralization and Associations**

Within Southern Baptist life, increased centralization shaped associations as vessels to promote cooperation toward denominational activity. To this end, J. C. Bradley argued, "The new era in denominational life prompted a redefinition of associations to serve the changing needs of denominational bodies. Although associations and conventions were different kinds of bodies, they came to be defined the same way regarding their membership and purpose."[49] In this modern era, Baptist leaders portrayed

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[47]Bill Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 55. Bodiford argues that this Cooperative Program plan was an outgrowth and modification of the Seventy Million Campaign. Bodiford, "Process of Denominational Cohesion," 228.

[48]Robert Andrew Baker, *The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People, 1607-1972* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1974), 404.

[49]Bradley, *Baptist Association*, 29. In E. P. Alldredge's 1925 work, published by the Convention Press, he offered no discernable distinction between each denominational entity. They all served to (1) provide closer ties of brotherhood and Christian fellowship, (2) council together regarding matters related to Christ's kingdom, and (3) lay plans, support agencies, and provide means to fulfill the Great Commission, a task individual churches cannot accomplish alone. E. P. Alldredge, *Southern Baptists Working Together: A Study of the Cooperative Life and Work of Southern Baptists* (Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1925), 43. This centralization was not without

the association as a prime avenue for denominational promotion. Speaking on behalf of the Home Mission Board in 1933, its executive secretary J. B. Lawrence described the association's vital role to his organization: "Southern Baptists will never list their churches in denominational programs . . . until they get back to the district association and make it a real functioning body in Baptist affairs . . . . The district association makes it possible to make a direct, sympathetic, and constant contact with every church."[50]

In addition, other denominational entities viewed associations as vibrant promotional channels. In 1935, T. L. Holcomb, the leader of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, presented a five-year plan to reach Baptists across the nation. He offered annual two-day conferences in each state. The associations provided Holcomb a fitting delivery agency. Over five years, the board reached fifty thousand people from 850 associations.[51] This program's success yielded a sequel from 1940-1944. This iteration offered a new element: leaders from the Sunday School Board conducted follow-up meetings in every association, a development that further wedded associations to this denominational endeavor. The first initiative enlisted associations as messengers, while the second program positioned them as platforms to ensure participation and retention. In response, the Sunday School Board reported to the Convention its plans to continue using the district association as primary means to promote their message to local churches. Bradley elaborated on this development: "The view of the association as a promotional unit was not peculiar to the Sunday School Board, however. It was a part of the generally

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detractors. For instance, this tendency concerned W. W. Barnes; he stated, "General bodies are now thought of as ecclesiastical in nature, forming an ascending series heading up in the Southern Baptist Convention . . . . The Convention has almost become a general Church." William Wright Barnes, *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Study in the Development of Ecclesiology* (Seminary Hill, TX: W. W. Barnes, 1934), 12.

[50]J. N. Barnette, *Associational Sunday School Work* (Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1933), 59. Bradley argued that the Seventy-Five Million Campaign served as the major catalyst in viewing associations as ideal fundraising and promotional mechanisms. Bradley, *Baptist Association*, 31.

[51]Ibid.

accepted view of associations and the way the denomination went about its cooperative work."[52] During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the Southern Baptist Convention established entities and promoted denominational efforts in a manner that centralized action at the national level. These changes affected the conception and action of local association; associations adopted a promotional role for extending denominational vision and objectives.

**Multi-directional cooperative effort: Southern Baptist associations in a post-centralized denomination.** As seen, expansion and centralization within the Southern Baptist Convention affected associational life. This trajectory led Baptists to consider the purpose and future of local Baptist associations. For instance, in light of denominational development questions arose: in what ways should associations define themselves as a promotional agency underneath broader denominational entities? Conversely, how should Southern Baptist associations function as a support system to provide support and stability for member churches? In fact, defining associationalism in the twentieth century became a perpetual task for Southern Baptists. The changing landscape led many Southern Baptist leaders to consider the association's role, and even question their legitimacy.[53] Ultimately, following denominational expansion, associations possessed dual allegiances. They served the local churches and denominational entities, and also fostered cooperation across Southern Baptist life.

Twentieth-century denominational and associational leaders describe this development. When Baptists considered the purpose of associations in 1949, Harold D. Gregory offered a defense: "The association missions program directed by a missionary

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[52]Bradley, *Baptist Association*, 31.

[53]Many treatments of associationalism in the twentieth century approach the subject by offering a defense of the association's legitimacy in Baptist life. For instance, see Graves, *Principles of Administration*. See also Bradley, *Baptist Association*.

paid dividends in evangelism, in the formation of new churches, in more efficient education work, and in more mission involvement." In 1956, the Southern Baptist Convention formed a committee on the "Coordination and Promotion of Associational Work," which yielded the 1969 work by Lynn E. May, Jr., "The Work of the Baptist Association." He agreed that the emergence of missionary societies changed the makeup of the traditional associational structure. He also described changing tide of associations in light of denominational development: "As the conventions became more influential they were increasingly able to meet the needs once met exclusively by the Association. The trained leadership and financial resources of statewide and other Baptist convention agencies enabled them to offer assistance to the churches in many areas of their work."[54] He added, "The need for promoting such denominational programs caused denomination leaders to look to the Association as a promotional agency."[55] Rather than a departure from historical precedent, May viewed the association's transition as a "development" because they were accommodating the changing needs of Southern Baptists.

In the same vein, in 1963, Southern Baptist associational leaders gathered at the Gulfshore Baptist Assembly in Pass Christian, Mississippi in order to consider the future and purpose of the historic Baptist institution. These leaders conceived a multi-faceted and multi-directional purpose for the association. In addition to its engrained role of fellowship among local churches, associations allowed churches to cooperate toward broader Christian service, as well as channel state-level support to local bodies. Moreover, associations served as an "invaluable instrument in interpreting

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[54]May, *Work of the Baptist Association*, 20.

[55]Ibid. May and his committee proposed that associations stood on the basic plan developed by the seventeenth-century Baptists. Churches associate in order to voluntarily accomplish common objectives they could not achieve alone. May's work meshes with the changing ecclesiological mindset of mid-twentieth century Southern Baptists. Perhaps, this mindset controlled his narrative and framed his reading of associational history. Gregory Wills notes that church "success" following the late nineteenth century was defined in terms of efficiency and pragmatic progress. Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900*, Religion in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). This trajectory seems to capture May's approach.

denominational information to the churches."[56] The conference leaders believed the association formed an interdependent partnership with other aspects of Baptist life in order to provide needed resources in an efficient manner—grounded in Baptist cooperation.[57] Similarly, in 2005, long-time Baptist associational missionary, Paul Stripling, reiterated many associational leaders before him; he captures the association's trajectory within a Baptist framework. When faced with denominational expansion, he argues, "The association was encouraged to move from being just a mutual support system of counsel and fellowship to having a more far-reaching goal—mission work beyond the associational family of churches."[58] In summary, twentieth-century associations promoted both denominational endeavors and local church needs. Structural expansion and centralization forced associations to adapt and expand upon their initial identity.

### Doctrinal Trajectory: Outward Focus Displayed through Confessions of Faith

Baptists are confessional people. Confessional statements serve descriptive and prescriptive purposes: they assert the consensus views of a collective people and also provide prescriptive theological parameters for those within a tradition.[59] Confessional assertions provide insight toward the mindset and priorities of Southern Baptists. The major American Baptist confessions are helpful in understanding the nature of the church as it pertains to inter-church connection. These confessions reiterate the connectional

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[56]Graves, *Principles of Administration*, 17. Graves also viewed this multi-directional relationship as an invitation for associations to offer input to other Baptist entities, such as state conventions and the like.

[57]Stripling, *Turning Points*, 99–100.

[58]Ibid., 91. He argues that this transition yielded a diminished concern for fellowship that signaled the erosion of the ecclesiological base of the association. Stripling questions whether the inception of state conventions caused associations to appear less important and less effective in meeting the needs of churches. Ibid., 12. The validity and extent of this claim will be addressed in the following chapter.

[59]For a helpful discussion regarding the role of confessions of faith in Baptist life, see Anthony L. Chute, Nathan A. Finn, and Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement* (Nashville: B and H Academic, 2015), 326–30.

shift among Baptists in America, illustrated through regional associations. Early Baptists, beginning in England, portrayed communion among local bodies of Christ as a fundamental Baptist distinctive. Later confessions reveal that cooperation ascended as a central defining principle.

**Second London Confession**

As descendants from Britain, Baptists imported the Second London Confession as a benchmark for Baptist doctrine in America. The Confession describes the universal church: [this body] "consists of the whole number of the Elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all."[60] Furthermore, the Confession states that these visible saints form particular congregations throughout the world. These visible saints, within each local assembly, commune together as an association of believers. Section 14 of Article 26, a section pertaining to the church, says,

> As each church, and all the members of it, are bound to pray continually for the good and prosperity of all the churches of Christ, in all places, and upon all occasions to further every one within the bounds of their places and callings, in the exercise of their gifts and graces, so the churches, when planted by the providence of God, so as they may enjoy opportunity and advantage for it, ought to hold *communion* among themselves, for their peace, increase of love, and mutual edification.[61]

Local bodies pursue and enjoy inter-church fellowship; this arrangement honors God and mutually builds up Christ's people. It should be noted that the Confession situates this call for communion within its ecclesiological treatment. In turn, communion among like-minded churches stood as a core ecclesiological aspect, as it provided direction for inter-church relationships. As discussed in chapter 2, the Philadelphia Baptist Association, its

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[60]William Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 2nd rev. ed., rev. Bill J. Leonard (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2011), 283. The Second London Confession grounds these words in Scripture: Heb 12:23; Col 1:18; Eph 1:10, 22-23, 5:23, 27, 32.

[61]Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 290.

member churches and sister associations formed a nearly identical statement of faith. This tradition produced many prominent leaders who served instrumental roles in forming the Southern Baptist Convention. As the nineteenth century unfolded, other confessional statements defined Baptist life in America. These new expressions presented alternative views regarding the nature and intent of church association.

**New Hampshire Confession**

The New Hampshire Confession began as a regional effort when the Baptist Convention of New Hampshire prepared and presented "such a declaration of the practice, together with a covenant, as may be thought agreeable and consistent to the views of our churches in this state."[62] Many within New Hampshire encouraged this effort because they were concerned that the Second London Confession did not properly represent the views of Baptists in the region.[63] The New Hampshire Baptist State Convention commissioned N. W. Williams, William Taylor, and Ira Person to compose this new confession. Finally, on January 15, 1833, the committee appointed John Newton Brown to prepare a final copy of the work. Upon approval, the churches of New Hampshire adopted the document.

The New Hampshire Confession contains two sections that address the church: "Of a Gospel Church" and "Of Baptism and the Lord's Supper." Only the former treats church ontology and government. While it addresses the existence of the local body, this section maintains silence in regard to church connectivity or the universal church in general.

Without John Newton Brown's work, the New Hampshire Confession may

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[62]Terry Wolever, ed., *An Anthology of Early Baptists in New Hampshire* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2001), 534.

[63]Due to the rise of Free Will Baptists and their modified Calvinism, many believed a new statement was in order. See Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 376.

have never been read outside of the state. Twenty years after the document was approved, Brown served as American Baptist Publication Society's editorial secretary. In this post, he published the New Hampshire Confession within the widely disseminated Baptist Church Manual of 1853. Brown's work had no small impact, as the New Hampshire Confession became the most widely disseminated and accepted creedal declaration of Baptists in America by the end of the nineteenth century.[64]

In order to understand the New Hampshire Confession's popularity, one must consider the ecclesiological setting of the region. The New Hampshire Confession's broad-reaching popularity coincides with the landscape of American Baptists in the mid to late nineteenth century—particularity those in the South. While other factors contributed, Landmarkism profoundly affected Southern Baptist ecclesiology during the nineteenth century. This movement denied the existence of the universal church—they held that the New Testament refers to the local church only. William Barnes argued that these distinctive attributes led Landmark Baptists (such as Graves and Pendleton) to champion the New Hampshire Confession, as the document contained no ecclesiological language beyond the local church. To this end, Barnes added that Graves, in his theological battle with R. B. C. Howell, adopted an ecclesiology opposite to his Philadelphia Confession. Due to the large Landmark influence in the South and Southwest (south of Ohio and west of the Allegheny Mountains, as far as Texas) this confession garnered wide approval.[65]

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[64]Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 377. While space does not permit further addressing how this Confession emerged, Barnes ponders it in his 1942 essay on the New Hampshire Confession: William W. Barnes, "The New Hampshire Confession of Faith, Its Origin and Use," *The Review and Expositor* 39, no. 1 (January 1942): 6–7. Also, study is needed to determine the wide acceptance of the New Hampshire Confession among non-Landmarkists. Perhaps the benign statements regarding the church made it easier for churches with diverse theological stances to ascribe to a single confession. Brackney also holds that the mild Calvinism of the document matched the doctrinal trends within Baptist life during the era. Brackney, *Baptists*, 136.

[65]Barnes, "New Hampshire Confession of Faith," 7.

**A New Southern Baptist Confession of Faith**

At the 1919 Southern Baptist Convention, J. F. Love of Virginia composed a resolution to appoint a five-member committee in order to craft a united statement of faith; he longed to restore worldwide Baptist fellowship. The 1919 delegates appointed E. Y. Mullins, L. R. Scarborough, J. B. Gambrell, Z. T. Cody, and William Ellyson to draft this new confessional statement. Mullins, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary president and denominational statesmen, chaired the efforts. Initially the Statement of Principles (1919), this document expanded to become the Baptist Faith and Message (1925).[66]

Within the Baptist Faith and Message, Articles 6 and 14 address church matters. Article 6 introduces the church as a local body of baptized believers. Furthermore, it is an autonomous body that operates through democratic processes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Article 14, entitled "Cooperation," states the following,

> Christ's people should, as occasion requires, organize such associations and conventions as may best secure co-operation for the great objects of the Kingdom of God. Such organizations have no authority over each other or over the churches. They are voluntary and advisory bodies designed to elicit, combine, and direct the energies of our people in the most effective manner . . . . Individual members of New Testament churches should co-operate with each other, and the churches themselves should co-operate with each other in carrying forward the missionary, educational, and benevolent program for the extension of Christ's Kingdom. Christian unity in the New Testament sense is spiritual harmony and voluntary co-operation for common ends by various groups of Christ's people.[67]

The section claims that Christ's people should, as occasion requires, organize associations and conventions. These organizations are voluntary and advisory bodies designed to

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[66]Lumpkin mentions the committee's struggle to craft this document. Controversy over evolutionary theory proved a prominent point of contention. notes that when one compares the two documents, the new document contained 10 additional sections concerning the resurrection, the return of the Lord, religious liberty, peace and war, education, social service, cooperation evangelism and missions, stewardship, and the kingdom of God. The committee deleted articles 12 and 16 from the New Hampshire document, and the wording of article seven, nine, and 18 was greatly altered. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 407.

[67]Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 413.

elicit, combine, and direct the energies of people in the most effective manner. To that end, members of New Testament churches should cooperate for the purpose of missionary, educational, and benevolence ministries that extend Christ's kingdom.

At the 1963 Southern Baptist Convention in Kansas City, Missouri, Baptist statesmen Hershel Hobbs spearheaded a commission that updated the 1925 version of the Baptist Faith and Message. Like the New Hampshire Confession, from which it originated, the 1925 document addressed no ecclesial manifestation outside the local body of Christ. The 1963 committee—through the leadership of Hobbs and Albert McClennan—added the following phrase, "The New Testament speaks also of the church as the body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all ages."[68] The committee had compiled multiple recognized authorities on Baptist ecclesiology—chiefly dependent on J. M. Pendleton's *Church Manual* to offer the addition. Article 14, which addresses cooperation, remained intact. According to Hobbs, a church history professor told the committee that this addition to the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message represented the "first new development in ecclesiology in the Southern Baptist Convention since 1845."[69]

When compared to the confessionalism of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, the Baptist Faith and Message replaced "communion" with "cooperation" as the operative term that undergirded church connectivity. While the latter statement encourages church association, it calls churches to measure church connectivity as a means to unite Baptists toward mission and denominational goals. This transition coincides with associationalism's increased denominational emphasis during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[70]

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[68]Herschel H. Hobbs, "Baptist Faith and Message: Anchored but Free," *Baptist History and Heritage* 13, no. 3 (July 1978): 33.

[69]Ibid., 38.

[70]This chapter intends to illustrate the doctrinal trajectory, while the following chapter will evaluate the trajectory in more detail.

## Conclusion

The historical developments within Southern Baptist associational life reveal a continuation of the trajectory observed through the Philadelphia Baptist Association. Outward denominational endeavors expanded the identity and function of associations, altering their relationship with local churches. Specific to Southern Baptist development, denominational centralization secured a united and cooperative relationship between the association and broader entities. In a post-centralized Southern Baptist context, associations espoused a multi-faceted and multi-directional cooperative structure; they supported the needs of local churches while they championed denominational activity. The next chapter will evaluate the development of associationalism in America, and assess biblical and theological fidelity.

CHAPTER 5

# THE TRAJECTORY OF ASSOCIATIONALISM IN AMERICAN BAPTIST LIFE: AN EVALUATIVE ASSESSMENT

## Introduction

The previous two chapters trace the establishment and development of Baptist associations through the lens of the inaugural group, the Philadelphia Baptist Association. Chapter 2 argued that during the first hundred years of its establishment, the Philadelphia Association promoted connection between local independent Baptist churches. The Association sought to maintain each church's independence while they promoted an atmosphere of ecclesial accountability, an open-handed fellowship. The last two decades of the eighteenth century marshaled rapid Southern Baptist growth, creating additional needs and opportunities. Baptists, like other Christian denominations, became more aware of the need to reach the nations without the good news of Jesus Christ. Denominational growth also affected local associations.

Chapter 3 argues that denominational growth shifted the concern away from attention to internal matters of local churches. As the nineteenth century unfolded, the burgeoning Baptist denomination established many missions and educational entities to reach the growing nation and more accessible world. In turn, chapter 4 traces the Philadelphia associational tradition as inherited and developed by Baptists in the South.

This chapter argues that the historical trajectory of the associations within American Baptist life—as observed through the Philadelphia tradition[1]—displayed a

[1]This study situates the Philadelphia Tradition as the brand of connectionalism founded by the Philadelphia Baptist Association and transmitted to the South by such denominational leaders as William B. Johnson and Richard Furman. For more discussion on this tradition, see John Samuel Hammett,

measure of both continuity and discontinuity as related to the nature and purpose of church connection observed within Scripture and Baptist theology. To this end, three notable Baptist ecclesiological positions intersect with this study: (1) inter-church connection fosters communion defined by theological accountability; (2) inter-church connection maintains local church independence; (3) inter-church connection fosters cooperation in order to reach unbelievers.[2] To the first position, an emphasis upon inter-church communion lessened as denominationalism grew in America. Second, the Philadelphia tradition continually maintained local church independence. Third, although Baptists historically affirmed cooperation toward the advancement of Christ's gospel, this aspect received increased interest after the turn of the nineteenth century. Methodologically, this dissertation presents the biblical and Baptist positions regarding these connectional aspects; it assesses the Philadelphia tradition's continuity and discontinuity in relation to these three positions; it also interacts with specific interlocutors who represent particular points of view regarding these three ecclesiological aspects.[3]

## Inter-Church Connection: Communion Promotes Interdependence

This section considers communion as an aspect of connection among local churches. First, it is important to survey the biblical grounds: how does the Bible communicate this aspect? Next, how have Baptists throughout the centuries conceived of

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"Selected Parachurch Groups and Southern Baptists: An Ecclesiological Debate" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1991), 59-80.

[2]A comprehensive ecclesiological treatment sits outside the purview of this dissertation, because this study is concerned with matters that directly intersect with church connectivity. For instance, the polity and governance within particular churches will not be addressed.

[3]Specifically, these ecclesiological aspects will include exegetical consideration of specific passages, biblical-theological connections within the biblical canon, as well as consultation from historical sources, following Gregg Allison's method. See Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 33.

communion among churches? In turn, this dissertation considers how the Philadelphia tradition adhered to the established Christian and historical traditions.

**Biblical Affirmation of Inter-Church Communion**

Baptists, within a congregational framework, affirm the visible and gathered fellowship of believers. However, the gathered congregation derives its significance from its existence and identification within a greater connection. Scripture articulates multiple metaphors to represent Christ's church: communion of saints, body of Christ, temple of the Holy Spirit, to name a few. All of these terms connote a believer's connection to Christ through the Holy Spirit. This unity with God yields unity between God's people.[4] The apostle Paul exhorts his readers to live in light of this truth in Ephesians 4:4-5. They are to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit. For God's people exist as one body led by one Holy Spirit, and they share the same hope.[5] Believers are called to one Lord, one faith, and one baptism through the same united triune God. The crux of this command lies in the unity of God. We are to be one united people because we serve one God (Eph 3:14).[6] The New Testament provides implications for this truth. Matthew's Gospel asserts that no one should approach God in worship without first being reconciled to an estranged brother (Matt 5:24).[7] The apostle John states, if anyone claims to love God but fails to love his brother, he is self-deceived and a liar (1 John 4:20). Edmond

[4]Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 79. The following chapter will expound on union with Christ and its implications for the church in more detail.

