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Associational History in a Sociological Perspective

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ASSOCIATIONAL HISTORY IN A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

If you are a child of God, you want to please Him. But that may not be easy. We humans are sinful. Nevertheless, some of us struggle. If you share in that struggle, I write this for you. Although flesh can not encompass the mind of God, through experience and heritage we can learn to serve him better. Hopefully by sharing our perceptions we can grow both in understanding and behavior.

If you are a missionary Baptist, to some extent you are involved in an association. Keeping that denominational structure vital to the service of God is not easy either. Back in 1968 John Gardner wrote about the life and death of institutions – such as a Baptist association.[1] The following four paragraphs are a synopsis of his observations on keeping institutions alive.

Some institutions are simply the sum of historical accidents, shaped like sand dunes by influences rather than intentions. Like mega cities they are the unintended consequences of multiple, fragmented purposes. Such organizations are structured to solve problems no longer pressing. They need the means to free procedures so that the rule book does not grow fatter while the ideas grow fewer. They need release from custom that cares more about how rather than whether things are done. To living persons accomplishment is more urgent than protocol, but rigid institutions are dying and doing little.

Institutional decline is due not to ignorance but to internal decay – rigor mortis. Tradition and reputation become cosmetics for an aging structure. Custom so oppresses creative minds that new developments must originate outside respectable practice. (For examples note the origins of jazz, land grant colleges or motels.) Attachment to past methods, preoccupation with vested interests and an excessively narrow definition of what is relevant kill human institutions. They develop functional blindness to their own problems. They suffer not because they can not solve problems but because they will not see them. Some even rationalize that their ills are either necessities or virtues. Blind organizations move toward disaster.

Such organizations remain static because change would jeopardize the rights and privileges of positions – maybe president, perhaps janitor. No sure way exists to combat vested interests. But we can shape institutions if we are clear about our purpose – and not too complacent or myopic. The best protection is to create an atmosphere in which anyone can speak up. To renew a system, provide for vigorous criticism. Protect the dissenter and non-conformist. Critics can be saviours as well as trouble-makers. But the spirit that welcomes nonconformity is fragile. A self-renewing community devises explicit arrangements to protect the critic. That pleases God.

Why ask for evaluation? Because organizations are not without fault nor above criticism. No leader can be adequately self-critical. Today's healthy structure may deteriorate tomorrow. The just use of power now may be corrupt then. "No one puts new wine in old wineskins." Faith must be in ideals, not organizations. Evaluate to avoid building community while killing creed. Evaluate to celebrate valued qualities and those who embody them. Look for today's challenge, not just future needs.

Now let's apply this to your Baptist association. What challenge will enliven it? Does the revelation of God in Christ impact the Baptist association? If so, how and what difference will that make to us? To answer, let's begin with theology – our knowledge of God. And especially with practical

theology, - i.e., what should we do because of that knowledge? That ought to be an enliving challenge! It also is pleasing to God.

So this is not a history book. But surely knowledge of the past helps us understand the present. You understand a child better if you know about the parents.[2] Knowledge of sources helps us better understand any organization, even the Baptist Association. Aristotle said, "We cannot feel that we understand a thing until we can account of its causes and its modus operandi."[3]

To know both how and why an organization developed helps you understand what it is today – or should be tomorrow. Theology demands more than just a summary of historical facts. One object of theology is intelligibility and coherence. That requires interpretation as well as analysis. That is, you reflect on the facts as well as report about them. Therefore, my study is sociological as well as historical. Let me ask "why" as well as "what." Unworthy stewards repeat meaningless routine. Worthy institutions are shaped by divine vision, not historical accident. Let's not waste our lives with the trivial. Judgment is too close.