[5]Harold Hoehner notes that the seven-fold use of "one" emphasizes unity. This one body refers to the universal church, an entirely new concept not conceived of in the Old Testament. Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 514.

[6]Clowney, *Church*, 79. This text says that we serve one God who is the heavenly Father of his united family.

[7]Craig Blomberg adds that true discipleship will necessarily lead to reconciliation among fellow believers. He connects this passage with 1 John 1:8-9, 2:9. Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 108.

Clowney surmises each church's call for unity; God intended that this mindset form each church's posture toward the greater body. Clowney states, "The church that is to be one in the Spirit, and one in faith, holding to the purity of the apostolic gospel, must also be God's holy people on earth, growing in likeness to Christ, and transcending worldly divisions as the beginning of a new humanity in Christ."[8] Unity in Christ provides the impetus for each local church's connection to the greater body of Christ.[9]

Communion captures well the unity each local church enjoys with the greater collection of visible churches. Additionally, communion among believers fosters accountability and interdependence. The writer of Hebrews called believers to "exhort one another every day . . . that none of you may hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold firm to the end" (Heb 3:13). Because saints share union with Christ, Christians are expected to spur one another toward holiness and devotion to God. Later the writer of Hebrews encouraged believers not to neglect fellowship, but rather to "encourage one another all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Heb 10:25). The biblical text reveals that the body of Christ, as a united community of faith, should maintain vibrant connection, even beyond their local churches.

**Baptist Affirmation of Inter-Church Communion**

Baptist theologian Stephen Holmes asserts, "Baptists believe straightforwardly in the unity of the church: Christ has one church, composed of all true believers from all times and places. Baptists would be very suspicious, indeed disdainful, of any attempt to identify this one church with any particular historical organization (including their

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[8]Clowney, *Church*, 82.

[9]To this end, Augustus Strong adds, "The doctrine of the Church is a necessary outgrowth of the doctrine of Regeneration." Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology: A Compendium and Commonplace-Book Designed for the Use of Theological Students* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1907), 893.

own)."[10] Baptists affirm that each local congregation needs nothing beyond itself to be a true church; this, however, does not mean that churches have a right to ignore fellowship with broader manifestations of the body of Christ. Thus, Baptists have called it their duty to associate together for support and instruction.[11]

Baptist history offers robust examples toward a strong conception of the unity of Christ's church, expressed in congregational interdependence. The 1652 minutes of early prominent Abington Association (England) reveal the following,

> That particular churches of Christ ought to hold firm communion each with other in point of advice in doubtful matters and controversies . . . because there is the same relation betwixt the particular churches each towards other as there is betwixt particular members in one church.[12]

The Second London Confession echoes this sentiment. Article 27, section 1, "Communion of Saints" articulates,

> All saints that are united to Jesus Christ, their head, by his Spirit, and faith, although they are not made thereby one person with him, have fellowship in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory; and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, in an orderly way, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.[13]

The Confession affirms that unity among the body of Christ stems from union with Christ through the Holy Spirit. This unity, grounded in love, yields communion among Christ's people. Furthermore, Christians are indebted to celebrate this vibrant communion. In the next section, the Confession says, "Saints by profession are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual

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[10]Stephen R. Holmes, *Baptist Theology*, Doing Theology (New York: T and T Clark, 2012), 98.

[11]Ibid., 104. This point has been drawn from the Philadelphia Association's history, as well as British Baptist history.

[12]Ibid., 104–5.

[13]William Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 2nd rev. ed., rev. Bill J. Leonard (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2011), 289–90.

services, as tend to their mutual edification."[14] These examples illustrate Baptists' doctrinal affinity in terms of inter-church connection that exudes a posture of communion familiar to the biblical text.

## PBA Tradition Continuity with this Position

As illustrated through historical Baptist conception, communion stood as a doctrinal basis for inter-church relationships. Baptists in Philadelphia imported this language from their English Baptist heritage. Doctrinally, the Philadelphia Baptists affirmed the Second London Confession, nearly to the letter.[15] In practice Philadelphia maintained this posture within their Association.

**Communion in practice and doctrine.** Chapter 2 details the nature of early American associationalism as observed through the inaugural group in Philadelphia. From the Association's initial meeting in 1707, the PBA established a culture dedicated to "set the churches in order." The Association's annual meeting minutes reveal the assembly's posture toward mutual accountability; they promoted doctrinal purity as well as unity among and within member churches. The interaction revealed the churches' dependence upon the advice of the corporate body. While each church possessed responsibility to govern its own affairs, they routinely consulted the Association's collective doctrinal and ministerial insight.

In addition to their confession, Philadelphia Baptists penned their own documents that reiterated the importance of communion among member churches. Chapter 2 discusses the 1749 document penned by Benjamin Griffith, which delineated

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[14]Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 290.

[15]Philadelphia added two articles in addition to the Second London material. One article concerned the singing of Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs as a "divine institution." The other considered the laying of hands upon baptized believers as "an ordinance of Christ." Ibid., 365.

the purpose and limitations of association. Six years earlier, Jenkin Jones and Benjamin Griffith co-authored "The Discipline of 1743." The Association annexed this work into their Confession of Faith.[16] One section entitled, "Of the Communion of Churches" states, "Such particular distinct churches, agreeing in gospel-doctrine and practice, may and ought to maintain communion together in many duties which may tend to the mutual benefit and edification of the whole."[17] The authors found it expedient and beneficial "that particular churches should by their mutual agreement appoint proper times and places to meet . . . for the mutual benefit of all the churches—for their peace, prosperity, and mutual edification." They continued,

> It is according to the mind of Christ that many churches holding communion together should meet by their messengers and delegates to consider of, and to give advice in or about such matters in difference; and their sentiments to be reported to all the churches concerned. And such messengers and delegates . . . may declare and determine the mind of the Holy Ghost revealed in Scripture concerning things in difference; and may decree the observation of things that are true and necessary, because revealed and appointed in scripture.[18]

These words reveal the nature of the Association's connection. They championed the sentiment of Acts 15 and the posture of the Second London Confession. Philadelphia Baptists considered their inter-church assembly a platform to receive wisdom, insight, mutual support, and accountability, united under the Holy Spirit's leadership.

**A broad communal vision for Baptist life in America.** Philadelphia conceived a vision of Christian communion beyond the regional level. As seen in chapter 2, Morgan Edwards envisioned a union of Baptists across America. His mindset reflected a deep concern for unity among local bodies of believers. He desired that no baptized

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[16]Winthrop Hudson noted that these men relied heavily upon the writings of Elias Keach, Abel Morgan, John Owen, and Thomas Goodwin. Winthrop Hudson, "Documents on the Association of Churches," in *Baptists, the Bible, Church Order and the Churches: Essays from Foundations, a Baptist Journal of History and Theology*, ed. Edwin S. Gaustad (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 333.

[17]Ibid. Hudson compiled specific documents from the Philadelphia Baptist Association.

[18]Ibid., 334.

believer would "abide loose and scattered."[19] As more Baptists settled across the vast new land, Edwards desired that all "be made sufficiently known to one another."[20] While this sort of connection never materialized, nonetheless, readers encounter the theological posture of the Philadelphia Baptists. These eighteenth-century churchmen possessed a vibrant and visibly manifested expression of Christ's universal church.

**PBA Tradition Discontinuity with this Position**

The era of denominational expansion saw less inter-church communion within the Philadelphia tradition. While Baptists maintained a commitment to this biblical principle, this aspect saw a diminished emphasis as outward denominational activity rose to the forefront. As seen in chapter 3, denominational causes captured the attention and energy of the Philadelphia Association. It seems presumptive to assume that the Philadelphia Association ceased to value this ecclesiological assertion. However, observation reveals that as missionary and educational activism grew during the nineteenth century, these activities garnered more attention among the delegates than matters related to doctrinal health and unity.

The Philadelphia Tradition, inherited in the South through such leaders as William B. Johnson and Richard Furman, continued the trajectory enacted during the early nineteenth century. As chapter 4 illustrates, in addition to missionary and educational causes, associations championed a strong centralized denominational structure among its constituents. Associations provided the SBC localized enthusiasm that helped Southern Baptists cultivate their national identity. As chapter 4 also illustrates, by the mid-twentieth century, associations became suitable promotional agents for

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[19]Morgan Edwards, *Materials toward a History of the Baptists in Pennsylvania Both British and German*, vol. 1, *Materials Toward a History of the American Baptists* (1770; repr., Enid, OK: Regular Baptist Publishing, 1998), 124.

[20]Ibid., 125.

benevolent causes, cultivating palpable denominational pride among local Baptist churches across the American landscape.

**Confessional transition.** Chapter 4 details the confessional progression among Baptists in America. By the mid to late nineteenth century, the New Hampshire Confession had eclipsed Second London as the mainstream Baptist confessional document. Rooted in the language of New Hampshire, the Baptist Faith and Message emerged in 1925. Unlike Baptists in ages past, this new confessional statement—like the New Hampshire document before it—neglected to include communion among churches. Instead, cooperation toward denominational efforts defined the Baptist inter-church connection.

This confessional transition does not imply that Southern Baptists ceased to emphasize doctrinal accountability among local churches. This emphasis, though, provided an additional nuance to the nineteenth-century Philadelphia tradition. The early era promoted doctrinal accountability as a catalyst to improve church health and vitality among member churches. Within the twentieth-century context, Southern Baptists emphasized doctrinal accountability as a means to filter unsound theology from its ranks. This action yielded theologically united cooperation, seated in a theologically orthodox gospel message. Chad Brand and David Hankins assert,

> Now, people who share [theological] convictions are motivated to cooperate because they are confident in the theological commitments underlying the mission and ministry ventures. The cloud of suspicion that, at times, has hovered over the Convention's enterprises has lifted, and the way is clear for unreserved enthusiastic support.[21]

Baptists sought to ensure that theologically conservative churches cooperated to promote and fulfill Christ's great commission. This mechanism, while necessary for theologically

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[21]Chad Owen Brand and David E. Hankins, *One Sacred Effort: The Cooperative Program of Southern Baptists* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2005), 181.

sound mission efforts, emerged as a primary driver toward Southern Baptist doctrinal accountability.[22]

**Interaction: Communion, not a Baptist Principle?**

As described in the previous chapter, cooperation became a prominent connectional term for Baptists in America. To this end, Southern Baptists—at the advent of the twentieth century—penned the Baptist Faith and Message. Baptists did not transfer the communion language observed in previous Baptist confessions. How then did twentieth-century Baptists conceive of the expression of unity among local churches? E. Y. Mullins provides a suitable answer to this question, as he is considered by some the most influential Baptist theologian of the twentieth century. Furthermore, Mullins served as a primary author of the 1925 Baptist Faith and Message.

*The Axioms of Religion: A New Interpretation of the Baptist Faith*, written in 1908, best expressed Mullins' ideology.[23] Fisher Humphreys believes this work "probably has done more than any other single volume to define Baptists in the twentieth century."[24] In the introduction, Mullins asserted that the book, which contains sixteen

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[22]It would be interesting to explore how the "Conservative Resurgence" of the late twentieth century related to this doctrinal filtering idea. It would seem that as Southern Baptists coalesced around the inerrancy of Scripture and other theologically conservative doctrines, proper "filtering" became necessary to ensure the fidelity of cooperative efforts. Albert Mohler penned an article calling for a renewed emphasis on doctrinal filtering at all levels of the SBC, especially at the regional level. R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "Baptist Polity and the Integrity of the Southern Baptist Convention," *The Albert Mohler Blog*, June 19, 2014, accessed January 31, 2017. http://www.albertmohler.com/2014/06/19/baptist-polity-and-the-integrity-of-the-southern-baptist-convention/. See also, James T. Draper, *Authority: The Critical Issue for Southern Baptists* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1984), 105–6. Draper projects "irreducible minimums" in regard to doctrine that galvanize Baptists toward theological fidelity in mission efforts. Morris Chapman seems to channel this mindset as well. He says that connection among churches serves to build trust in order to enhance cooperative efforts. Thus, doctrinal alignment and fellowship provide a filter for denominational progress and growth. Morris H. Chapman, "Axioms of a Cooperating Southern Baptist," in *Southern Baptist Identity: An Evangelical Denomination Faces the Future*, ed. David S. Dockery (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 160. See also, Jason G. Duesing, "A Denomination Always for the Church: Ecclesiological Distinctives as a Basis for Confessional Cooperation," in *The SBC and the Twenty-First Century: Reflection, Renewal, and Recommitment*, ed. Jason K. Allen (Nashville: B and H Academic, 2016).

[23]E. Y. Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion: A New Interpretation of the Baptist Faith* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1908).

[24]Fisher Humphreys, "E. Y. Mullins," in *Baptist Theologians*, ed. Timothy George and David

chapters, aimed to produce a fresh statement that would enable the world to understand Baptists more clearly.[25]

For Mullins, the concept of "soul competency" grounded the Baptist conception of Scripture. With this notion, Mullins quested to cultivate a core Baptist identity.[26] To this end, he offered several descriptive phrases. First, mankind is created in God's image. Patterned after the *Imago Dei*, all humans possess the capability for communion with God. Mullins believed, "This relationship is exercised in a direct, personal, and individual way."[27] Second, soul competence is not human autonomy, but rather a synonym for the priesthood of believers. The priesthood represents the Godward expression of soul competency. Finally, soul competence includes "the right of private judgment as to the meaning of the Bible."[28] From this ideology Mullins derived his ecclesiology. As a child of God indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the competent church member should rule the church's affairs. Mullins stated, "Decisions of the local congregation on ecclesiastical matters are the 'consensus of the competent.'"[29] According to Mullins, this competence does not describe the church as a whole, but individuals within it. Later,

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S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), 335. Gregory Wills argues that Mullins "carried the torch" of the privatizing trends of the nineteenth century, thus perpetuating a decisive departure from the corporate concept of church competence in favor of a distinctively individual brand. Gregory A. Wills, *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1859-2009* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 231–32.

[25]Mullins, *Axioms of Religion*, 26. He did not treat the finer points of Baptist polity. He contended, "The attempt is rather to state our case in the light of primary and universal principles and to show the relation of the ordinances and polity to these principles."

[26]John Hammett points out that this term is first found in the work of E. Y. Mullins. John S. Hammett, "From Church Competence to Soul Competence: The Devolution of Baptist Ecclesiology" *Journal of Baptist Theology and Ministry* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 145. Also, Winthrop Hudson posited that this idea "was derived from the general cultural and religious climate of the nineteenth century rather than from any serious study of the Bible." Winthrop Still Hudson, "Shifting Patterns of Church Order in the Twentieth Century," *American Baptist Quarterly* 30, no. 3–4 (September 1, 1959): 215.

[27]Mullins, *Axioms of Religion*, 92-94.

[28]Hudson, "Shifting Patterns of Church Order in the Twentieth Century," 215.

[29]Mullins, *Axioms of Religion*, 56.

Mullins clarified, "The church is a community of autonomous individuals under the immediate Lordship of Christ held together by a social bond of common interest . . . . The church, therefore, is the expression of the paradoxical conception of the union of absolute monarchy and pure democracy."[30] Therefore, for Mullins, soul competence (complete autonomy of individuals within churches) undergirds and fuels any activity within or without the local church.[31] Soul competence sets the boundary for any ecclesiastical polity, which he described as a pure democracy (humanity) and an absolute monarchy (Christ). This conception offered the only suitable ecclesiological expression.[32]

Mullins' axioms provided entailments for the nature and purpose of Baptist connectionalism. He admitted, "No one will contest the desirability of cooperation for religious purposes on the part of individuals and churches and societies is highly desirable and fully in accord with the nature of Christianity, and not opposed to the teachings of the New Testament."[33] However, Mullins proclaimed that the voluntary principle must control all Baptist organization. This view proceeded directly from his view of soul competency, ushering in certain implications. The voluntary principle entails "no legislative or judicial functions left for general bodies to assume. The Scriptures are the rule of faith and practice, and discipline is remanded to the local church."[34] Thus, general organizations—any bodies outside the local church—should be strictly limited. Mullins deduced,

> They have no ends to serve save those of eliciting, combining, and directing the missionary, educational, or other forms of energy among the churches and smaller

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[30]Mullins, *Axioms of Religion*, 129.

[31]Holmes, *Baptist Theology*, 133. He also picks up on centrality of the Mullins' *Axiom*.

[32]Mullins, *Axioms of Religion*, 130–31.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Ibid., 213.

> societies, for the advancement of the kingdom of God on earth. In short, they are simply means of cooperation on entirely voluntary basis.[35]

Because each human is solely able to govern himself, any other connectional expression violates the voluntary principle.[36] This language was familiar to twentieth-century Baptists, as it was the basis for article 14 of the Baptist Faith and Message.[37] While many Baptists may not affirm the connectional limits yielded by Mullins' individualistic stance, this language directed the Southern Baptist posture toward connectionalism.[38]

**Response to Mullins' work.** What, then, serves as a proper assessment of Mullins' views—as they relate to the progression of Baptist associationalism in America? Mullins' axioms and their implications undercut traditional biblical categories and theological formulation. From a confessional perspective, Baptists had never restricted connectionalism to mere cooperation toward outward missions or educational activity. The early Baptist confessions held inter-church communion, as regulated in Scripture, in high esteem. While historical precedent does not guarantee biblical fidelity, Mullins' soul competency motif imports undue individualism situated outside the biblical text.[39] His

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[35]Mullins, *Axioms of Religion*, 213.

[36]This mindset led Mullins and later Baptists to reject any representative form of governance. He noted, "If representation is real it binds, and this is excluded by the religious and ecclesiastical axioms. It shifts general organization at once from a Baptist to a Presbyterian basis." Ibid., 216.

[37]As noted, Mullins was the chief framer of the 1925 document. The founders of the SBC also used the same language, observed in the Baptist Faith and Message, art. 14, in their initial documents. See Robert Andrew Baker, *A Baptist Source Book, with Particular Reference to Southern Baptists* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1966), 116. However—unlike Mullins—Furman, Fuller, Johnson, and their contemporaries were strongly confessional; they adhered closely to the 1689 Second London Confession of Faith.

[38]Chapman, "Axioms of a Cooperating Southern Baptist." This article illustrates an adoption of the connectional limits set forth by Mullins. Chapman calls for Baptists to disregard "connectionalism" because it creates confusion regarding local church autonomy. Chap. 6 will address this source in greater detail.

[39]Hammett points out that Mullins offered a disclaimer that soul competence entails competence under God, not competence in the sense of human self-sufficiency; unfortunately, however, Mullins rarely referenced this helpful nuance when he described the term. For this reason, Mullins conflated "soul competency" and the "priesthood of the believers." Hammett, "Church Competence to Soul Competence," 159. Holmes adds, "Soul competency is not language one can imagine Helwys, Williams, or Backus using, and not language that—to the best of my knowledge—is found in any pre-1900 mainstream Baptist statement." Holmes, *Baptist Theology*, 133–34.

view seems to conceive a Baptist vision for church polity that ascends American democracy, impacted by the Enlightenment, as the noblest vision for humanity.[40] Humphreys asserts, "He was intoxicated by personal freedom, even by personal rights—a category which owes more to the Enlightenment than to the New Testament—even to the loss of the indispensability of sociality and social relationships for personal life."[41] While Mullins attempted to provide a mediating approach between confessionalism and individual freedom, he created a false dichotomy.[42] Mullins believed that Baptists are not creed-makers because "the Scriptures are a sufficient revelation of his will."[43] To this end, creeds "become barriers to the free development of personality in religion" when their adherence replaces the personal dimension of the God/man relationship.[44] This posture leads Tom Nettles to assert, "His [Mullins] heightened emphasis on the superiority of experience to creed, his clear warning about the dangers of creeds, and the vivid images he evoked in speaking of their oppressive use tended to neutralize their advantages as instruments of education, definition, and discipline."[45] Thus, confessionalism encroached upon personal freedom. Nettles also considers Mullins' impact on Baptist life:

> Neither his paradigm for epistemology nor his treatment of biblical authority, confessional unity, and divine sovereignty had cohesive power. Though often scintillating, their highly individualized implications created an atmosphere in which unity could only center on function and organization and not theology. Definition of 'Baptist' had less and less to do with doctrine and more to do with the correlation of spheres of freedom. His system seemed more congenial to the well-

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[40]Holmes, *Baptist Theology*, 135.

[41]Humphreys, "E. Y. Mullins," 346.

[42]Tom J. Nettles, *The Baptists: Key People Involved in Forming a Baptist Identity*, vol. 3, *The Modern Era* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2007), 218.

[43]Mullins, *Axioms of Religion*, 146.

[44]E. Y. Mullins, *Freedom and Authority in Religion* (Philadelphia: Griffith and Rowland, 1913), 302. See also Nettles, *Baptists*, 3:218.

[45]Nettles, *Baptists*, 3:218.

> developed modernism of the day than it did to a Baptist identity built on Scripture as a regulative principle.[46]

In summary, Mullins affected the identity of Baptists in the twentieth century.[47] He diminished doctrinal conviction. While he fostered a self-identified personal freedom, he seated religious authority within each individual believer's interpretation and preference, and undercut functional authority beyond one's own person. Thus, connectionalism that stimulates inter-church communion sits outside Mullins' ecclesiological conception.

## Inter-Church Connection: Association that Maintains Local Church Independence

### Biblical Foundations: Christ's New Covenant Priesthood Entails Independent Local Bodies

The Philadelphia tradition adhered to a biblical and Baptist principle—local church independence. The linguistic significance of *ekklesia* flows from its first-century application. The term indicates an "assembly" or gathered citizens.[48] Stanley Grenz asserts, "The early Christians found in this term a helpful means for expressing their self-consciousness. They saw themselves as a people called together by the proclamation of the gospel for the purpose of belonging to God through Christ."[49] The New Testament offers multiple presentations of the church body. The term signifies local churches, a collection of the people of God on earth, or a reference to the universal church throughout history.[50]

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[46]Nettles, *Baptists*, 3:232.

[47]For example, we can observe Mullins' impact in Shurden's core understanding of Baptist identity as "soul freedom." While Shurden affirmed a place for communal discipleship, he is quite sympathetic to an Enlightenment conception of freedom of conscience, viewing it as a core Baptist belief. Walter B. Shurden, "The Baptist Identity and the Baptist Manifesto," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 25, no. 4 (1998): 321–40. Nettles recognizes Shurden's dependence on Mullins' understanding of freedom. He also points out that Shurden seems to misunderstand Calvinism's conception of freedom through the example of Obadiah Holmes. Nettles, *Baptists*, 3:221.

[48]Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 465.

[49]Ibid.

[50]These passages present *ekklesia* as a singular congregation or plurality of local churches.

Local church independence flows from a regenerate church structure, shaped by the realities of the New Covenant. Gregg Allison offers four fundamental aspects that define the New Covenant community and correspond with the reality of Christ's church. First, the New Covenant is unilateral; God establishes this sacred bond. 1 Peter 1:20 proclaims that Christ's work was foreknown before the foundation of the world. This work coincides with God's eternal plan. Secondly, the New Covenant enacted a structured relationship between God and his people.[51] What characteristics define this group? Allison puts forth,

> There are Christ followers who heard the gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, repented of their sins, embraced Jesus Christ by faith, were baptized in the name of the triune God, received forgiveness for their sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and were incorporated into the church of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:22-47).[52]

From this New Covenant reality, these characteristics mirror one's journey from an unregenerate individual to an adopted member of Christ's corporate body.

God bestows this new covenant community with a new leadership framework. To this end, Christ is the head and mediator of his New Covenant church. Ephesians 5:25-27 teaches that Christ purchased his church with his own blood. He built his church (Matt 16:18) and stands as its chief foundation and cornerstone (1 Cor 3:11). Christ serves as the Chief Shepherd over his redeemed flock (Eph 2:20; 1 Pet 5:4).[53] This New

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The following passages show the singular form: Acts 5:11, 8:1, 11:22, 26, 12:1-5, 13:1, 14:27, 15:3, 4, 22, 18:22, 20:17; Rom 16:1, 5; 1 Cor 1:2, 6:4; 2 Cor 1:1; Col 4:15-16, 17-19; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; Phlm 2; 3 John 6:9-10; Rev 2:1, 8, 12, 18, 3:1, 7, 14. The following passages show the plural form: Acts 15:41; 1 Cor 16:1; 2 Cor 8:1, 19, 11:8; Gal 1:2, 22; 1 Thess 2:14; Rev 1:11, 2:7, 11, 17, 29, 3:6. Baptist theologian Edwin Charles Dargan stated that these passages clearly refer to one domain or the other. Edwin Charles Dargan, *Ecclesiology: A Study of the Churches* (Louisville, KY: C. T. Dearing, 1905), 40. Additionally, Grenz adopted three terms to describe the church (1) the mystical church describes the body of Christ throughout all ages; (2) the universal church stands as a collection of all Christians on earth; and (3) the local church designates a local community of believers. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 468. It is helpful to delineate time and space, as well as geographical location.

[51]Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 78.

[52]Ibid.

[53]Stephen J. Wellum and Kurk Wellum, "The Biblical and Theological Case for Congregationalism," in *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age*, ed. Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman (Nashville: B and H Academic, 2015), 62–63.

Covenant reality entails that Christ serves as his church's only mediator. This direct relationship impedes "any human mediators between God and his redeemed people."[54] Believers enjoy direct access to their divine mediator. Stephen Wellum says, "No doubt, the apostles served as Christ's chosen instruments to interpret the Old Testament, to write the New Testament, and to pass on the gospel that had been given. Yet their authority rested not in themselves but in the triune God who acted in and through them . . . . In no way did they function as mediators or dispensers of grace."[55] Even the apostles—perhaps the most authoritative voices in the early church—did not serve a mediatorial function between Christ and his church—this falls to Christ alone. The local church represents the most concrete expression of God's covenant people. Concurrently, the local church receives its existence from its connection to and participation in the greater manifestation of God's people. Grenz offers,

> Each congregation is nothing less than the local reality of the one church. Therefore, each local church is the church of Jesus Christ in miniature. Because the local expression is the church of Jesus Christ in miniature, all the lofty phrases used in the New Testament of 'the church' are to be true of each congregation of believers.[56]

Thus, the Scriptures support the assertion that each local church sits under the authority of Jesus Christ; the chief shepherd grants each local congregation authority to govern its own affairs.

**Baptist Doctrinal Affirmation**

Baptists have long affirmed the independence of local churches under the lordship of Jesus Christ. The 1689 Second London Confession asserted, "The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, in whom by the appointment of the Father, all power for

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[54]Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 281.

[55]Wellum and Wellum, "Biblical and Theological Case for Congregationalism," 63–64.

[56]Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 467–68.

the calling, institution, order, or Government of the Church, is invested in a supream (sic) and sovereign manner (Article 4)."[57] Christ bestows his church as a local and visible manifestation, as seen in article 5 of the Confession: "Those thus called he commandeth to walk together in particular societies or churches, for their mutual edification."[58] Additionally, these local communities walk together "visibly manifesting and evidencing their obedience to the call of Christ (article 6)."[59] Christ had bestowed each gathered church the power they needed to carry out his command, according to article seven.[60]

Article 6 of the Baptist Faith and Message affirms the following definition of the church: "An autonomous local congregation of baptized believers . . . operating under the lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord."[61] From these assertions, congregationalism—within a Southern Baptist framework—is grounded upon two foundational concepts. First, independence, meaning a local church is self-governing; second, democracy, meaning that church authority is situated in its individual members. These redeemed members all have responsibility for congregational decisions through a democratic procedure.[62]

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[57]Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 284.

[58]Ibid., 285.

[59]Ibid.

[60]Ibid.

[61]This quote is from the Baptist Faith and Message 2000. It is nearly identical to the 1963 version. However, this definition is quite expanded from the original 1925 work. For insight regarding the differences between the first and second BFM see Herschel H. Hobbs, "Southern Baptists and Confessionalism: A Comparison of the Origins and Contents of the 1925 and 1963 Confessions," *Review and Expositor* 76, no. 1 (1979): 55–68.

[62]Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 277. However, this conception of congregational authority differs from the individualistic brand conceived by Mullins. While churches are democratic, they affirm the priesthood of the believer. Baptists have historically affirmed outside doctrinal authority (confessions), as well as other biblical forms of ecclesiological authority within the local church, namely local church elders. Hammett provides a helpful delineation when he presents the differences between "church competency" as opposed to "soul competency." Hammett, "Church Competence to Soul Competence."

Baptists believe this ecclesial framework represents authentic apostolic practice. In concert with church tradition stemming from the Patristic age, Baptists affirm each gathered church as a visible manifestation of Christ's redeemed community, seated under the headship of their divine mediator. This local community breaks bread together in memory of Christ's death, and anticipates his return.[63] In summation, Holmes writes, "The principle of the independence of the local church is the claim that a particular congregation needs nothing beyond itself to be a true church of Christ."[64] From their origins, Baptists have affirmed a biblically informed emphasis upon the independence of each local congregation.

**Philadelphia Tradition Continuity with Baptist Affirmation**

Throughout their history, Baptists have emphasized the importance of local church independence. From its earliest days, the Philadelphia Baptist Association valued the authority of each local congregation. From its adherence to the Second London Confession to its 1749 Associational Statement of Discipline, the churches of the Philadelphia Association protected this ecclesial conviction. As chapter 2 illustrates, the Association ceased to advise member churches without their consent. Seeming to overstep this boundary in 1800, the Association saw fit to "take up a matter of consequence introduced by an individual member."[65] Five years later, the Association recognized the imprudence of this procedure. They dismissed an individual's request, and added the following, "Cannot take up a question that relates to an individual member of any church without interfering with the independence of such church."[66] In an effort to

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[63]Holmes, *Baptist Theology*, 97.

[64]Ibid., 104.

[65]A. D. Gillette, ed., *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, 1707 to 1807: Being the First One Hundred Years of Its Existence* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2002), 349.

[66]Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 349.

protect local church independence, the Philadelphia Association voluntarily corrected its action.[67] Local church autonomy remained a central aspect of Baptist life throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

**Philadelphia Tradition Discontinuity with Position**

As mentioned, Baptist associations of the Philadelphia tradition continually protected local church independence. However, this reality does not entail that churches refused to grant authority to other denominational bodies. In Benjamin Griffith's 1749 essay, he stated that associations possessed ingrained power: independent entities responsible for upholding doctrinal benchmarks, and retaining the right to regulate certain groups from their assembly.[68] The Philadelphia Association grounded this power in the granted consent of member churches, which also affirmed confessional standards. However, the association possessed no right to regulate a local church's existence, regardless of doctrinal failure or congregational disunity. Griffith grounded these powers in the example of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, and he rightly surmised that the council rightfully disavowed erroneous teachers (Acts 15:25); they also delivered warnings to other churches. In addition, this Council possessed power—grounded in doctrinal truth—to declare a person or church defective or disorderly in their practices. All of these activities fall within a congregational ecclesiology.[69]

As the Baptist denominational structure flourished in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, churches delegated authority to denominational entities, in addition to the local

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[67]The response to Priest in the following section will offer more examples to this end.

[68]Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 59.

[69]However, in order to better reflect the biblical expression, the PBA's 1749 treatise would have benefitted from clarified language. In Acts 15, the Jerusalem Council was not an established body, but rather a temporary fixture put forth by multiple churches in order to provide accountability and council. In order to draw complete symmetry with the biblical mandate, Griffith could have explained differences between a temporary council (illustrated in Scripture) and a permanent association (not directly mentioned).

association. As chapter 3 explains, some Baptists in the nineteenth century, especially those in New England, feared that a central denominational structure would undercut the power bestowed upon local churches. However, Furman, Staughton, and other denominational sympathizers assured Baptists that local authority would remain central.

From its outset in 1845, the Southern Baptist Convention's conception of local church centrality did not negate authority for denominational groups outside the local church. Akin to Griffith's 1749 associational ideas, each Southern Baptist organization possesses organizational authority.[70] However, Andrew Christopher Smith contends that denominational centralization—catalyzed by the Seventy-Five Million Campaign, the formation of the Executive Committee, and the like—produced a "system of reward and coercion to ensure that churches, pastors, and laypeople would meet [the Convention's] financial obligations."[71] While outside the bounds of this study, Smith offers a compelling case worthy of further engagement. Perhaps the Convention's model—whether unknowingly or otherwise—threatened church independence. Notwithstanding Smith's argument, Southern Baptists have continually strove to protect each church's right to govern and operate freely.

Recent activity within Southern Baptist life provides an intriguing example of the relationship between SBC churches and its denominational entity. This example reveals that local churches possess considerable power within this context. During the 2016 American presidential election, Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) President, Russell Moore, emerged as one of the most consistent

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[70]William Wright Barnes, *The Southern Baptist Convention, 1845-1953* (Nashville: B and H Academic, 1954), 250.

[71]Andrew Christopher Smith, *Fundamentalism, Fundraising, and the Transformation of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1919-1925* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2016), 133. He adds that this reality is what Mullins had hinted in *Axioms of Religion*: denominational workers would be "bishops in all but name, leaders whose job was to increase the 'efficiency' of local churches and to spread the gospel of stewardship and denominational loyalty."

and out-spoken adversaries of Republican nominee, Donald Trump. Moore criticized Trump's moral character, and sharply questioned many Evangelical Christians who supported the nominee. This posture irritated some Southern Baptist church leaders. Jack Graham, senior pastor of the 40,000-member Prestonwood Baptist Church in Texas, noted that his church "considered making major changes in our support of the Southern Baptist Convention."[72] To this end, on February 17, 2017, Graham and the church withheld all designated contributions ($1 million) from the Convention's Cooperative Program.[73] According to an article in *Baptist Press*, these actions stemmed from "various significant positions taken by the leadership of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission that do not reflect the beliefs and values of many in the Southern Baptist Convention."[74] Similarly, Robert Jeffress, lead pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, stated that his church was, like others, "always looking at the wisest expenditures of its dollars."[75] While the full effects of these actions have yet to be determined, they reveal that churches within a centralized SBC structure openly question institutional decisions and stand compelled to take unilateral action contrary to denominational desires.

**Interaction: Was the Philadelphia Association a Superior Authority over the Churches?**

In 2007, Baptist historian Gerald Priest authored an essay, "The Philadelphia Baptist Association and the Question of Authority." Priest posits that early American

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[72]Ian Lovett, "Baptist Figure Faces Backlash over His Criticism of Donald Trump," *Wall Street Journal*, December 19, 2016, accessed February 13, 2017, https://www.wsj.com/articles/baptist-figure-faces-backlash-over-his-criticism-of-donald-trump-1482162791.

[73]This action is significant because rather than withholding funds from the entity in question, Prestonwood chose to withhold funds from all other denominational entities (state convention, colleges, seminaries, and the like).

[74]David Roach, "Prestonwood Escrows CP funds, Cites ERLC Actions," *Baptist Press*, February, 2016, accessed February 20, 2017, http://bpnews.net/48364/prestonwood-escrows-cp-funds-cites-erlc-actions.[74]

[75]Lovett, "Baptist Figure Faces Backlash over His Criticism of Donald Trump."

Baptist associations, beginning with the PBA, assumed a great deal of power while they claimed to uphold the independence of the local assembly. While this reality might suggest a power struggle, a remarkably harmonious relationship existed between the association and the member churches. Priest says,

> Indeed, these churches willingly conceded certain powers to the association for resolving issues which they had the prerogative to decide independently of any external arbiter. In other words, they relied on the judgment of a body outside of themselves for direction and mediation, deferring frequently and submissively to the direction of the association.

He argues that this reality reveals two major themes: "(1) Early American Baptist congregations were not purely autonomous as their polity statements would suggest; (2) they were willing to live with the tension of a two-tiered ecclesiastical authority—the one local, the other associational."[76] The Philadelphia Association was considered an advisory body, but rather it possessed hierarchical features akin to Presbyterianism, wherein a synod of elders make decisions on behalf of the churches.[77] The PBA existed as an autonomous entity that could censure and remove member churches; it practically functioned as a hovering entity that imposed a denominational agenda upon these churches. This stipulation undercut local church autonomy.[78] To this end, the relationship between the Association and the churches mirrored a parent-child relationship; they

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[76]Gerald L. Priest, "The Philadelphia Baptist Association and the Question of Authority," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 12, no. 1 (Fall 2007), 71.

[77]Using the PBA as a case study, Priest's method is as follows (1) he notes various factors that led to the formation of the association; (2) he observes the paternal role the PBA assumes in relation to its own members and other Associations; (3) Priest examines the criteria colonial Baptists themselves used to the justify associationalism (practical, biblical, and theological); and finally, (4) he argues whether associationalism is a valid means of Baptist ecclesiology. As it pertains to this chapter, the discussion will center on point two in order to illustrate the nature of the association's power and authority in relation to the churches.

[78]Later in this essay, Priest cites the precedent of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 to illustrate that intervention from sister churches is suitable; however, these arrangements should function occasionally rather than permanently. He believes a permanent arrangement undercuts local church autonomy. Priest concludes, "Such an arrangement compromises, to some degree, the capability and responsibility of the local assembly to exercise a prerogative assigned to it by the New Testament." Priest, "Philadelphia Baptist Association and the Question of Authority," 73.

served a judiciary and authoritative purpose.[79] Through their advisory power, the PBA censured member churches and excluded those who did not heed its advice. Priest opines,

> Moreover, what was normally an exclusive right of the local church, i.e., the determination of its membership, was indirectly controlled by the PBA. For example, the PBA ruled that it would receive no church which admitted into its membership a Paedo-Baptist, or anyone denying unconditional election, original sin, and perseverance of the saints. Obviously, this meant that if a Baptist Church wanted to be a member of the PBA it had to adopt the same requirements for its own membership. Likewise, the administration of church discipline and the selection of ministers, normal functions of the local church, were frequently determined by PBA action.[80]

He surmises that there are at least three reasons why member churches were so ready to conform to associational decisions. He states,

> First, they were willing to defer to ministers of intellectual and spiritual stature whose wisdom they considered an expression of God's will. Second, a majority decision would exert pressure to conform . . . . Third, the risk of being dropped from membership and forfeiting the assistance which the PBA afforded its members encouraged compliance. Associational policies would serve as a doctrinal and moral safeguard but at the expense of local church autonomy. It is apparent, therefore, that denominational life resided in the association not the congregation.[81]

Priest believes circular letters and required reports by member churches infringed on local church autonomy. While they provided valuable information on numerical statistics and spiritual health, they also portrayed a semblance of doctrinal accountability and denominational loyalty. Such statements as "we maintain the order we were established in" or "we continue in the faith" aimed toward "parental" approval of a member church's

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[79]He argues that this model was inherited from the centralized polity found in English and Welsh Particular Baptist polity. In addition to considerable power over the churches, these associations practically functioned as denominational heads. Priest cites Shurden, to argue that an association's power was most exerted through their advisory function. See Walter B. Shurden, "Associationalism among Baptists in America, 1707-1814" (ThD thesis, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1967), 135.

[80]Priest, "Philadelphia Baptist Association and the Question of Authority," 62. Priest cites the same passage from 1766-1767 referenced in the above section. He states that the correction from "appeal" to "advise" was merely a semantic change that did not affect the result. Priest notes that individual pastors and members continued to appeal directly to the association. He cites Shurden's claim that the PBA perceived this process as perfectly compatible with their confession, though it seemed to oppose Baptist belief of local church regulations. Shurden, "Associationalism among Baptists in America," 155-56.

[81]Priest, "Philadelphia Baptist Association and the Question of Authority," 64.

belief and behavior.[82] Furthermore, he notes that if member churches departed from the Association they were expected to request dismissal, joining another group "*only* if the PBA granted permission [emphasis added]."[83] In summary, Priest surmises that the Philadelphia Association exerted authority upon member churches in three areas: doctrinal commitment, ministerial dependence, as well as various ecclesiastical matters. This authority mirrored a parent-child relationship between the PBA and member church, as well as other associations, respectively.

**Response to Priest.** Priest's assertions seem to reflect an incomplete consideration of the Philadelphia Association's relationship with, and posture toward, conjoining churches. On one hand, it is impossible to discount that the Philadelphia Baptist Association held considerable influence among member churches.[84] On the other hand, historians should recount specific safeguards set forth by the Association, as well as the Association's corrective behavior when it was perceived to "over-step" its self-imposed boundaries. To this end, Priest's critique could benefit from more robust interaction with Philadelphia's attempts to protect local church independence. These instances are absent from Priest's article.

As chapter 2 emphasizes, the Philadelphia Association took specific action to maintain authority within local churches. Griffith's 1749 work explicitly elucidated the limitations of associational power. While the Association maintained engrained power to

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[82]Priest, "Philadelphia Baptist Association and the Question of Authority," 64.

[83]Ibid., 65. Priest also cites a 1782 interchange wherein the Philadelphia church conformed to the PBA's "unanimous recommendation" to excommunicate forty-six members who espoused universalism.

[84]In his work regarding the English churches in the Delaware Valley from 1680 to 1730, Jon Butler surmises that the Philadelphia Baptist Association created an egalitarian atmosphere that promoted healthy church discussions, centered upon mutual care and advice. He argues that the PBA remained true to its inherited tradition, rather than authoritarian tendencies akin to other denominations within the Delaware Valley region. Jon Butler, *Power, Authority, and the Origins of American Denominational Order: The English Churches in the Delaware Valley, 1680-1730* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009), 75–93.

disassociate delinquent or doctrinally unsound churches, the Association possessed no ability to alter their status as a church of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, not only did churches consent to join the assembly, they also unanimously approved this document during the 1749 annual meeting. Furthermore, the association proved to uphold local church authority in practice. For example, in 1739 a member church thought the word "advise" might signal over-reach. In response, the Association deferred to the church's authority to alter the Association's relationship with member churches. Priest also objects to the PBA determining "normal functions of the local church," viewing this as an exercise in undue authority.[85] In the case Priest mentions—a 1775 instance involving the Church at Coram—the Association responded to the church's request for pastoral aid following their pastor's death. Following this aid, the church desired that the Association ordain Ebenezer Ward, the church's faithful itinerate minister. The Association claimed no such right; this responsibility fell to the church alone.[86]

Beneath the surface, however, lies a central distinction between Priest and the eighteenth-century Philadelphia Baptist Association. Priest's critique reveals a fundamental difference related to the nature of authority, especially in regard to confessionalism. The Philadelphia Association situated their authority to council churches within the confines of their confession of faith. For this reason, the PBA and the churches involved did not consider this kind of action as an infringement upon church authority. Instead, this action illustrated and maintained the assembly's doctrinal fidelity. Priest's conception of authority—outside influence or advise creates a subordinate relationship—seems more akin to Mullins' "soul competency" than confessional Baptist connectionalism that welcomes inter-church aid and support.

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[85]Priest, "Philadelphia Baptist Association and the Question of Authority," 62.

[86]Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 149.

## Inter-Church Connection: Cooperation toward the Church's Mission

Before Christ ascended to the right hand of his Heavenly Father, the Lord commanded his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations, to baptize, and teach them all that he had commanded them (Matt 28:28-30). In turn, as his apostles established local manifestations of the body of Christ throughout various regions, these local churches ultimately multiplied to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth. The biblical text reveals considerable cooperative ministry between churches and individuals. In Acts 8, the Jerusalem church sent Peter and John to aid Philip in his work among Gentiles. Phillip did not perceive the Jerusalem church's action as an intrusion, but rather welcomed their gracious aid. The apostles did not remain with Philip to manage the work, but rather returned to the church in Jerusalem to share about the work among the Gentiles.[87] Acts 11:20-22 highlights a flourishing ministry in Antioch that compelled the Jerusalem church to send Barnabas to participate in the work, since he was a Cypriot Jew (Acts 4:36-37).[88] Upon arrival, Barnabas encouraged these believers and brought even more to faith in Christ.[89] After this experience, Barnabas journeyed to Antioch to labor with Paul. While the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas—like Peter and Paul before him—they did not direct the ministry efforts in the other city.[90] These men, with their church's blessing, offered welcomed assistance, cooperating with another congregation's missionary effort.

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[87]Chad Owen Brand, "Cooperation," in *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000: Critical Issues in America's Largest Protestant Denomination*, ed. Douglas K. Blount and Joseph D. Wooddell (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 146.

[88]Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 1079. Darrell Bock also makes this point. See Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 415.

[89]Bock, *Acts*, 415. Bock points out Barnabas' commendable ability to promote maturity in others and unite the churches he served.

[90]Brand, "Cooperation," 146. Brand aptly surmises that the apostles would not have been likely to have recommended Barnabas to include Paul in this work, as Paul did not have a positive reputation in that city (Acts 9:26).

The New Testament also provides several examples of cooperative financial support for churches in need. In Acts 11, Paul and Barnabas collected funds from the church in Antioch to give the church at Jerusalem. During Paul's third missionary journey, he again advocated for the believers in Jerusalem in each letter written during that journey (Rom 15:26; 1 Cor 16:1-2; 2 Cor 8-9). Paul requested the help of every Christian church in his purview to aid the saints in Jerusalem.[91]

Early churches also shared ministry responsibilities. While Timothy hailed from Lystra, he served in nearby Iconium, in addition to his home church. Paul recruited Timothy's aid in his ministry to multiple churches throughout Asia Minor. Through their efforts, "The churches were being strengthened" (Acts 16:5).[92] Additionally, in Troas, Luke joined Paul and following their trip to Macedonia, Luke remained in Philippi to support the church while Paul continued on to Thessalonica. Regarding this sequence, Chad Brand observes, "Paul likely left Luke there so he could help the church—which now included Lydia, the Philippian jailer, and others—grow and achieve stability."[93] Through these examples it is clear that churches assisted one another in joint efforts. They commissioned missionaries and supported efforts outside their own local body to enact Christ's mandate to take his gospel to the ends of the earth.

**Baptist Affirmation**

While early Baptist confessional documents of this era did not address cooperation to advance Christ's gospel, Baptists affirmed a brand of connectionalism that

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[91]Chad Owen Brand, "Toward a Theology of Cooperation," in *The Mission of Today's Church: Baptist Leaders Look at Modern Faith Issues*, ed. Ed Stetzer and Daniel Akin (Nashville: B and H Pub., 2013), 169.

[92]Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 667. He points out that this growth demonstrated that the Jews and Gentiles were planting healthy churches together, despite their past disputes over circumcision.

[93]Brand, "Toward a Theology of Cooperation," 170. See also I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 275.

spurred "the furtherance of the gospel and the interest of Christ to the world."[94] Specific figures and events catapulted Christ's mission to the forefront of Baptist life. Chapter 3 considers the effort of the evangelical English Baptists who spurred worldwide missionary efforts. The General Missionary Convention—fueled by Carey, Judson, Rice, and others—galvanized Baptists toward this sacred endeavor. To this end, Nettles states, "Virtually every manifestation of society-type and denominational-type missions can trace its origin to ripples proceeding from the Carey/Fuller plunge into an attempt to convert the heathen."[95] Nettles also affirms,

> It would not be an exaggeration to say that Baptists were elated that their age had seen the recovery of worldwide missionary efforts. Carey and Judson alike were true heroes in Baptist households, and every published correspondence was greeted by earnest and eager readers. Baptists felt blessed that God, in His Providence, had moved in that generation again to take the gospel to the nations.[96]

This cooperative effort reveals the desire and action of Baptists in America. The desire to bring Christ's gospel to those who might never hear it fueled Baptist denominational expansion during the early nineteenth century.

With the emergence of mission agencies, Baptists continually affirmed cooperation as a divine mandate bestowed on the church.[97] Hammett argues,

> The mission and divine commission given to the universal church are thus given in a special sense to the local churches as representations or 'embodiments' of the universal church. Local churches may share that mission with other groups, but cannot surrender it to them, for that would involve an implicit rejection of the commission given to them by their Lord.[98]

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[94]Hudson, "Documents on the Association of Churches," 334. Hudson references the Philadelphia Association's Discipline of 1743.

[95]Tom J. Nettles, *A Foundation for the Future: The Southern Baptist Message and Mission* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 1997), 28.

[96]Ibid. He adds that great unity of purpose toward missions existed in the mid-nineteenth century, both in the North and South.

[97]Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 890.

[98]Hammett, "Selected Parachurch Groups and Southern Baptists," 141.

The Baptist connectional tradition, especially the Philadelphia strand, affirmed a harmonious relationship between the universal and local manifestations of Christ's church. While God's great commission call terminates upon each local church, Baptist churches express their connection with the broader church body by partnering together to expand God's kingdom.[99]

Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, the issue of slavery separated many Americans. While this issue perpetuated a fissure between Northern and Southern Baptists, missionary fervor continued to flourish within the Philadelphia tradition in the South. When regional separation became a reality, the Virginia Baptist Foreign Mission Society called their Southern brethren to meet in Augusta, Georgia in May of 1845.[100] The meeting's central purpose was to organize a plan to direct the energies of the whole denomination toward "one sacred effort, for the propagation of the gospel."[101] This mindset yielded the words of the Baptist Faith and Message, first penned in 1925. Article 25 avowed, "It is the duty of Christ's people to pray and labor continually that his kingdom may come and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven."[102] Article 23 declared, "It is the duty of every Christian man and woman, and the duty of every church of Christ to seek to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth . . . . Missionary effort on the part of all rests thus upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life."[103] These statements have remained virtually unchanged through multiple iterations of the Baptist Faith and Message.[104]

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[99]The Second London Confession illustrates this relationship between the local and universal church. See chap. 4 of this dissertation.

[100]Nettles, *Foundation for the Future*, 30.

[101]Baker, *Baptist Source Book*, 116.

[102]Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 414.

[103]Ibid., 414-15.

[104]Douglas K. Blount and Joseph D. Wooddell, eds. *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000: Critical Issues in America's Largest Protestant Denomination* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield,

**PBA Tradition Continuity and Development Regarding Position**

Prior to the closing decades of the eighteenth century, most Baptist expansion and advancement occurred within the Britain Isles and into England's young colony across the Atlantic Ocean.[105] As shown, this aspect of Baptist life garnered increased emphasis during the closing decades of the eighteenth century. Philadelphia Baptists affirmed the advancement of Christ's gospel by fulfilling the mission mandate. As chapter 2 notes, in 1771, prominent Philadelphia Baptist Morgan Edwards urged the PBA to commission missionaries to preach throughout the American colonies. The following year, they sponsored missionary efforts to the Western Indian tribes in 1772; they sent another churchman to the Ohio frontier in 1792.[106] The Philadelphia Association played a prominent role in the advance of world mission efforts; the work of Carey, Fuller, and the Particular Baptist Mission Society in England inspired the PBA to take bold action.[107] The 1807 centennial sermon illustrated rising missionary fervor. Proclaiming the words of Isaiah 59:2-3, Samuel Jones exhorted Philadelphia Baptists to expand Christ's gospel to those who had never heard, both on their continent and across the world.[108] Jones'

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2007), 216–18.

[105]Within the seventeenth and eighteenth-century English Particular Baptist context, it is impossible to escape Hyper-Calvinism dampened Baptist evangelism and missions. For a good discussion of this topic, see David J. Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel: An Examination of the Well-Meant Gospel Offer*, rev. ed. (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Pub., 1994). See also, Michael A. G. Haykin, *A Cloud of Witnesses: Calvinistic Baptists in the Eighteenth Century*, ET Perspectives 3 (Darlington, England: Evangelical Times, 2006).

[106]A. D. Gillette, ed., *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, 1707 to 1807: Being the First One Hundred Years of Its Existence* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2002), 283. This is also mentioned in chap. 2 of this dissertation.

[107]Douglas Sweeney points out the significance of Jonathan Edwards' 1749 work, *The Life of David Brainard* upon the spread of Protestant missions. Detailing Brainard's courageous work upon the American Indians inspired Fuller, Carey, and the English Particular Baptists toward global missionary consciousness. Douglas A. Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story: A History of the Movement* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 86–87.

[108]See chap. 2 of this dissertation, under "Missionary Endeavors."

commemorative sermon signaled a rising interest that captivated Baptists for generations to come.[109]

**Interaction: Biblical Cooperation Grounded in the Local Church**

In 2014, Southern Baptists appointed David Platt to lead its International Mission Board. The denomination tasked Platt to enact the vision and determine the priorities of this key mission agency for a new generation. Leading such a large institution, one is tempted, in Platt's words, "To put the denomination, or missions organization, in the front and center position."[110] This mindset yields a top-down approach wherein some perceive that the denomination exists to identity, equip, and send missionaries. Conversely, churches merely send willing candidates along with their generous donations. In addition, this institutionally driven approach drifts from the biblical mandate. Platt contends,

> The local church is God's chosen agent for the accomplishment of the Great Commission. Christ's commission is not going to be completed primarily by individuals, conventions, or even missionary organizations like the IMB, but by local churches that are making disciples and multiplying churches. Therefore the IMB must be driven by a steadfast desire to serve local churches here and around the world.[111]

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[109]Much debate has ensued regarding the roots of the rise of this Evangelical revival among Protestants, which marshaled the rise of Evangelicalism. Scholars have made compelling cases for the continuity between the Evangelical revival and sixteenth-century Puritanism. See especially, Ian Stewart, "The Evangelical Revival through the Eyes of the 'Evangelical Century': Nineteenth-Century Perceptions of the Origins of Evangelicalism," in *The Advent of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart (Nashville: B and H Academic, 2008), 302–23. Stewart traces these connections among major British Protestant denominations. He builds upon David Bebbington's thesis that Evangelicalism cannot be dismissed as an "anti-intellectual or irrational response to the Enlightenment." Stewart, "Evangelical Revival," 322. However, Stewart provides a more resounding conclusion than Bebbington's passive assessment. Stewart proclaims, "From high Calvinist to Arminian, Anglican to Dissenter, they believed it was a time of renewal, and re-emphasis, but not origination." Stewart, "Evangelical Revival," 323. For Bebbington's view, see David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, new ed. (New York: Routledge, 1989), 34–35. Noll argues similarly. Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 48–54.

[110]David Platt, "The Future of the IMB and Our Collaborative Great Commission Work," in *The SBC and the Twenty-First Century: Reflection, Renewal, & Recommitment*, ed. Jason K. Allen (Nashville: B and H, 2016), 175.

[111]Platt, "The Future of the IMB," 173.

Echoing cooperation efforts observed in the New Testament, while also countering a top-down tendency, Platt reminds readers that God commissioned churches to multiply gospel efforts. Furthermore, Platt envisions a vibrant partnership between the IMB and proactive local churches. He says,

> When local churches are taking responsibility for global mission, what is needed is not a denominational organization to do mission for them, but a powerful relational network that facilitates and maximizes all they are doing together. In the end mission is ultimately achieved through the avenue God has ordained for its accomplishment: the local church.[112]

Platt's vision for the denomination's mission efforts echoes the church-centered approach to cooperation familiar to Baptists across history. Akin to the biblical text, Platt calls for Baptists to graciously defer to the prerogative and responsibility of local churches. The IMB exists, he rightly claims, to partner with more than 50,000 member churches throughout the denomination. The organization must worship, fast, pray, and lead churches to send and shepherd churches throughout the world. In concert, he postulates, "As disciples are made and churches are multiplied among unreached peoples, the IMB then exists to serve those new churches with a view toward mission."[113] All in all, Platt projects a future in which denominational entities serve the needs of local Baptist churches. Rather than mere efforts to promote and expand an institutional agenda, Platt presents a biblically aligned and confessionally affirmed vision for a united and worldwide cooperation to fulfill Christ's great commission.

## Conclusion

This chapter assesses the trajectory of Baptist associations within the Philadelphia tradition as related to the nature and purpose of church connection within Scripture and Baptist theology. The progression offered a measure of continuity;

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[112]Ibid., 175.

[113]Ibid., 176.

however, in regard to communion among churches, nineteenth and twentieth-century Baptists departed somewhat from their doctrinal and practical heritage. Additionally, as the denomination grew, it sought to maintain local church authority and freedom. Furthermore, following the late eighteenth-century Baptists, the denomination deeply valued cooperation toward the advancement of Christ's gospel. This cooperation—as expressed by the International Mission Board's renewed focus—is seated within a biblically sound inter-church relationship. The following chapter will offer a constructive theological treatment of Baptist associationalism in light of its history and trajectory.

# CHAPTER 6

# TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF SOUTHERN BAPTIST ASSOCIATIONALISM

## Introduction

This project considers the history of Baptist associationalism through the lens of the Philadelphia Baptist Association. Founded in 1707, it was the first prominent Baptist association in North America. Settlers from the British Isles brought with them the associational culture inherited from their Baptist forefathers. In addition, this work considers the growth of the Baptist denomination in North America and the outward expansion that defined the nineteenth century; these changes altered the interaction between the association and its member churches. By 1845, Northern and Southern Baptists mutually agreed to form respective denominational entities when distinct cultural differences made separation inevitable. Despite geographical distance, the Philadelphia tradition possessed great influence upon associational life in America. Prominent Southern Baptist founders were descendants of the Philadelphia brand of connectionalism. Denominational expansion within the Southern Baptist tradition, from its inception through the nineteenth century, followed a similar trajectory as the PBA. The previous chapter evaluates this trajectory by describing American associational life, in light of biblical and historical benchmarks.

The current chapter provides constructive theological material. Put another way, how should twenty-first century Southern Baptists conceive of their association with like-minded churches? Thus, this chapter argues that believers who are united to Christ through the Holy Spirit form local churches, and possess corporate unity as a united body of Christ. This unity—illustrated in the New Testament and church history—manifests

itself in a vibrant fellowship or communion among believers. Thus, communion should define inter-church fellowship among like-minded churches. To fulfill this thesis, the chapter first considers preliminary issues to orient the study, situating the church within the framework of the New Covenant. Also, Baptist connection with the broader Christian church demands appraisal. The study contemplates hermeneutical and methodological issues related to this work: theological method and the Regulative Principle. Within this framework, the study explores union and communion with God, adoption into the body of Christ, which enacts corporate unity. From this foundation, it considers the nature of inter-church fellowship observed within both the New Testament epistles and church history. Finally, the study offers specific theological entailments that emerge from the biblical text and historical study.

## Preliminary Issues

### Initial Considerations from a Congregational Perspective

Proper Baptist ecclesiological formulation considers the church's identity as a distinct New Covenant community within one people of God. While on earth, Christ instructed his disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit to comfort and lead them as they participated in the Great Commission. Following Christ's ascension, the Holy Spirit descended on believers at Pentecost. With this action, God enacted his New Covenant.[1] Gregg Allison proclaims that this New Covenant signals a "fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit."[2] This transformation means that the church exists in a new time in redemptive

[1]Stephen J. Wellum and Kirk Wellum, "The Biblical and Theological Case for Congregationalism," in *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age* (Nashville: B and H Academic, 2015), 48–49.

[2]Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 71.

history; the church stands distinct from Israel, while both form one people of God observed throughout Scripture.[3]

The Holy Spirit's fresh outpouring did not appear without warning. The Old Testament prophets anticipated this divine appropriation. Perhaps most famously, Jeremiah 31:29-34 signals this transition. This text preludes a change in structure and nature between God's relationship with Covenant Israel and the New Covenant people.[4] The Israelites were organized tribally, meaning that God spoke to them through an ordained mediator.[5] The Old Testament considered individual believers, although the people mostly relied upon God-ordained leaders—such as prophets, priests, and kings—to intercede on their behalf. The prophet Jeremiah envisioned the transformation away from the tribal-representative structure.[6] D. A. Carson states,

> In short, Jeremiah understood that the new covenant would bring some dramatic changes. The tribal nature of the people of God would end, and the new covenant would bring with it a new emphasis on the distribution of the knowledge of God down to the level of each member of the covenant community. Knowledge of God would no longer be mediated through specially endowed leaders, for all of God's covenant people would know him, from the least to the greatest. Jeremiah is not concerned to say there would be no teachers under the new covenant, but to remove from leaders that distinctive mediatorial role that made the knowledge of God among the people at large a secondary knowledge, a mediated knowledge.[7]

Carson portrays differences between the Old and New Covenant ages. He identifies Jeremiah's prophesy of a future reality; New Testament saints will have unmediated

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[3]This chapter will not spend much time situating the church within one people of God. However, readers should note that this implies some continuity between the Old and New Testament saints (see Rom 1:1-2; Phil 3:3, 7-9). For further discussion on this topic see Wellum and Wellum, "Biblical and Theological Case for Congregationalism," 51–52.

[4]Tremper Longman III, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, Understanding the Bible (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 210–11.

[5]D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 150–58. See also, Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 429.

[6]Wellum and Wellum, "Biblical and Theological Case for Congregationalism," 53. See also F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993), 279-81.

[7]Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 152.

access to God the Father through the Holy Spirit. From the least to the greatest, his covenant people will know him. This reality signifies a change in the nature of God's covenant people: they are regenerate.[8] Unlike the Mosaic Covenant—which was written in stone—the New Covenant features the law of God written on the hearts of his people, all of whom experience the forgiveness of their sins.[9]

Similarly, God also signaled his New Covenant through the prophet Ezekiel. In Ezekiel 36:26, God promises to replace his people's obstinate heart of stone with a receptive one of flesh. Verse 27 proclaims that God's Spirit will deliver this transformation and indwell his people. This unprecedented spiritual work will cause them to love and please their Lord.[10]

The prophet Joel communicates similar language and offers future insight toward this coming outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In Joel 2:28-29, the prophet said, "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour my Spirit." In this coming age—as Joel foretold—the Spirit will no longer merely empower judges, kings, and military leaders,[11] but he would be poured out for all God's people,

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[8]John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 85. Hammett argues that the very idea of the church as the called-out ones implies regenerate membership. He notes the church is referred to more than sixty times as "saints, or holy ones." He also illustrates that local churches in Acts included only those who believed. Ibid., 86.

[9]Wellum and Wellum, "Biblical and Theological Case for Congregationalism," 55. Wellum and Wellum point out the continuity with other Old Testament passages regarding "circumcision of the heart" language. (See Deut 10:16, 30:6; Jer 4:4, 9:25.)

[10]Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 71. Darrell Bock adds that Ezekiel 36 also picks up the theme of restoration. Bock surmises, "God will no longer administrate His salvation merely with outside stipulations; He promises to enter into the community from within the hearts of the people who reside in it." Darrell L. Bock, "God's Plan for History: The First Coming of Christ," in *Dispensationalism and the History of Redemption: A Developing and Diverse Tradition* (Chicago: Moody, 2015), 162.

[11]Allison clarifies that under the Old Covenant the Holy Spirit was essential for saving, purifying, and guiding God's people. However, His ministry predominately provided for the leaders of Israel. He cites several passages including the following: Judg 3:7-11, 6:1-7:25, 10:6-9, 11:29-33; 1 Sam 16:13; Ezek 2:1-7; Mic 3:8). For further discussion see, Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 71-72.

regardless of position, gender, class, and the like.[12] Surmising the Old Testament observation, Allison offers, "From the perspective of the Old Testament, then, the Mosaic covenant is a failure and will one day become obsolete, being replaced by a new covenant."[13]

The Holy Spirit descended (Acts 2:1-4); John the Baptist and Jesus both anticipated this fresh Holy Spirit outpouring among God's people.[14] In John 1:33, John the Baptist announced the coming age and previewed Christ, who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. The Savior himself initially signals the Spirit's new operation. Later, in John 7:37-39, Christ compared the Spirit's future indwelling to a heart flowing with rivers of living water.[15] In John 14:16-17, Christ provided insight about the Spirit's coming. He would be their "helper" and "advocate" who dwells with and comforts them following Christ's heavenly return.[16] Just prior to Christ's ascension, the closing words of Luke's Gospel show that Christ continued to raise anticipation by instructing his disciples to wait for the descent of the Holy Spirit: "And, behold I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49).[17]

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[12]Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 72. Allen also picks up on this transformation. Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 99.

[13]Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 72.

[14]David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 130–31.

[15]Murray J. Harris, *John*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: B and H Academic, 2015), 158. Harris offers, "In an absence of actual water-pouring on the eighth day Jesus offered his life-giving spiritual water to all who chose to come to him."

[16]Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 73.

[17]Regarding this passage, Bock notes, "The Spirit's coming represents the inauguration of the kingdom blessings promised by the Father in the OT. Pentecost will be the beginning of God's new work and promise that will eventually manifest itself in the church." Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 1943.

This foreshadowing—signaled in the Old Testament, and affirmed by John the Baptist and Jesus Christ—culminates on the Day of Pentecost, described in Acts 2. The disciples were "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4). Inaugurating this new era, the apostle Peter proclaims these miraculous events as the fulfillment of Joel's prophetic words, written hundreds of years prior. Christ's Spirit had been poured out to empower and lead His New Covenant community. The New Testament epistles echo a strong contrast between the Spirit's work within the Old and New Covenants. 2 Corinthians 3:3 calls the Corinthian disciples, "a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts." Perhaps directly channeling Ezekiel's prophetic words, Paul portrays the Spirit's work in the inaugurated age.[18] Paul was acutely aware of this new era and its implications: "He has made competent to be ministers of a New Covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor 3:6). Paul compares aspects of each era and culminates his argument in verses 10-11. He says that the Old Covenant has passed away; it has been replaced with a permanent New Covenant ministry wherein each follower of Jesus Christ is empowered by the Holy Spirit.[19] The author of Hebrews echoes Paul's sentiment; the New Covenant replaces the old. Jeremiah 31:31-34 announced the Old Testament's anticipation of a new divine administration (Heb 8:8-12). In Hebrews 9, the author compares this new reality with its predecessor. Through Christ redeeming work, the Old Covenant's physical and ceremonial regulations have been fulfilled. This accomplishment redefines how humans approach the God of the universe.[20] Hebrews 9:15 declares, "Therefore, He is the mediator of a New Covenant, so

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[18]Allison points out that multiple Pauline scholars consider these words a direct reference to Ezek 37. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 74.

[19]Ibid., 75.

[20]The Hebrews author mentions that the high priest entered the most holy place alone to offer a covering for his sin and those committed by all the people, both overtly and in ignorance; Christ has fulfilled that role (Heb 9:6-7). This use of the aorist participle for the word translated "appeared"

that those who are called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance, because a death has taken place for redemption from the transgressions committed under the first covenant." In summary, the New Covenant's establishment yields transformation. This covenant signals a fresh and unprecedented outpouring of the Holy Spirit, wherein every redeemed individual is indwelt with God's Spirit.

As a result, this redeemed community of indwelt believers form Christ's church. Given the nature of the Spirit's work through the Old Covenant, the people of God (Israel) was a mixed community, containing those who believed as well as those who neglected God's promises and rule. What was once true for Israel's remnant now stands true for the entire New Covenant community. Thus, this community consists of a people united to Christ and regenerated through his redemptive work.[21]

## Hermeneutical and Methodological Issues

When attempting theological construction, proper method stands paramount. As Christians consider church connectivity, they must understand the relationship between Scripture and tradition, in light of cultural context. Theologians must consider the relationship between Holy Scripture and tradition, while they also contemplate how the biblical regulates matters of church order.

**Theological method for the study.** Considering theological method, Herman Bavinck asserts, "Virtually every work of dogmatic theology begins with the doctrine of Scripture as the sole foundation of theology. The best equipped theologian carries out the task by living in full communion of faith with the church of Christ."[22] In every science—

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(*paragenomenos*) indicates completed action. Donald Guthrie offers a helpful discussion on this passage. Donald Guthrie, *The Letter to the Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 185–95.

[21]Wellum and Wellum, "Biblical and Theological Case for Congregationalism," 55–56.

[22]Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids:

theology is no exception—practitioners must acquaint themselves with their field of study, understanding the authority within the field before beginning a new area of research. In other words, tradition precedes scientific work. Theologians are immersed into a tradition before studying.[23] Pedagogically, then, the church is prior to Scripture. However, logically, Bavinck deduces,

> Scripture is the sole foundation of church and theology. In case of conflict between them, the church and confession must yield to Scripture. Only Scripture is self-authenticating and its own interpreter, and nothing may be put on a level with Scripture. All Christian churches are united in the confession that Holy Scripture is the foundation of theology.[24]

Additionally, the supreme status of Holy Scripture does not remove theological appraisal as a personal discipline. Theology is attached to a real object within a real world and accomplished by real people. However, unlike any other activity the Holy Spirit, the divine inspirer of Scripture, indwells his people. Thus, in Reformed theology, the doctrine of Scripture is intimately tied to the Holy Spirit's witness.[25] The same Spirit who bestowed Scripture also bears witness to its truth in the heart of God's redeemed people. In turn, the follower of God's chief task is to "take the thoughts of God laid down in Scripture into their consciousness and to understand them rationally," according to Bavinck.[26] Since each theological endeavor brings with it a specific disposition, upbringing, and insight, theological appropriation is a diverse practice.[27] Bavinck

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Baker Academic, 2003), 24.

[23]Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 24.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Ibid., 25.

[26]Ibid. He calls this interpretive concept the synthetic-genetic method.

[27]Michael Allen and Scott Swain offer a helpful treatment of these issues. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015). Chaps. 3 and 4 help navigate the relationship between Scripture and tradition, as well as the role of the community of faith.

elucidates the centrality of Scripture and the essential role of tradition in approaching the theological task. In addition, he specifies,

> Without shortchanging the truth that in a pedagogical sense the church precedes Scripture, a theologian can nevertheless be positioned in Scripture itself as the foundation of theology and there develop dogmas. What a theologian does in this case is replicate, as it were, the intellectual labors of the church. We are shown how dogmas have arisen organically from Scripture . . . not a single text in its isolation but Scripture as a whole.[28]

Bavinck provides guidance toward forming specific theological procedure, which cultivates a proper foundation for theological formulation. He reminds Christ's followers that belief in Scripture's teachings does not originate from the church's authority, but rather belief comes through the church and its ministry. To this end, Michael Horton adds, "Children and theologians alike take their place under the magisterial norm of scripture and its communal interpretation by the ministerial guidance of the church."[29] This "magisterial" and "ministerial" distinction affirms that the infallible canon of Scripture—God's spoken revelation—exists qualitatively distinct from all other sources and authority. Underneath this magisterial standard sits the ministerial service of creeds and confessions.[30]

**The Regulative Principle.** The Regulative Principle refers to the belief that Christians should consider Scripture as the regulatory grid for establishing all matters of church order, ministry, polity, and the like. Strictly observed, the principle teaches that whatever is commanded in Scripture is prescribed, and that which stands outside of the biblical text is prohibited.[31] To this end, John Frame puts forth, "If there are principles of

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[28]Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 26.

[29]Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 218.

[30]Ibid.

[31]Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 429.

worship to be found in nature, these cannot be understood except through the 'spectacles' of Scripture; for when we try to reason without Scripture, sin distorts our vision."[32] Fitting within the Protestant tradition, most Baptists believe that the Regulative Principle should control local church activity. However, debate arises when discerning the detail of these matters; what room exists to use approaches to church order not specifically articulated within Scripture?[33]

Historically, Baptists have espoused some form of the Regulative Principle when structuring church order. For example, the First London Confession of Faith rendered, "The Rule of this Knowledge, Faith, and Obedience, concerning the worship and service of God, and all other Christian duties, is not man's invention, opinions, devices, laws, constitutions, or traditions, unwritten whatsoever but only the word of God contained in the Canonical Scriptures."[34]

Concurrently, some Baptists have strictly applied this principle, yielding ecclesiological implications. In the mid-nineteenth century controversy arose within Southern Baptist life concerning these matters. J. R. Graves believed the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant churches stood as degraded forms of the biblical standard for New Testament churches. Graves denied the existence of the universal church; the New Testament only used "church" to indicate individual local congregations. Chad Brand surmises, "At the heart of Graves' approach was his own conviction that every detail of

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[32]John M. Frame, "Some Questions about the Regulative Principle," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 54, no. 2 (September 1992): 357.

[33]Chad Owen Brand, "Toward a Theology of Cooperation," in *The Mission of Today's Church: Baptist Leaders Look at Modern Faith Issues*, ed. Ed Stetzer and Daniel Akin (Nashville: B and H Pub., 2013), 157. Brand's approach serves a primary role in considering this topic.

[34]William Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 2nd rev. ed., rev. Bill J. Leonard (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2011), 158. Readers observe latitude when comparing Baptist confessional documents. The First London Confession seems to employ stricter language, i.e., "*only* the word of God."Whereas, the Second London Confession uses "*prescribed* by the Holy Scriptures" and the Abstract of Principles recognizes local church authority when considering these matters. Suffice it to say, Baptists through the centuries, both through confessions and personal writings, have affirmed this principle.

church order, mission, and identity was spelled out in Scripture, that he, Graves, had identified just what those details were, and that any deviation from that pattern rendered a 'church' to be not a church."[35] This example illustrates the pitfalls of an over-emphasized understanding of the Regulative Principle.

A sensible approach is vital. Following the Second London Confession, Scripture *prescribes* right church order. The Regulative Principle should not serve as a theological "straight jacket," yielding an impotent hermeneutical approach that fails to consider ecclesiological and theological matters. Though writing from a Presbyterian context, Frame offers valuable insight for all Protestants. In his thought, the Regulative Principle does not always describe how each element should be carried out. Frame offers,

> It is not as if God has given us a document with a list of commands . . . . Rather to determine God's 'prescriptions,' we must exegete, deduce, analyze the force of biblical examples, determine the relations between the commands in the OT and those in the NT, etc. Now I am not skeptical enough to deny that normative content can be derived that way. Indeed, this is the way all theology proceeds.[36]

Frame recognizes that the Regulative Principle can be employed in ways that muzzle good exegetical and theological study. His words signal a steady approach that leaves space for theological appraisal stemming from the biblical text.

**Baptist Associationalism within the Greater Christian Framework**

In a 2016 address at Oklahoma Baptist University, Nathan Finn considered Southern Baptists' place within the larger Christian framework. He offered the term

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[35]Brand, "Toward a Theology of Cooperation," 161. While the movement garnered significant influence among Southern Baptists before the turn of the twentieth century, Brand notes that Landmarkism failed to establish itself as the majority Southern Baptist conception of the church. He mentions that some prominent Baptists held to certain aspects of Graves' conception of the universal church. For instance, John Dagg agreed that Scripture provided a straightforward picture of church order. See John L. Dagg, *A Treatise On Church Order* (1858; repr., Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 2006), 301. Additionally, Brand notes that Thomas Helwys held a similar position to Graves, though they were the exception. Brand, "Toward a Theology of Cooperation," 161.

[36]Frame, "Some Questions about the Regulative Principle," 359.

"Paleo-Baptists" as a title that captures the distinctive nature of Baptists coupled with their connection to the historic church of Jesus Christ that has existed since the apostolic age. Baptists proudly espouse continuity with believers throughout ecclesial history. Finn offers a description of this nature: "Our Baptist identity is necessarily a derivative of our Christian identity."[37] He continues, "The antidote to Baptist sectarianism—both real and perceived—is a deeper sense of Baptist catholicity."[38] Baptists, as a subset of Protestant Evangelicalism, situate themselves within a rich and long-lasting tradition.[39] They heartily accept the theological consensus of the first five centuries of Christian thought. Timothy George captures this theological continuity when he says,

> Evangelicals worship and adore the one and only true and living God, who has forever known himself as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They further believe that this triune God of love and holiness became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Man of the four canonical Gospels. Evangelicals, no less than Roman Catholic and Orthodox believers, thus stand in fundamental continuity with the Trinitarian and Christological consensus of the early church, including the affirmation of Mary as *theotokos* (the term but not the doctrine questioned by some), the condemnation of Pelagianism, and the Definition of Chalcedon: Jesus Christ fully God and true man.[40]

George argues that Evangelical Baptists should take pride in their rich heritage. Baptists stand firm within the Protestant tradition. As the term "reformation" communicates, the Protestant Reformers sought to recover what they reasoned the Roman Catholic Church

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[37]Nathan A. Finn, "After the Controversy: Toward the Renewal of Southern Baptist Identity" (Herschel H. and Frances J. Hobbs Lectureship in Baptist Faith and Heritage, Oklahoma Baptist University, Shawnee, OK, October 19, 2016).

[38]Ibid.

[39]Chap. 2 of this study draws continuity between the Baptist and the Protestant/Reformed tradition.

[40]Timothy George, "Why I Am an Evangelical and a Baptist," in *Why We Belong: Evangelical Unity and Denominational Diversity*, ed. Anthony L Chute, Christopher W. Morgan, and Robert A. Peterson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 97. Other Protestant historians, such as D. Jeffrey Bingham and D. H. Williams, present excellent discussions of how Evangelicals draw continuity with the Fathers through the apostolic rule of faith, connecting Scripture and tradition. D. Jeffrey Bingham, "Evangelicals and the Rule of Faith," in *Evangelicals and the Early Church: Recovery, Reform, Renewal*, ed. George Kalantzis and Andrew Tooley (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 185–86. See also Daniel H. Williams, *Evangelicals and Tradition: The Formative Influence of the Early Church*, Evangelical Ressourcement: Ancient Sources for the Church's Future (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 88–96.

had lost, a devotion to Scripture as the supreme benchmark, the *norma normas*, by which all other traditions and teachings should be measured.[41] As it stood during the Patristic era—communicated through the Apostolic and Patristic era and canonized as the written Word of God—the Holy Scriptures stand as the all-sufficient rule of faith and conduct. By recovering Scripture's centrality, the Reformers championed the doctrine of justification by faith. This retrieval was no sixteenth century invention; rather, it arose as the necessary consequence of the ecumenical orthodoxy crystalized during the church's first five centuries.[42] Jaroslav Pelikan encapsulated the Protestant train of thought,

> If the Holy Trinity was as holy as the Trinitarian dogma taught; if original sin was as virulent as the Augustinian tradition said it was; and if Christ was as necessary as the Christological dogma implied—then the only way to treat justification in a manner faithful to the Catholic tradition was to teach justification by faith.[43]

Pelikan framed the essence of the Protestant call for change. These reformers did not venture to create a religion of their own invention; rather, they recovered the classic Christian tradition. Stalwart reformer John Calvin intended this mindset in his famous letter to Cardinal Jacopo Sadoleto. Calvin asserted the Protestants recovered the true Catholic faith because the Roman Church had become a wayward sect.[44]

Paleo-Baptists, as Finn ascribed, stand on the shoulders of theological giants. Unashamedly, Baptists claim their place within the historic Christian tradition. More pointedly, twenty-first century Southern Baptists are catholic: members of the great tradition. They are Protestant; they champion the centrality of Scripture, the necessity of justification by faith, and the priesthood of all believers. Similarly, they are Evangelical, they necessitate the atonement of Christ for sins and the command to participate in

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[41]George, "Why I Am an Evangelical and a Baptist," 98.

[42]Ibid.

[43]Jaroslav Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels: Catholic Substance and Protestant Principle in Luther's Reformation* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 50–51.

[44]John Calvin and Jacopo Sadoleto, *A Reformation Debate: Sadoleto's Letter to the Genevans and Calvin's Reply*, ed. John C. Olin (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 49-94.

Christ's mission mandate: sharing His gospel with all people. From this foundation, Baptists hold specific convictions and affirm specific confessions. They affirm regenerate church membership and the independence of the local assembly (free church tradition), among other distinctives. Baptists find themselves etched to a mosaic of sorts—an eclectic collective filled with essential unity and vibrant denominational diversity.

In his recent work, *Biblical Authority after Babel*: *Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity*, Kevin Vanhoozer conceives how denominationalism fits within the unity of Christ's universal church in general, and Protestantism in particular. He advocates for a "strong denominationalism," viewing them (when at their best) as one of God's good gifts to the church.[45] He asserts, "Churches with a strong denominational identity are confident enough in their own skins to cooperate with other denominations. They have a healthy self-image, which includes an acknowledgement of their own impartiality."[46] From this strong denominational mindset, churches realize that their sect alone cannot fully embody the universal church. In sum, Baptists situate themselves within a magnificent catholic tradition. As inheritors of this tradition, Baptists recognize and appeal to the majesty of Christian history, and also champion the particularity of essential Baptist beliefs.

## Biblical Foundations for Associationalism

The following section considers a biblical conception for Baptist associationalism. In so doing, the section grounds this discussion in believers' union and communion with God. This union yields a vibrant unity between believers, forming a united body and communion of saints. From this corporately united foundation, the New Testament reveals a vibrant *koinonia* (partnership) between local churches.

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[45]Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 189.

[46]Ibid., 189-90.

**Union and Communion with God through the Spirit: Grounding Christian Unity**

Within *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin contemplated union with Christ,

> As long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value to us. Therefore, to share with us what he has received from the father, he had first to become ours and to dwell within us. For this reason, he is called "our head" [Eph 4:15], and the firstborn among many brethren [Rom 8:29]. We also, in turn are said to be engrafted into him [Rom 11:17], and to put on Christ [Gal 3:27]; for, as I have said, all that he possesses is nothing to us until we grow into one body with him.[47]

Calvin desired real communion with Christ, which includes significant transformation. Upon salvation, Christ first "dwells with us." Through union with Christ, sons and daughters are engrafted into an incomparable relationship. This communion is the supreme covenant blessing. Calvin situated union with Christ within a Trinitarian framework. He realized that the fabric of our union was neither a mere mechanistic imputation nor an infused divination, but rather participation with the triune God through the enacting work of the Holy Spirit.[48]

The apostle John offered a vivid expression of union with Christ and its implications for Christ followers. John 13-17 captures Jesus' final gathering with his disciples the night before he was tried in Jerusalem and crucified. In John 17, Jesus envisions his difficult impending mission and his imminent future at the right hand of his Father in heaven. Within this passage, Jesus prays for himself (vv.1-5), his disciples (vv. 6-19), future believers and the world (vv. 20-26). Throughout, a call for unity pervades.

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[47]John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 3.1.1. Augustine offers the classic treatment of this point in book 4, chap. 4 of Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill, 2nd ed. (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991).

[48]Julie Canlis, "Calvin, Osiander and Participation in God," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 6, no. 2 (April 2004): 172–73. Space does not permit a discussion of this material, although Calvin spent considerable time discussing the union we have with Christ through the Spirit. See Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.1.1-4.

In verse 11, he prays that his disciples will share in the oneness Christ possesses with the Father—knowing that only through a divinely empowered unity will his followers complete the commission set before them. Detailing this oneness, eighteenth-century Baptist theologian John Gill surmised,

> [This oneness is] in nature, will, affection, and understanding; which must be understood not of equality, but of likeness; and design not their union with Christ; but to one another; abiding together, cleaving to each other, standing fast in one spirit, having the same designs, and the interest of the redeemer in view, and at heart.[49]

The unity, analogous to union with Christ, grounds Christian community. Heavenly unity is a source and example for believers.[50]

In John 17:20, Christ shifts his focus outward. Akin to his desire for the disciples, Christ prays for the unity of future believers in verse 21: "May they all be one, as You, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be one in us, so the world may believe you sent me." With these words, Christ connects the mutual indwelling of the Father and Son as the basis for the unity of those who will believe in Christ through the apostolic witness.[51] This passage situates union with Christ within the unity of the Godhead.[52] While an analogy, readers must not discount the wonder and mystery that

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[49]John Gill, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testaments* (1748; repr., Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 2005), 86.

[50]Harris, *John*, 292. Harris points out that καθώς is both comparative and causative. In other words, he states, "Christian unity is patterned and dependent on the eternal divine co-inheritance." He offers that the third ἵνα may express a purpose and result.

[51]D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 568.

[52]However, theologians must maintain a creator/creature distinction in this matter; our indwelling in the Godhead sits analogical to the divine unity between the Trinity. To this point, the Reformed tradition has staunchly maintained an analogical understanding of divine and human interaction. For instance, Calvin's understanding of the communication of Christ's attributes precludes a direct interpenetration of his divine and human characteristics. Calvin maintained a robust person-nature distinction, not conflating Christ's hypostatic union, thus risking a Eutychian presentation of Christ; nor did he bifurcate Christ's union and threaten Nestorianism. Bruce L. McCormack, "Union with Christ in Calvin's Theology: Grounds for a Diviniation Theory?" in *Tributes to John Calvin: A Celebration of His Quincentenary*, ed. David W. Hall (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R Pub., 2010). See also Robert A. Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit: Union with Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 67. To this end, Michael Horton points out the importance of both the ascension of Christ and the descent of the Spirit. He states, "Our union with Christ does not occur at the level of fused natures, but as a common participation of different members in the same realities of the age to come by the same Spirit." Michael S. Horton, *People*

redeemed believers participate in the divine love the Triune Godhead has eternally possessed together.[53] Furthermore, Jesus prays, "That the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21). This perichoretic relationship offers missional implications.[54] The notable unity among God's people intends to offer lost individuals an opportunity to believe in the Son's incarnation, impending death and glorious resurrection.[55] The apostle continues to recount Jesus' words, "The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one. I am in them and You are in Me. May they be completely one, so the world may know You have sent me, and have loved them as You have loved me" (vv. 22-23). Leon Morris surmises, "Indwelling is the secret of it all. Christ indwells believers and the Father indwells Him."[56] Christ introduces an additional element of his unity with the Father—the love shared with the Father. Christ desired this same kind of love for his people and the world. Divine love defines this unity; such love transcends all human unity.[57] This love will draw unbelievers to the love of the Father found in the Son.[58] In verse 26, Christ revisits his theme of love: "I have made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them" (v.

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*and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 187.

[53]Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit*, 67. Clowney states that union is mysterious in the sense that it far surpasses any possible human relation between finite persons. Edmund P. Clowney, "Biblical Theology of the Church," in *The Church in the Bible and the World: An International Study*, ed. D. A.Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 51.

[54]Most notably, chaps. 3 and 4 of Augustine's *Trinity* emphasize the unity of Godhead and their mission.

[55]Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 499. Morris points out the vocative construction of the verb *Pateo* to add solemnity and emphasis. Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 733.

[56]Morris, *Gospel according to John*, 735.

[57]Ibid., 736.

[58]Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit*, 68.

26).[59] With this verse, the apostle echoes Christ's inviting words in John 14:23: "We [the Father and the Son] will come to him and make our home with him." Readers can clearly discern, through this chapter, the Father and Son will indwell believers—fuller New Testament teaching will include the Spirit's work in this triune action.[60] This divine union ensures the unity that will mark believers as the body of Christ, his church.[61]

The apostle Paul offers a New Testament understanding of a believer's union with Christ. Throughout his letters, Paul teaches that believers are united to Christ by faith; in so doing they participate in God's story of redemption. Tom Schreiner believes that union with Christ is a fundamental theme of Pauline theology.[62] Mark Seifred confirms, "In varying ways, then, the expression 'in Christ' conveys Paul's belief that God's saving purposes are decisively effected through Christ."[63] For this reason, several passages display Paul's understanding of the implications of each believer's union with Christ. Believers participate in the work of Christ. They share in his sufferings and glory, made alive in Him, and will be raised with him.[64]

**Communion with God.** Vanhoozer, evaluating the implications of union with Christ, argues,

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[59]In his homily on this passage, Augustine writes in *Tractate* 111, "For in one way, he is in us as in his temple, but in another way, because we are also himself, since, in accordance with the fact that he was made man to be our Head, we are his body." Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John 55-111*, trans. John W. Rettig, Fathers of the Church Patristic (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1995), 307.

[60]Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit*, 70.

[61]Carson, *Gospel according to John*, 504.

[62]Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 314.

[63]Mark Seifred, "In Christ," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993), 433.

[64]Peterson believes this theme appears in at least twelve texts: Rom 6:1-14, 7:4-6, 8:15-19:2; 2 Cor 4:8-14; Gal 2:17-20; Eph 2:4-10; Phil 3:8-11; Col 2:11-15, 2:20-23, 3:1-4; 1 Thess 5:9-10; and 2 Tim 2:11-13. Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit*, 203.

> To be 'in Christ' is to be restored to one's true humanity and to a right relationship with God. Union with Christ is therefore of all the words the best that can be heard. What is in Christ is nothing less than the love, light, and the life of God, and to have Christ means having a share in that: communion with God. To be 'in Christ' means that one is elect, adopted, justified, and sanctified. It means sharing in all the benefits of Jesus's sonship, in particular the incomparable privilege of calling God 'Father.'[65]

This glorious union has implications for the believer's relationship with God. Union represents the objective reality of our salvation; communion describes the experiential relationship with the creator.[66] This relationship was impossible during the Old Testament era. Saints like Enoch and Abraham fellowshipped with God. The high priest entered the most holy place within the tabernacle, though only once a year to mediate the sins of God's people. John Owen explained,

> Though they had communion with God, yet they had not the boldness and confidence in that communion. This follows the entrance of our High Priest into the most holy place. The veil was also upon them, that they had not freedom and liberty in their access to God. But now in Christ we have boldness and access God with confidence.[67]

This communion represents something entirely new for Christ's church. Christians—united to God through the Holy Spirit as enacted by Christ work—enjoy a magnificent connection that was foreign to the Old Testament saints. The ultimate High Priest rent the veil that separated man from God (Heb 10:20). Thus, through Christ "we have access to by one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph 2:18). This vibrant communion with the triune God undergirds our communion and fellowship with the body of Christ.

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[65]Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel*, 150. In this work, Vanhoozer treats ecclesiology within his discussion of *solus Christus*. Also, Calvin calls the church the "society of Christ." Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1114.

[66]Jerry Bridges, *True Fellowship: The Biblical Practice of Koinonia* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1985), 47.

[67]John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 2, *Communion with* God, ed. William Goold (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1965), 6–7.

**One Body, One People United to Christ through the Spirit**

Union and communion with the Godhead produces a visible and corporate unity among believers. From this connection, Christ adopts believers into his family. For Paul, this metaphor is deeply Trinitarian. The Father initiates adoption; it is grounded in the work of the Son, and mediated by the Holy Spirit.[68] In Galatians 4:4-7, Paul proclaims, "God sent his Son . . . so that we might receive adoption as children." He continues, "And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God."

While the adoption metaphor begins as a legal declaration, it encompasses a broader reality. Adoption yields membership in the family of God.[69] Thus, what exists in Christ is not merely a collection of isolated individuals, but rather a new community—a communion of saints, a corporate body.[70] J. Todd Billings asserts, "One is adopted to be a son or daughter of God, placed in the security of God's family, and given a new identity into an eschatologically conditioned way."[71]

The "body of Christ" serves as one of Paul's favorite descriptors of the church.[72] This imagery rightly exalts Christ and describes people as organically

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[68]J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 19.

[69]Billings, *Union with Christ*, 20. Billings notes that Paul's overall usage of the adoption metaphor describes both legal and familial dimensions. John Owen also situates adoption within his treatment of communion with the Godhead. Owen, *Works of John Owen*, 248–49.

[70]Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel*, 151.

[71]Billings, *Union with Christ*, 20. Within this context, he notes that the forensic sense of adoption does not exhaust the meaning of Christ's metaphor. Also, this eschatological reference connects well with the following section.

[72]Clowney, "Biblical Theology of the Church," 56. The "people of God" is another important image of the church Paul uses in his epistles. Unlike the body of Christ, the people of God title shows historical continuity in God's redemptive program—engrafting the church into a plan once reserved for the people of Israel. Robert L. Saucy, *The Church in God's Program* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 19–20.

connected to their covenant Head and to each other.[73] This concept beautifully captures the richness of a believer's union with Him. First Corinthians 6:15 confirms this point, as Paul rebuked believers for making Christ's members "members of a prostitute." Peterson writes, "This reference is metaphorical, but at the same time there is a spiritual reality behind it. By God's grace through faith we are really, spiritually united to Christ. Because of our true union with him, becoming one flesh with a prostitute joins his members to the prostitute!"[74] Needless to say, Paul understood union as a real and vibrant spiritual reality.[75] Later in the same letter Paul considered this embodied community in greater detail, laying out the interpersonal implications of the horizontal aspect of union with Christ (1 Cor 12:12-27). Paul compared the human body to the church, capturing both individual and corporate aspects. He says, "For as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of that body, though, many, are one body—so also is Christ" (1 Cor 12:12).[76] Akin to his words in Ephesians 2, both Jews and Gentiles, whether slave or free, are brought into this body through the Holy Spirit; this collection is a diverse community. How then is this body formed and sustained? Paul declared that the Holy Spirit joins believers to Christ and to one another in one body: "And all were made to drink of one spirit" (1 Cor 12:13). Romans 12:4-5 echoes this point as well: "For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." Through our vast differences, God unites his body as a multi-faceted assembly.

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[73]Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit*, 387.

[74]Ibid, 388.

[75]Clowney cautions, "This closeness of identification does not mean that Paul is caught in a naïve or mystical realism in which he cannot distinguish between the physical body of Christ and the figure of the body applied to the church." Clowney, "Biblical Theology of the Church," 52. In other words, the church as the body of Christ is not a continuation of Christ's incarnation.

[76]Gordon Fee notes, "The preposition '*eis*' can either be local, indicating that into which all were baptized, or denote the goal of action, indicating the purpose or goal of the baptismal action (= 'so as to become one body')." Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 488.

To God's glory, each member of the body of Christ offers an integral contribution to the whole: "But now God has placed each one of the parts in one body just as he wanted. And if they were all the same part, where would the body be? Now there are many parts, yet one body" (1 Cor 12:18-20). Through a powerful human analogy, Paul revealed to the church at Corinth—and the whole church—the interdependence among the body of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul summated the horizontal manifestation of believers' union with Christ.[77] He says, "Now you are the body of Christ and individual members of it" (1 Cor 12:27). Paul illustrated the interdependence of this New Testament community. Six verses prior, Paul asserted that no member can claim they do not need the other parts (v. 21). More to this point, the parts we neglect are, in fact, indispensable.[78] He says, "God has composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it" (v. 24). Paul offered these words for the purpose that no division would exist among the body. (v. 25) Thus, "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (v. 26). David Garland offers, "The church is not to be like its surrounding society, which always honors those who are already honored. It is to be counter-cultural and bestow the greatest honor on those who seem to be negligible."[79] This well-known "body of Christ" passage reveals the manifestation of the individual and corporate aspects of union with Christ. Peterson summarizes this blessed interrelated relationship,

> Union with Christ is vertical and horizontal, corporate and individual . . . . Because union is also corporate and horizontal [in additional to vertical], just as our bodily members belong to us, so believers belong to Christ. And by virtue of union with him they belong to each other! This idea is also corporate.[80]

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[77]Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit*, 104.

[78]Ibid.

[79]David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 107.

[80]Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit*, 389.

The organic imagery also illustrates unity in diversity. As an organism, Christ's church stands as one united body.[81]

Because the church exists as a united body, Christ's followers are called to exhibit tangible unity as a cohesive communion of saints. Ephesians 4:1-6 also illustrates this pursuit. It says,

> I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of your calling to which you have been called, with all humanity and gentleness, with patience, bearing one with another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit[82]—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Paul exhorted God's people to display unity through humility, gentleness, and patience; members bear with one another in love and long to maintain peace through the power of the Holy Spirit, who bestows His fruits for God's people to employ.[83] These verses prompted John Calvin to proclaim, "If truly convinced that God is the common Father of all and Christ the common Head, being united in brotherly love, they cannot but share their benefits with one another."[84] Paul's call for love, humility, and patience reveals that this unity is also an entrenched partnership, wherein his people pursue each other in love and kindness as a vibrant communion of saints within and without the local church. This term also applies to some extent to the outward church; each of us should maintain

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[81]While outside the bounds of this study, it is noteworthy that the local bodies of Christ possess deeper unity, through baptism and the Lord's Supper, than connection among churches. For a good discussion of this matter, see Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 81–105. However, Christians share one baptism in Christ (Eph 4:6), thus enacting Christians as members of Christ's body. Thomas R. Schreiner, "Baptism in the Bible," in *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age*, ed. Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman (Nashville: B and H Academic, 2015), 104–5.

[82]Regarding the textual construction of the phrase, "There is one body and one Spirit," Hoehner notes that Paul neglected to use a conjunction when introducing this phrase (an abnormal occurrence in Pauline literature). In Hoehner's view, the abruptness is telling; it appears to indicate the importance Paul placed on the Trinity in conjunction to unity. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 502. This observation augments the aim of the previous section.

[83]Christopher W. Morgan, "Toward a Theology of the Unity of the Church," in *Why We Belong: Evangelical Unity and Denominational Diversity*, ed. Anthony L. Chute, Robert A. Peterson, and Christopher W. Morgan (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 31.

[84]Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.3.

agreement with all God's children.[85] However, Christopher Morgan reminds that God's call for unity is not minimalistic. He says,

> It is important to note that in 4:1-6 unity does not emerge through theological vagueness, theological minimalism, or a lack of doctrinal conviction. Rather, church unity is built upon theological foundations of the one God, one Lord, one Spirit, one faith, and so forth. And Paul's emphasis on love, humility, and patience do not point to an epistemic uncertainty about core concepts of the Christian faith. Instead, Paul clarifies that such unity simultaneously requires both doctrinal truth and love.[86]

This unity is not an empty notion, unfettered to doctrinal truth; rather, it appreciates essential doctrine, while promoting a vibrant communion.

**Local Assembly: Space-time Manifestation of God's Culminated Kingdom**

While the church is already a united body, Paul exhorts them to maintain unity. The unity of the church is both a present reality and an ongoing pursuit. This command entails that the church on earth reflects the "already and not yet" aspect of God's kingdom.[87] In multiple places, the New Testament canon also picks up on this future reality. This crucial distinction illustrates continuity between different manifestations of Christ's church.

The New Testament's use of *ekklesia* portrays the church as, ultimately, an eschatological, adopted, and gathered community; Christ established it and will consummate it in the age to come.[88] While the whole of Christ's church will enjoy this

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[85]Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.3.

[86]Morgan, "Toward a Theology of the Unity of the Church," 31.

[87]Ibid., 29.

[88]Wellum and Wellum, "Biblical and Theological Case for Congregationalism," 56. See also Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 27–33. In a similar vein, 2 Cor 11:2 portrays the church as betrothed to Christ and he will receive his bride as "a pure virgin." To this end, Saucy remarks, "The marriage can be viewed as having already taken place and yet still in the future . . . . The church is united to Christ as His bride and yet the complete entering into the state of this blessed position awaits the future when Christ will take His bride to be with Him forever." Saucy, *Church in God's Program*, 31.

eschatological gathering in the culminated kingdom, citizens have begun to gather as this heavenly community. Hebrews 12:18-29 portrays this point. The passage describes the Old Covenant people's gathering at Mount Sinai, and it introduces a New Covenant gathering at Mount Zion: "Instead you have come the city of the living God [the Heavenly Jerusalem]" (v. 22). The verb construction here is essential, as it communicates a completed action accomplished through Christ's work.[89] Though the church waits for its full realization, Christians already participate in the blessings that come with this eschatologically gathered fellowship.[90] Because this kingdom has been enacted on earth, the church can enjoy the kingdom by faith in its consummation. Stemming from union with Christ through salvation, believers have already been raised with Christ and seated with him in the heavenly realms (Eph 2:5-6; Col 2:12-13, 3:3). Thus, the church confidently enjoys their present place "in Christ" as they await blessed glorification.

The local assembly visibly enacts this heavenly gathering. D. A. Carson masterfully discerns the complexity of this relationship. He states,

> Each local church is not seen primarily as one member parallel to a lot of other member churches, together constituting one body, one church; nor is each local church seen as the body of Christ parallel to other earthly churches that are also the body of Christ—as if Christ had many bodies.[91]

Carson then explains a proper view toward this relationship. He continues,

> Each church is the full manifestation in space and time of the one true, heavenly eschatological, new covenant church. Local churches should see themselves as outcroppings of heaven, analogies of 'the Jerusalem that is above,' indeed colonies of the new Jerusalem, providing on earth a corporate and visible expression of the 'the glorious freedom of the children of God.'[92]

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[89]"You have already come" is in the perfect tense.

[90]Wellum and Wellum, "Biblical and Theological Case for Congregationalism," 56. Schreiner offers a helpful and extensive discussion regarding inaugurated eschatology and its application to the church on earth. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 41-116; 675-754.

[91]D. A. Carson, "Evangelicals, Ecumenism, and the Church," in *Evangelical Affirmations*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1990), 366. See also Wellum and Wellum, "Biblical and Theological Case for Congregationalism," 57.

[92]Carson, "Evangelicals, Ecumenism, and the Church," 366.

Thus, the gathered local assembly is the present manifestation of the one true, heavenly, consummated, New Covenant church.[93] In addition to these insights, Carson teases out an implication of this viewpoint, namely, clarifying the visible/invisible distinction of the church. This distinction is often set parallel to an unmixed/mixed distinction, and thus has led many to assume a mixed nature of the local church. While ecclesial purity and impurity are tangible realities for the New Testament church, these categories do not portray the New Testament's primary conception of Christ's church.[94] Wellum puts forth,

> The New Testament views the church on earth as a heavenly (tied to the 'age to come') and the new creation and spiritual (born of and empowered by the Spirit) community. It is an outcropping of the heavenly assembly gathered in the Jerusalem that is above . . . . It [church] is constituted as a regenerate people who profess to have crossed from death to life, to have been united to Christ, to be participants in the new creation and the new covenant age.[95]

All in all, the New Testament views the New Covenant community as an inaugurated eschatological assembly. Each local church is a space-time visible manifestation of this future reality. Robert Banks implores,

> Paul uniformly speaks of them [local churches] as the church, which assembles in a particular place . . . . This suggests that each one of the various local churches is a tangible expression of the heavenly church, a manifestation in time and space of that which is essentially eternal and infinite in character.[96]

Thus, congregations are indelibly linked to each other through their mutual existence as an impending future reality, an inaugurated heavenly assembly. Leithart argues, "Paul's ethics is sometimes 'Be what you are. Practice the unity that you have.' It is also more deeply, 'Be *now* what you *will be*. Practice the future in the present.' This is what it means to live by faith, the substance of things hoped for, the reality of things yet

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[93]See also Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology: A Compendium and Commonplace-Book Designed for the Use of Theological Students* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1907), 890.

[94]Wellum and Wellum, "Biblical and Theological Case for Congregationalism," 58.

[95]Ibid.

[96]Robert J. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Cultural Setting*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 42.

seen."[97] While Christians should not "over-realize" this future reality that will culminate in the New Jerusalem, Christ's people strive for future unity now. They trust that God will achieve now, in part, and fulfill it after Christ's glorious return.[98] The upshot of this reality is that Christians should prudently delineate between the local and universal manifestations of the church, careful not to create undue separation. Each local church administers the sacraments and possesses complete independence to govern their membership practices, congregational discipline, and the like. No outside ecclesiological structure nor church possesses authority to that end. However, the universal church's inaugurated state as Christ's future eschatological community necessitates visible unity among local bodies of Christ. Churches honor God by pursuing, in this life, what Christ has prepared for life in his kingdom. To this end, Leithart concludes, "The future determines the present, and if we are going to be united, we should prayerfully strive for unity here and now."[99]

### *Koinonia*: Activity of the Communion of Saints

The New Testament teaches that individuals are united to Christ by faith through the Holy Spirit. This vertical union forms the unity that defines Christ's body of believers. This body of Christ is visibly manifested through local churches. This unity is essential in considering connections between local churches; it undergirds the engrained connection between all those who are "in Christ." From this foundation, the question arises, how did New Testament churches interact with one another? New Testament

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[97]Peter J. Leithart, *The End of Protestantism: Pursuing Unity in a Fragmented Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 19. Leithart's main scope for his study is unity among denominations and throughout Christianity.

[98]Leithart, *End of Protestantism*, 19.

[99]Ibid., 20.

churches possessed a vibrant *koinonia*, seeking to support and encourage each other as self-sustaining local assemblies.[100]

The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* defines *koinonia* as the common bond that unites believers to Christ expressed in the mutual connection to each other.[101] This concept correlates to the union that believers share with the triune God as well the united nature of the church. Sharing in one Spirit and one baptism implants this bond within a communal framework.[102] How then did this partnership in the gospel manifest itself within the churches?

**Interdependence.** In his letter to the Philippians, the apostle Paul thanks the church for their long-lasting partnership in the gospel "from the first day until now" (Phil 1:3). This mature church had supported Paul throughout his ministry. Their relationship did not stop there. Paul viewed them as partners in the gospel, so much so that he longed to send his beloved apprentice to them: "Now I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon so that I also may be encouraged when I hear news about you" (Phil 2:19). This assembly was a vibrant and mature congregation. Unlike other churches Paul had planted, they seemed to have no need for outside assistance—and yet Paul intended to send Timothy to them and to receive an update from them. The reason seems twofold. First, Paul did not merely plant churches and "set them aside." He maintained ongoing relationships with local churches.[103] Second, the connection and support they received

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[100]This section is indebted to Dave Harvey, Executive Director of the Sojourn Network, for a 2014 message he delivered to Sojourn Network pastors and leaders. Dave Harvey, "Why Network," Sojourn Network Pastor's Conference, Destin, FL, May 11, 2015.

[101]Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., Geoffrey Bromiley, trans., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "*Koinonia*" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 797–809.

[102]Regarding Paul's use of this term, Banks offers, "In his use of *koinonia*, Paul emphasizes their [churches] participation alongside one another." *Koinonia* itself occurs thirteen times in the New Testament, while other forms of the term also garner usage in the canon. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, 57.

[103]Ibid., 58. See also Harvey, "Why Network."

from him was not tied to a request. Even though they were a thriving church he wanted to hear from them and draw encouragement from their maturity in the gospel.[104] This fact illustrates an ethos of interdependence Paul modeled for local churches. These local churches were not isolated kingdoms but needed and welcomed outside support.

Closing his letter to the church in Colossi, the apostle Paul wrote, "Give my greetings to the brothers in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her home. When this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea" (Col 4:16-17). Paul encouraged churches across different cities to share his letters with other local assemblies. He also commissioned servants to care for multiple congregations. In Romans 16, Paul commended Phoebe, hailing from the church in Cenchreae, to the church in Rome. She would assist the church there, as they acted in kind. He wrote, "So you should welcome her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints and assist her in whatever matter she may require your help. For indeed she has been a benefactor of many—and of me also" (Rom 16:1-2).

Second Corinthians 8 reveals that local church interdependence extended to sharing resources between congregations. Paul called for the Corinthian church to support their brethren in Macedonia, who were suffering through a severe season of affliction. Paul stated, "I am not saying this as command. Rather, by means of the diligence of others, I am testing the genuineness of your love. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 8:8).[105] Later in the passage, Paul provided rationale for his request: "It is not that there may be relief for others and hardship for you, but it is a question of

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[104]Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, 58. See also Joseph H. Hellerman, *Philippians*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: B and H Academic, 2015), 146–47.

[105]Ralph Martin asserts, "What's at stake is the reality of the genuine love of their [Corinthians's] commitment to Paul's apostolic mission, to see whether their love is of the same caliber as the Macedonians." Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 2nd ed., Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 440.

equality—at the present time your surplus is available for their need, so their abundance may also become available for our need, so there may be equality" (2 Cor 8:13-14). From this passage readers gather insight into local church interdependence. First, Paul did not demand the Corinthians offer support to the needy Macedonian church. He appealed to them as a self-governing local church, which should be compelled by love to provide for the need. Second, Paul displayed the culture of mutual aid between congregations. At this juncture, the Corinthian church had a surplus that would benefit the needy Macedonians. Had the Corinthians been in dire need, other churches could rise to care for them.

Romans 15 also describes this interdependent posture. Within this context, Paul described his coming travels and the generosity of the churches in various regions. He said, "Right now I am traveling to Jerusalem to serve the saints, for Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. Yes they were pleased and indeed indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual benefits, then they are obligated to minister to Jews in material needs" (Rom 15:25-27). The New Testament reveals that churches across multiple regions depended upon each other for the sake of the gospel.[106]

**Doctrinal support and accountability.** Because each local church shares one Lord, faith, and baptism, they are indelibly bound together through the message of Christ's gospel. While the New Testament does not routinely command churches to observe and account for another church's doctrine, Scripture indicates a posture of doctrinal accountability among local congregations.

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[106]Within a Baptist treatment of the church, Bart Barber argues that the connection among local churches arose from "the mere fact that the vast preponderance of Christian congregations existed as the spiritual offspring of some other congregation." Bart Barber, "A Denomination of Churches: Biblical and Useful," in *Upon This Rock*, ed. Jason G. Duesing, Thomas White, and Malcolm B. Yarnell III (Nashville: B and H Academic, 2010), 141. This seems an overstatement because, as observed, churches possessed connections with those in distant areas. Also, the biblical text does not specify that these connections arose from generational relations.

Perhaps the most famous instance of inter-church interaction regarding doctrine is the Jerusalem Council found in Acts 15.[107] Verse one says that men from Judea were preaching that one must be circumcised in order to receive salvation. Luke says,

> But after Paul and Barnabas had engaged them in serious argument and debate, the church arranged for Paul and Barnabas and some others of them to go up to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem concerning this controversy. When they had been sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, explaining in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and they created great joy among all the brothers (Acts 15:2-3).

The passage goes on to describe the argument between the adverse parties. This exchange led to Peter's masterful explanation of Christ's work that provided salvation for all people; James, the brother of Jesus, affirmed Peter's words (Acts 15: 7-11). Following, verse 22 adds, "Then the apostles and the elders with the whole church, decided to select men who were among them to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas: Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, both leading men among the brothers. They wrote this letter to be delivered to them." The church in Jerusalem selected both elders and other church leaders from multiple churches to deliver a letter to churches in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, attempting to correct the heretical preaching they had received from false teachers. Upon gathering an assembly at Antioch, this council forged the letter. These thoughtful words brought much encouragement to the church in that city (15:30-31).

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[107]Other Protestant traditions, namely Presbyterian and Episcopalian, use Acts 15 to support a tiered authority structure. Within his work *Sojourners and Strangers* Allison provides a cogent argument that these systems misinterpret this passage. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 254-76. The Presbyterian tradition, especially, "stretches the narrative account and imposes that particular polity on a text that will not support it." Ibid., 276. From a congregational polity, Acts 15 serves a different function. While it does not provide grounding for a specific ecclesiastical authority structure, the passages does, however, provide biblical precedent for strong relationships between local churches. Allison elucidates: "The Jerusalem counsel pushes my ecclesiology to move beyond the simple affirmation of congregationalism, supporting the notion of strong connections between churches. Specifically, the narrative of Acts 15 emphasizes an association among churches that is focused on and, I believe, nourished by the gospel." Ibid., 298. Furthermore, the Philadelphia Confession in 1742 offered this passage as a central biblical precedent for associations within a Baptist ecclesiology. Benjamin Griffith, "Essay: Power and Duty of Associations," in *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, 1707 to 1807: Being the First One Hundred Years of Its Existence*, ed. A. D. Gillette (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2003), 59.

Additionally, Judas and Silas (two of the council members) offered strength and encouragement through their preaching (15:32). The Jerusalem Council offers an example of outside leaders lending guidance to another local church. For the sake of right doctrine and practice, these leaders aided confused and fragile churches.[108]

In writing to particular churches, the New Testament writers used examples from other congregations to illustrate doctrinal truth.[109] Paul, for instance, used other churches as examples for right faith and action. He reminded the Corinthians of "the ways in Christ" that he taught "everywhere in every church" (1 Cor 4:7); he often implored them to adapt a common belief "in all the churches" (1 Cor 14:33b-34; see also 1 Cor 7:17; 11:16).[110]

In a similar vein, 3 John reveals that a church leader testified on behalf of another church's elder. The apostle John, writing to Gaius, mentioned he was glad when "some brothers came and testified to your faithfulness to the truth—how you are walking in the truth" (3 John 3). While Gaius was responsible, firstly, to his local body, readers notice that his actions were commended from outside his local assembly. John offered a negative example to Gaius from a neighboring churchman. Diotrephes was slandering the apostle and refusing to welcome him and other brethren into his fellowship because he loved to be first (3 John 9).[111]

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[108]Acts 10:1-11:18 also reveals doctrinal connection and accountability between churches. Peter sought harmony between the Caesarean congregation (Gentiles) and the church in Jerusalem (Jews). It should be noted that this passage, first and foremost, considered a unique and unrepeatable situation within the New Testament context. However, Peterson notes, "A second paradigmatic point about the narrative might be a pattern for resolving church problems in a harmonious way." Peterson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 445. Peterson offers a helpful discussion of this passage and its implications. Ibid, 442-46.

[109]The nature of the New Testament epistles also illustrates this point. For instance, each of Paul's epistles were circular letters used and applied in different contexts than merely for the original recipient. Paul taught the corporate body of Christ through examples from other churches. Thus, Paul treated churches separately, but also, in a sense, as a collective unit.

[110]Harvey, "Why Network."

[111]Robert Yarbrough notes that it is hard to imagine that Gaius (on John's side in this matter) could still be within Diotrephes' congregation. Thus, Paul seems to be providing Gaius a cautionary example from another church's misfortune. Robert W. Yarbrough, *1-3 John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 380.

The apostle John's seven church letters in Revelation 2-3 also reflect doctrinal accountability among local bodies of Christ. With these letters, John offered hearty encouragement, as well as stern exhortations to these congregations. After each letter, John added, "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:7, 11, 17, 29, 3:6, 13, 21). [112] John invited other believers and churches to learn valuable lessons provided by other local churches. Though not overt, these examples show that churches contributed instruction, thus offering accountability to other local bodies. The next section will contemplate this issue through the lens of Christian history.

## Historical Affirmation for Local Church Partnership

Proper theological method demands consideration from the greater Christian tradition. After the New Testament era, how did fellowship among churches manifest itself? While innumerable examples throughout Christian history exist, this section focuses on Apostolic and Patristic examples that help illustrate this biblical mindset.

### Patristic Affirmation

Some assume that the Patristic era was dominated by a hierarchical bishopric funneling upward to Rome. This era, then, possessed little instruction for inter-church interaction. However, examples within this era affirm the New Testament model. Akin to Acts 15, when a dispute occurred between the church in Rome and churches in Asia in 155—over the date to observe Easter—Eusebius wrote that Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna traveled to Rome to confer with Bishop Anicetus in order to resolve the conflict.[113] While

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[112]David Aune argues that various forms of this expression are found in Jesus' words in the synoptic Gospels (e.g., Mark 4:9, 23; Matt 11:15, 13:9, 43; Luke 8:8, 14:35). He believes they most likely originated with Christ. David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1997), 155.

[113]Eusebius, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 1, *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 4.14.1. See also Everett Ferguson, "The 'Congregationalism' of the Early Church," in *The Free Church and the Early Church: Bridging the*

the two sides failed to reach an agreement, both maintained their own practice but also preserved fellowship.[114] Irenaeus later wrote, "The disagreement on the day of fasting confirmed agreement in the faith."[115]

The Patristic era also presents examples of inter-church doctrinal accountability. Everett Ferguson signals that the first indication of these gatherings involved a refutation of Montanism—a faulty understanding of the Holy Spirit—which had infiltrated several congregations.[116] Around 180 Apollinaris of Hierapolis, recalled that the believers in Asia had come together often and in various locations to reject the Montanist heresy "so that they were driven out of the church and excluded from fellowship."[117] In a similar vein, Tertullian, within his treatise *On Fasting,* mentioned that church councils in Greece "handled deeper questions for the common benefit."[118] These meetings set a precedent for the ecumenical councils—the first of which dealt with the heretical teachings of Arius in 325.[119]

Clement of Alexandria, an early post-canonical writer, indicated that congregational selection and commission existed in the Apostolic era. *1 Clement* 44 described bishops as those appointed "by eminent men with the consent of the whole

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*Historical and Theological Divide*, ed. Daniel H. Williams (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 130.

[114]Ferguson, "'Congregationalism' of the Early Church," 130.

[115]*Eusebius: Church History*, 5.24.13. Ferguson notes that this occasion led to the development of regional councils of bishops. Ferguson, "'Congregationalism' of the Early Church," 130.

[116]Ferguson, "'Congregationalism' of the Early Church," 131.

[117]*Eusebius: Church History*, 5.16.10. See also Ferguson, "'Congregationalism' of the Early Church," 130.

[118] Tertullian, *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A. D. 325*, vol. 4, *Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Part First and Second*, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe, Alexander Roberts, and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 111.

[119]Ferguson, "'Congregationalism' of the Early Church," 131. Ferguson asserts that even the authority of the councils depended upon the churches' reception and implementation. Ferguson's assertion warrants further interaction—a conclusion is presumptive at this juncture. In this vein, a thesis to consider would center upon the possibility of the ecumenical councils as a display of inter-church accountability toward right doctrine.

church."[120] *Didache* 15 taught Christians how to select bishops and deacons.[121] To this end, during the third century, canon law required the presence of three bishops at an incoming bishop's ordination. Ferguson surmises, "This requirement related the appointment of a bishop to the universal church through the presence of other congregations."[122] Michael Svigel surveys the ecclesiological spirit of this era, and asserts,

> The low episcopal form seems to have functioned at a time when local churches had some degree of governmental autonomy, though they always had a consciousness of belonging to a greater universal community of churches and bishops, and often corresponded, fellowshipped, and shared in ministry together. These were not what we would call independent churches, but interdependent churches, each with its own local church structure and headship, but actively engaged in a metacommunity of churches both near and far.[123]

These early churches valued substantial relationships as the united body of Christ.

The third century Latin Patristic father, Cyprian, offered insight into the necessity of visible unity among churches. In his famous work, *On the Unity of the Catholic Church*, the bishop correlated the visible unity and cooperation among those within the church to the unity among the triune God. Cyprian wanted the church to understand that pure union with Christ yields visible ecclesial unity. The bishop offered powerful imagery to solidify his position. Cyprian regarded this lack of visible unity as a means of spiritual adulteration against Christ. He equated disunity with immorality; those who disassociate with the Church are spiritually associating with prostitutes.[124] Just as no

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[120]Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 103–4.

[121]Ibid., 367.

[122]Ferguson, "'Congregationalism' of the Early Church," 135.

[123]Michael J. Svigel, *Retro Christianity: Reclaiming the Forgotten Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 187-88.

[124]Cyprian, *On the Church: Select Letters*, trans. Allen Brent, Popular Patristics (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimirs Seminary Press, 2006), 151. See also Robert Mayes, "The Lord's Supper in the Theology of Cyprian of Carthage," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 74, nos. 3–4 (July 1, 2010): 309. Mayes points out the importance of Cyprian's language in relation to the Novatian schism.

hint of indiscretion can exist in a pure marriage, no disunity from the outside world can exist in a pure communion with Christ. Visible ecclesial unity was not a mere social gathering but rather an embedded entity that is grounded in the unity of the Godhead.[125] While Cyprian subscribed to a different ecclesiastical polity (bishops ruling over local congregations) than a congregational understanding, his words prove instructive. He contended, as do the New Testament authors, that visible unity and communion among churches illustrates our union and communion with Christ; conversely, neglecting visible unity ceases to reflect God's conception of the body of Christ.

The generations that followed Christ's apostles exhibited inter-church connection. Akin to the biblical text, this era cultivated communion among local manifestations of Christ's body. An extensive survey of Christian history would yield a plethora of similar examples; however, the preceding illustrations display that Christ's church inherited and implemented rich communion among various local congregations.[126]

**Priesthood of Believers:**
**A Balanced Approach**

Chapter 5 considers E. Y. Mullins' impact upon Baptist ecclesiology. Mullins—best known for his articulation of soul competence—argued that because humans are created in the image of God they, in turn, possess an inalienable right to access him directly.[127] When affected by divine grace, humans are fully capable or

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[125]Cyprian, *On the Church*, 152–53. See also Abraham Van De Beek, "Cyprian on Baptism," in *Cyprian of Carthage: Studies in His Life, Language and Thought*, ed. H. Bakker, P. Van Geest and H. Van Loon, Late Antique History and Religion (Louvain, Belgium: Peeters, 2010), 145.

[126]Recent writing offers an exemplary example from the early reformed tradition. In his 2013 work, *Calvin's Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Tradition 1536-1609*, Scott Manetsch examines the pastoral theology and ministry activities of Geneva's Venerable Company of Pastors (as it was called). More than 130 men composed this collection. Such pastors as Theodore Beza, Pierre Viret, Simon Goulart, and Jean Diodati participated in the company. Manetsch elucidates the nature of these meetings. These pastors, along with local parishioners, would gather each Friday to provide mutual counsel for care and discipline cases as well as providing a preaching venue for ordination candidates. Scott Manetsch, *Calvin's Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Tradition*, *1536-1609* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). While this example stems from a different ecclesiastical tradition, it illustrates vibrant partnership and communion between pastors and members of neighboring local churches.

[127]E. Y. Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion: A New Interpretation of the Baptist Faith* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1908), 92–93.

"competent" to interact with their creator.[128] Mullins did not create this category, however. Calvin provided a traditional interpretation of the ingrained knowledge of God that has been situated within each person. He considered it "an awareness of divinity," "the seed of religion," and "the worm of consciousness."[129] However, Christians affirm the debilitating effects of sin nature. Only idolatry and self-centeredness exist apart from God's transforming grace. Romans 1 and 2 proclaim that every human stands accountable and to divine judgment and are inexcusable; human consciences are aware of God's existence and transcendence.[130] Thus, soul competency entails that every person, fallen in sin, is responsible to answer to a holy and blameless God.[131] The idea of soul competency, in the classic sense, is understood as a universal anthropological reality. However, Mullins, equated soul competency with the priesthood of believers. He considered this biblical category for the church as a human certainty. George reminds, "The priesthood of believers is really a part of the doctrine of the church. It cannot be spread into an anthropological generalization without doing great violence to its biblical and historic Reformation meaning."[132] Baptists, sadly, enacted this damaging theological misappropriation. Individual experience and private judgment—traditionally frowned upon aspects of Christian theology—became associated with a departure from biblical fidelity and doctrinal consensus.[133] In turn, this distorted view of the priesthood of

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[128]Mullins, *Axioms of Religion*, 63–64.

[129]Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 43–51.

[130]Timothy George, "The Priesthood of All Believers," in *The People of God: Essays on the Believers' Church*, ed. Paul Basden, David S. Dockery, and James Leo Garrett (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 86.

[131]Regarding this concept, B. H. Carroll stated, "This is the first principle of the New Testament law—to bring each naked soul face to face with God . . . O soul, thou art alone before God." B. H. Carroll, *Baptists and their Doctrines*, ed. Timothy George and Denise George (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995), 15–16.

[132]George, "Priesthood of All Believers," 86.

[133]Ibid., 91-92.

believers bred "a magna carta for interpreting the Bible according to the dictates of one's own conscience."[134]

Correctly conceived, the priesthood of all believers was a stalwart principle for the sixteenth century Reformers. Martin Luther and his contemporaries used this term to crystalize a Protestant understanding of the church in contrast to the clericalism and sacerdotalism of the medieval church.[135] Luther scholar Paul Althaus explains the Reformation understanding of this term:

> Luther never understands the priesthood of all believers in the sense of the Christian's freedom to stand in a direct relationship to God without a human mediator. Rather he constantly emphasizes the Christian's evangelical authority to come before God on behalf of the brethren and also of the world. The universal priesthood expresses not religious individualism but its exact opposite, the reality of the congregation as a community.[136]

Reformation historian, John McNeill offers that the priesthood of believers stood in that era "an office conceived of not an individualistic but in a social sense as obligation to aid his fellow Christian and 'be a Christ' to him."[137] The priesthood of all believers necessitates community. This classic concept channels the freedom and responsibility of every Christian to portray Christ's gospel in their words and actions.[138]

## Theological Entailments for Twenty-First Century Southern Baptists

Through biblical argumentation and historical precedent, this chapter argues that union and communion with Christ yields a visible unity that exists within and among local congregations. This unity expresses itself in vibrant partnerships, steeped in

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[134]Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel*, 157.

[135]George, "Priesthood of All Believers," 92.

[136]Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 314.

[137]John T. McNeill, *Unitive Protestantism: The Ecumenical Spirit and Its Persistent Expression* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1964), 77. Leithart also offers a good discussion of this source and topic: Leithart, *End of Protestantism*, 41.

[138]Vanhoozer also picks up on this point. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel*, 158.

accountability and interdependence. The following section will consider theological entailments for the current Southern Baptist context.

## Recovering Communion and Cooperation in Twenty-First Century Baptist Life

To rightly honor the biblical text, Christian history, and Baptist identity, twenty-first century Southern Baptists ought to champion two stalwart aspects that have defined their denominational history—namely, communion and cooperation. Both concepts are familiar for Baptists across generations. The following section will conceive of these doctrines within a Baptist framework.

### Retrieving Communion among Churches

Baptists have historically valued vibrant communion among local churches.[139] The Second London Confession believed this concept was necessary for theologically sound church doctrine. As chapter 2 illustrates, the connectionalism of the Philadelphia tradition prioritized this notion. However, Southern Baptists have not received this doctrine with similar vigor. For instance, in 2009 denominational leader Morris Chapman made the following statement, "What shall we conclude about connectionalism and Southern Baptists? Because connectionalism is widely understood as a violation of local church autonomy, it must be rejected as an acceptable polity for Southern Baptists."[140]

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[139]Note that this language does not refer to administering the Lord's Supper but rather to describe fellowship among the people of God between local churches. Chap. 5 offers confessional and practical examples that clarify the Baptist tradition's understanding and usage of this term between local churches. Early Baptists William Kiffin and Benjamin Keach used this term—though not exclusively—to describe relationships between the people of God. They describe Christian fellowship as "holding communion together." Two particular works explain this language. William Kiffin, *A Sober Discourse of the Right to Church Communion*, Baptist Distinctives (Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 2006.) See also Benjamin Keach, *The Glory of a Gospel Church, and the True Orderly Disciple thereof Explained* (London: 1697). In a conversation with Baptist historian Tom Nettles, he offered that in light of Baptist theology, this understanding of communion consists of three elements: cognition toward doctrinal affinity, a shared spirit of fellowship, and mutual edification.

[140]Morris H. Chapman, "Axioms of a Cooperating Southern Baptist," in *Southern Baptist*

Chapman continues, "However, this does not mean that Southern Baptists do not value ecclesial bodies beyond the local church or official relationships between churches. On the contrary, maintaining these relationships is a core value of Southern Baptists. It is called *cooperation*." Chapman, thus, views cooperation as the only viable aspect of connectionalism among Southern Baptist churches.

Chapman surfaces a noticeable posture within the Southern Baptist Convention. Cooperation toward denominational activity defines inter-church connection. However, Scripture—affirmed by the church catholic and Baptist precedent—communicates the importance of visible unity through inter-church fellowship. For this reason, Southern Baptists should retrieve this central ecclesiological aspect. Recent Baptist treatments have made strides toward this recovery. For example, Leeman calls for Baptists to hold a stronger appreciation for "family ties" among churches. Leeman argues,

> The point is impossible to evade: local congregations of the New Testament were very much integrated with one another. A church will best fulfill the Great Commission when it is connected in relationship, prayer, and work with other churches. Local churches possess independence . . . because they possess authority for representing Christ, pronouncing a confession, and initiating the Great Commission. By a similar measure, the interdependence of local churches is founded in the fact that they share the same Christ, the same confession, and the same commission.[141]

Leeman offers implications from this inter-church connection. Among these practical suggestions, he echoes the scriptural mandate as well as the mindset of the early American Baptists in Philadelphia. Leeman believes,

> Churches share an interest in one another's spiritual welfare, they should pray for one another, encourage one another, financially support one another's ministries as opportunity allows, and generally do what they can to support one another's

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*Identity: An Evangelical Denomination Faces the Future*, ed. David S. Dockery (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 159. Chapman believes using "connectionalism" would lead to "more confusion." Ibid., 160.

[141]Jonathan Leeman, "A Congregational Approach to Catholicity: Independence and Interdependence," in *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age*, ed. Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman (Nashville: B and H Academic, 2015), 375–76.

> ministries . . . . Having knowledgeable relationships facilities specific prayer, encouragement, and aid.[142]

Leeman's work is commendable. He pushes Baptists toward inter-church connection.[143] This study seeks to build upon his work. To augment Leeman's call, Baptists should retrieve "communion" as a means to describe vibrant Baptist associational relationships. This language echoes Scripture and Baptist precedent while communicating the unity local churches share as the united body of Christ. Additionally, Baptists should consider inter-church communion as a visible manifestation of the universal church that reflects the already inaugurated kingdom, which will culminate fully in the future heavenly assembly.

**Deeper than affinity groups: Ecclesiologically-driven communion.**

Recently, organizations such as the Gospel Coalition and Together for the Gospel have offered premiere preaching and teaching. These events display vibrant visible unity among thousands of Evangelical Christians. Not surprisingly, many pastors and Christians alike consider these assemblies the most vibrant and valuable visible manifestation of fellowship beyond their local church. While encouraging and invigorating, these assemblies do not offer the connectional gravitas that comes from fellowship within the same denomination.[144]

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[142]Leeman, "A Congregational Approach to Catholicity: Independence and Interdependence," 375-76.

[143]While space does not permit extended interaction regarding this matter, Leeman's language garners further interaction. For instance, Leeman describes local churches alone as "eschatological embassies of Christ's kingdom . . . invisibly united by the apostolic gospel." Leeman, "A Congregational Approach to Catholicity," 367. As it relates to inter-church relationships, this language may not fully capture the connectivity among the body of Christ seen within Scripture and the language Baptists have historically ascribed. Leeman is correct to say that the universal church ultimately consists of a "heavenly eschatological community." Jonathan Leeman, *Political Church: The Local Assembly as Embassy of Christ's Rule* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 368. Further study can delineate how to display visible future unity among the body of Christ, inaugurated through the New Covenant while maintaining a historically Baptist definition of the universal church.

[144]Ministries like 9Marks have sought to promote healthy churches, offering a renewed ecclesiological impetus between churches, especially through publications and fellowship. While improvements exist, church connectivity demands renewal, especially within classic denominational organizations.

For Baptists, theologically conservative leaders from other denominations offer accountability and mutual care for many pastoral and exegetical issues. However, there are crucial activities to which ecclesiologically driven fellowship offers better care and support. For example, for a Baptist pastor who serves in a rural church, deacons may lead most aspects of church life; however, the New Testament epistles turn him toward a plurality of elders. Given his church's history, quickly installing elders without proper care and understanding may cause irreparable damage to his congregation. In this case, a Presbyterian or Anglican pastor possesses no category for this kind of situation. In this critical instance, only Baptists—and similar Free Church evangelicals who conceive elder leadership within a regenerate membership framework—can offer situated advice. The same mindset applies to questions of providing aid, receiving baptismal candidates, practicing membership within a congregational structure, as well as other church functions specific to this tradition.

A necessary question arises from this proposal. How does doctrinal affinity contribute to inter-church fellowship? More pointedly, should churches solely pursue communion with those who share considerable doctrinal affirmation (e.g., extent of the atonement, doctrines of grace)? Space does not allow for a full consideration of this point. In recent years, affinity groups have become quite popular, and it is impossible to discount the vibrancy of fellowship between churches that share deeper theological affinity.[145] Given the historical relationship between affinity and associational connection,

[145]It is impossible to discount, however, that theological affinity regarding substantial points of doctrine was a signature characteristic of early American Baptist associationalism. Tom Nettles notes that early American Baptist life portrayed much theological continuity, as most churches and associations ascribed closely to the Second London Confession (e.g., Philadelphia, Charleston, Sandy Creek). Tom J. Nettles, *The Baptists: Key People Involved in Forming a Baptist Identity*, vol. 2, *Beginnings in America* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005), 76. To this end, Nettles quotes H. G. Jones' 1851 preface to the Philadelphia Association annual meeting minutes: "In every period of its existence the Association has firmly maintained the soundest form of Scripture doctrine; nor could any church have been admitted at any period, which denied or concealed any of the doctrines of grace." Horatio G. Jones, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1851), 4. See also Nettles, *Baptists*, 76. This reality shows that differences exist between early American Baptist life and the more theologically diverse current Southern Baptist context.

it seems these fellowships reserve the right to possess different degrees of doctrinal alignment. For instance, many Southern Baptist associations follow the national convention by mutually affirming the "Baptist Faith and Message." Others affirm additional points of doctrine.[146] This reality beckons back to the foundational conception of Baptist associations. At their core, these assemblies are grounded within common doctrinal belief approved by associating churches. [147] All in all, this chapter does not prescribe a specific level of doctrinal affinity within associationalism but a recovery of inter-church fellowship among like-minded local churches. However, any type of associational fellowship necessitates some semblance of confessional unity and accountability.

**More than virtual reality: A visible embodied fellowship of local churches.** In recent years, writers like James K. A. Smith have helped Protestants consider the reality that humans are more than mere cognitive thinkers; rather, they are embodied liturgical people who form liturgical practices based upon habits and bodily practices.[148] Smithreveals an anthropological reality. As embodied beings, humans are formed by what they worship.[149] Smith's thesis provides implications for local churches. Hand-in-hand with embodiment, "place" occurs between body and landscape. Craig Bartholomew posits, "Since humans are to be placed, it follows that place results from dynamic

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[146]Over the past decade, affinity-based associations have emerged with evangelical life. The Sojourn Network, a Calvinistic Baptist fellowship of churches, offers a commendable example of an affinity-based network of churches. Unlike most affinity groups—whose primary aim is planting churches—this network exists to support and encourage newly formed as well as established churches that join the fellowship.

[147]Southern Baptist statesman James Sullivan points out that associations are responsible for "doctrinal examinations," rather than the national body. James Sullivan, *Ropes of Sand with Strength of Steel: How Southern Baptists Function and Why* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1974), 84.

[148]James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 7–8.

[149]Vanhoozer also notices this reality. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 399–411.

interaction of humans in their particular locations. The interplay between humans and their contexts means that place possesses a cultural dimension."[150] This reality means that emplacement contains a social component. Humans are not placed in a vacuum, but rather they exist within a community of relationships. Thus, relationships are crucial for a right conception of emplacement.

Scholars like Smith address the implications for liturgy, emplacement, and embodiment for local churches. Smith surmises,

> If Christian worship is going to be formative, it has to be repetitive. Secular liturgies already know this; yet Christians, especially Protestants, can be suspicious of such 'ritualized' repetition. But we need not be. God has created us as creatures of habit and meets us where we are. Indeed, the Father invites us into union with Christ through Spirit-charged practices that, over and over again, sink us into the triune life. In is in their repetition that the story begins to sink into our imagination, thus sanctifying our perception and engendering action 'toward the kingdom.'[151]

Humans are creatures of habit. Liturgical practices create habits that draw Christians to a deeper relationship with their Savior. The goal of liturgical catechesis is to summon people to a more conscious and deliberate awareness of what worship entails and why Christians gather together.[152] Within a local church, practicing the Lord's Supper embeds the reality of Christ's gospel, symbolizing his death and resurrection. These anthropological realities inform other ecclesiological aspects as well, especially inter-church connection.[153] Through visible fellowship between churches, believers can

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[150]Craig G. Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 3.

[151]James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 185–86.

[152]Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 188.

[153]For instance, geographical context serves an important role in inter-church relationships. Regionally-based fellowship offers more situated forms of connection than a mere national or international affinity group. Churches within the same city or region share similar contextual concerns, obstacles, and the like. Broad-based fellowship from different regions cannot capture these aspects in the same way. This realization has caused church networks to promote regional fellowship. For example, the Sojourn Network, based in Louisville, KY, will soon establish regional chapters to foster more vibrant church fellowship.

express a vibrant conception of the universal church, and experience the inaugurated beauty of the culminated eschatological communion of saints as they anticipate the culmination of the everlasting heavenly kingdom.[154]

## Cooperation toward Gospel Advancement: A Corollary to Inter-Church Communion

Prior to his ascension to the Father, Christ commanded his disciples to go and preach the gospel to all nations, and to baptize and train those who respond to the gospel call (Matt 28:18-20). Christ's commission holds special relevance for his church. Within God's plan of redemption, his Son commissioned his New Covenant community to join him in his plan to recover fallen humanity and establish his future kingdom.[155] Each local church should strive toward this commission's fulfillment. Given the global scope of Christ's command, Christians realize this task requires a corporate effort.[156] These efforts led Christians to establish para-church organizations to take Christ's gospel across the world. Baptists led this charge, and continue to spur churches toward this effort.

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[154]Similarly, Kimberly Samuel adds, "The church should serve as a looking glass through which humanity may glimpse the coming kingdom." Kimberly Samuel, "The Community of Mission: The Church," in *Theology and Practice of Mission: God, the Church, and the Nations*, ed. Bruce Riley Ashford (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2011), 65. Also, Lesslie Newbigin is helpful regarding this concept. He argues that orientation toward the kingdom helps properly situate all of life in the here and now. He sees the proclamation of the kingdom as something which concerns all aspects of life. Lesslie Newbigin, *Sign of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), viii.

[155]Space does not allow for a full treatment God's mission to establish his future kingdom. Briefly, the mission of God is a central theme across the biblical narrative and essential component to a right understanding of the church. Bruce Ashford asserts, "God's mission provides the impetus, framework, and trajectory for the church's mission to glorify God among the nations by proclaiming and promoting the good news that God is redeeming a people for himself and bringing all things under his good rule." Bruce R. Ashford, "The Church in the Mission of God," in *The Community of Jesus: A Theology of the Church*, ed. Kendell H. Easley and Christopher W. Morgan (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2013), 239. At the heart of the mission mandate, two theological aspects intersect: God's image and his Kingdom. Christopher Wright states, that as God's image bearers, "Humanity was put on the earth with a mission—to rule over, to keep and to care for the rest of creation." Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 64.

[156]Relevant to this point is a right understanding of the implications of the *Imago Dei*. A call toward ruling and subduing the earth as God's vice-regents necessitates that his people cultivate order and establish proper organizations and procedure to fulfill this kingdom mandate. For a beneficial discussion regarding this point, see Wright, *Mission of God*, 421–53. See also Ashford, "Church in the Mission of God."

Cooperation stands as a parallel corollary to communion; they function as two distinctive scripturally mandated means of inter-church connection. Thus, Southern Baptists should recover communion as they maintain theologically sound cooperation to extend Christ's good news.

## Conclusion

This chapter considers biblical foundations and historical affirmation regarding inter-church connection. United to Christ, believers enter the New Covenant community and are incorporated into the body of Christ through his Holy Spirit. This body forms local churches, and also maintains corporate unity as the united body of Christ. This unity produces vibrant communion between churches. This reality offers implications for twenty-first century Baptists. This tradition should promote inter-church communion, which cultivates God-honoring local churches that share in the blessings of Christ's redemption and exhibit the inaugurated beauty of his everlasting kingdom.

# CHAPTER 7

# CONCLUSION

This dissertation argues that a proper Baptist ecclesiology consists of church connectivity that includes accountability and mutual care between local bodies. The New Testament literature affirms this reality; ecclesial and Baptist history augments this truth. This associational concept does not disrupt local church self-governance, an essential Baptist belief. Also, proper Baptist connectivity retrieves the early American Baptist tradition, as illustrated by early American Baptist associations, and exemplified by the Philadelphia tradition. Baptists within this context espoused an associationalism that strove to uphold robust inter-church communion among local bodies of Christ, both in doctrine and practice. This connection reflected a desire for doctrinal fidelity and encouraged churches to maintain doctrinal purity and unity among associational churches. As Baptist denominational activity flourished during the nineteenth century, the Philadelphia Association—as well as their Southern Baptist descendants—emphasized emerging outward denominational activity (education, missions, and the like); these groups became less focused on inter-church communion. The disruption of this founding Baptist principle necessitates theological reappraisal.

## Summary of Chapters

Chapter 1 introduces Baptist connectivity within an American context and surveys the development of this doctrine. Monographs and essays illustrate that early American Baptists possessed vibrant inter-church relationships, inherited from their British roots. Member churches valued corporate wisdom and encouragement from sister congregations, while they maintained independence to govern their affairs. This literature

reveals a common trajectory as denominationalism grew in America, and indicate that the second decade of the nineteenth century offered a turning point toward increased denominational activity. The Southern Baptist tradition illustrates this trajectory as well. More pointedly, twentieth-century denominational leaders illustrated the pragmatic benefits of associations; these entities offered increased efficiency for a centralized denominational structure. To this end, many contemporary Baptist treatments have championed the cooperative benefits of associational relationships: churches partner to pursue Christ's great commission. Though, in recent years, Southern Baptists have accentuated the need for substantial inter-church fellowship.

Chapter 2 argues that early American Baptist associations, as children of British Baptist ancestry, demonstrated a commitment to encourage doctrinal health, mutual care, and unity between and within partnering churches. The chapter illustrates that the Philadelphia Baptist Association demonstrated a commitment to encourage doctrinal health and spiritual unity among Baptists within their local churches, between member churches and association, and among associations. For instance, churches offered aid in discerning difficult doctrinal and discipline issues, pulpit supply, and disputes among members and between churches. In the midst of advice and mutual care, Baptists strove to preserve local church autonomy. This chapter also reveals that outward concerns—mission and educational endeavors—emerged within the Philadelphia Baptist Association during the late eighteenth century.

Chapter 3 describes the Philadelphia Association's development during the nineteenth century. Though some continuity with the previous era remained, less direct interaction between the association and local churches defined this era, especially after the 1830s. Outward endeavors became central for the Philadelphia Association, controlling much of its time and energy. This shift, though, was neither unprecedented

nor unexpected, as Baptists seemed positioned toward this trajectory during the closing decades of the eighteenth century.

Chapter 4 shifts the discussion to the Southern Baptist Convention. Like the Philadelphia Baptist Association, denominational growth turned associations toward activity beyond their initial role: they originally championed the health and unity of member churches. Specific to this context, Southern Baptist denominational establishment and centralization—culminated in the early twentieth century—affected the identity of local Baptist associations. Associations became vital instruments for denominational promotion and overall Southern Baptist cooperation. All in all, Baptist associations supported the inward health of member churches through inter-church relationships. However, as a result of the association's altered relationship with the burgeoning denominational entities, Baptist cooperation toward denominational pursuits became a significant aspect of associational life.

Chapter 5 argues that the historical trajectory of associations within American Baptist life—as observed through the Philadelphia Tradition—displayed a measure of both continuity and discontinuity as related to the nature and purpose of church connection observed within Scripture and Baptist theology. To this end, three Baptist ecclesiological positions intersected with the study: (1) inter-church connection fosters communion defined by theological accountability; (2) inter-church connection maintains local church independence; (3) inter-church connection fosters cooperation in order to reach unbelievers. First, an emphasis upon inter-church communion decreased as denominationalism grew in America. Second, the Philadelphia tradition (including Southern Baptists) continually protected local church independence. Third, although Baptists historically affirmed cooperation toward the advancement of Christ's gospel, this aspect received increased awareness after the turn of the nineteenth century. This chapter also interacts with specific interlocutors regarding each ecclesiological aspect. As the

primary framer of the Baptist Faith and Message, E. Y. Mullins' impact upon the Baptist conception of connectivity proved significant.

Chapter 6 presents constructive theological material in light of the trajectory and development of Baptists associations in America. Prior to this chapter, the study establishes that cooperation toward outward missions and denominational efforts persist as the primary means to describe connectivity among Baptists. This chapter argues that believers who are united to Christ through the Holy Spirit form local churches, and possess corporate unity as a united body of Christ. This unity—illustrated in the New Testament and church history—should manifest itself in a vibrant fellowship or communion among believers. Thus, communion should define inter-church fellowship among like-minded churches; Baptists should retrieve their historical language regarding inter-church relationships. This language echoes Scripture and Baptist precedent while communicating the unity local churches share as the united body of Christ. Additionally, Baptists should consider inter-church communion as a visible manifestation of the universal church that reflects the already inaugurated kingdom, which will culminate in the future heavenly assembly.

## Suggestions for Future Research

This area of study offers opportunities for future research endeavors. The current work focuses upon relationships between Baptist churches. Further scholarship should assess catholicity within broader Christian circles. For instance, how should Baptists—who value ecclesial tradition and maintain orthodox theological doctrine—rightly connect with other denominational traditions? Baptists within different streams have addressed this topic.[1] A historically confessional Southern Baptist treatment within this area could offer significant benefit.

[1]For example, see Steven R. Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future: Story, Tradition, and the Recovery of Community* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016). See also Curtis W.

Another corollary study would consider the impact of specific philosophical developments upon the Baptist conception of inter-church connectivity. This study would trace the philosophical underpinnings of specific Baptist theologians and leaders, and consider how different schools of thought (e.g., Individualism, Pragmatism, Whig ideology) affected this aspect of Baptist life.[2] This type of study would provide Baptists with historical clarity in order to encourage biblical and theological fidelity.

## Conclusion

Across multiple generations, associationalism has been a prominent aspect of Baptist ecclesiology. Baptists have rightly appreciated the beauty of communion among local bodies of Christ. Independent churches governed their own affairs; yet they deeply regarded the wisdom of sister congregations, and received their advice and aid with an open hand. During the last century, Southern Baptists, specifically, have neglected this foundational aspect of their history. Twenty-first century Baptists ought to recapture their heritage. It is suitable to confess congregational independence, and yet embrace a dependence upon the body of Christ outside one's local membership. Deeper than

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Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014).

[2]A recent dissertation provides a good example of this type of study within a Baptist context. See Kevin Michael Crouch, "The Influence of William James on E. Y. Mullins and the Changing Nature of Pastoral Ministry Instruction at Southern Seminary in the Early Twentieth Century" (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014). Crouch considers pragmatism's effect upon ministerial education during the twentieth century. A similar study could assess an effect upon associational relationships. Francis Wayland and E. Y. Mullins would provide suitable conversation partners, given their impact upon Baptist life and affinity for nineteenth-century philosophical thought. To this point, see Curtis W. Freeman, "E. Y. Mullins and the Siren Songs of Modernity," *Review & Expositor* 96, no. 1 (December 1, 1999): 23–42. See also Norman Maring, "The Individualism of Francis Wayland," in *Baptist Concepts of the Church: A Survey of the Historical and Theological Issues Which Have Produced Changes in Church Order*, ed. Winthrop S. Hudson (Chicago: Judson Press, 1959).

cooperation, inter-church communion offers Southern Baptists meaningful connection that honors God's Word and affirms vibrant Christian tradition.

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ABSTRACT

DEPENDENT INDEPENDENCE: TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF BAPTIST ASSOCIATIONALISM

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This study provides a historical survey of connectionalism within American Baptist thought, using the Philadelphia Baptist Association as a case study. It will argue that twenty-first century Baptists ought to recapture their heritage and confess congregational independence while they embrace a meaningful dependence upon the body of Christ outside one's local membership. In recent years, Baptists have emphasized the need for vibrant inter-church connection; this study augments these pursuits and offers more historical and theological support toward these efforts.

In the eighteenth century, the Philadelphia Association, as a descendent of English Particular Baptists, fostered vibrant relationships among member churches that offered mutual care, doctrinal accountability, as well as unity between and among partnering churches—but also labored to preserve local church autonomy. During the late eighteenth century, and into the nineteenth century, outward endeavors became central for the Philadelphia Association, specifically, mission and educational endeavors; this era offered less direct interaction between the association and local churches. This dissertation also considers associationalism's trajectory within the Southern Baptist tradition. Like the Philadelphia Baptist Association, denominational growth broadened associations beyond their initial conception. Specifically, Southern Baptist denominational establishment and centralization—culminating in the early twentieth

century—affected the identity of local Baptist associations. Associations became vital instruments for denominational promotion and overall Southern Baptist cooperation.

This study assesses the trajectory of Baptist associational life in light of biblical and theological fidelity. Three Baptist ecclesiological positions intersect with the study and provide categories for this assessment: (1) inter-church connection fosters communion defined by theological accountability; (2) inter-church connection maintains local church independence; (3) inter-church connection fosters cooperation in order to reach unbelievers. Theological and biblical truths undergird these assertions; believers who are united to Christ through the Holy Spirit form local churches and possess corporate unity as the body of Christ. This reality yields inter-church fellowship among like-minded churches. Baptists should consider inter-church communion as a visible manifestation of the universal church that reflects the already inaugurated kingdom, which will culminate in the future heavenly assembly. Deeper than cooperation, inter-church communion offers Southern Baptists meaningful connection that honors the Scriptures and affirms Christian tradition.

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