The association is one expression of Baptist "connectionalism". That is the theory of how local congregations relate or connect. An association operates through voluntary cooperation of members. Associated congregations select messengers from among their own membership.[4] But Peter Berger asserts that the real function of an organization cannot be understood just by reading its bylaws. A complex religious institution cannot be comprehended by just scanning explicit social philosophy expounded by its representatives. Sociological understanding peeks into areas unspoken and hidden.[5] "Why" may not be easily seen as "what." Let me note some pivotal events in associational history that may suggest reasonable theories to explain their occurrence. These "wants" may suggest "why."

Associational origins among English Baptists.

R. G. Torbet demonstrates that Particular Baptists, watershed of our associations, developed in seventeenth century England. They germinated in the "free church" hope of that time.[6] They wanted the church to manage its own affairs under the Lord rather than under the tax and control of the state. The chief pioneer seems to have been John Smyth. He led his church to Holland about 1609 as a group of religious refugees. Nichols describes Holland as "an oasis of constitutional liberties in the great waste of Romanist and Lutheran despotisms."[7] Baptists were part of the religious reform developing there. Later they returned to England.

A. T. Boisen says, "The creative manifestations of organized religion seem to have been associated chiefly with periods of social crises."[8] Such was the condition of 17th century England. Boisen further states, "The task of organized religion is to transform into custom and habit the new vision … and thus transmit them from one generation to another,"[9] His sociological axiom is that religious form tends to follow culture.[10] These two axioms concern when and why religious movements develop. If he is right, the Baptist association reflects the influence of 17th century English culture.

Three-fourths of the people then lived miserable lives without leisure or luxury. Their horizons were limited to their rural surroundings. The crude living conditions bred indifference to suffering. Death

took every second child before age ten and destroyed the strong in their prime. The pervasive sense of danger, helplessness and mourning may explain the prominence of religion and awe.[11]

But travel and trade began change. New energy sources (peat and coal), new materials and new foods began improving conditions some. Wealth began to exalt the merchant class. Wars with professional armies became increasingly expensive. Traders soon learned how international affairs affected their profits and began resisting taxes. James I tried to rule with divine right, but his iron fist begot an iron soul in the opposition.

Civil War erupted. Parliament won because Oliver Cromwell recruited a cavalry on the basis of religious enthusiasm rather than picturesque chivalry. Disregarding social traditions, he assembled men of strong convictions from every class. Their victory led to the execution of Charles I in 1649- an act - unheard of![12] That a people should try and kill a ruler for disloyalty and mischief sent horror through all courts of the world.

During Cromwell's brief reign the English navy controlled the seas and wool traders prospered. But his imposition of puritan standards upon the general public produced a return to the monarchy with Charles II.

Three separate religious groups developed during these tumultuous times: Quakers, Congregationalists and Baptists. They prospered under Cromwell but suffered greatly under Charles II. Nevertheless, these free churches made impossible the old type of church establishment. Politics and economics were somewhat released from ecclesiastical regulation. Toleration became a legitimate part of the culture.[13]

These new sects rebelled against the control exercised over public worship. They believed that tax revenue was supporting a corrupt clergy and that infant baptism was producing unregenerate churches. They believed in the possibility of having a visible church of visible saints. At issue was church polity. This issue rose uniquely in England because of the Puritan insistence that one particular form of church government was taught in the Scriptures.[14]

The beginnings of Baptist Associations are complex. Walter Shurden says it is difficult to know when informal cooperation between churches became formal organization.[15] Interchurch relationships gradually developed into structured organization. Why they took certain forms and why they originated at that time are more intricate problems. If we consider factors that cause this movement then we may better understand the Baptist association now.[16] Was it a response to God's leadership or just a convenient way to handle affairs, i. e., was it a charismatic, normative, enduring creation or just an expedient, temporal, passing copy? Pleasing to God or just to man?

Perhaps Baptists just copied from Presbyterians. Whitley refutes that suggestion because of Presbyterian ecclesiasticism that Baptists reject.[17] What about the Puritans or the Quakers? Baptist associations antedate Puritan associations[18] as well as the Yearly Meeting of the Friends, which were entirely different from the theory and practice of the association and did not originate till 1668.[19] Evidence indicates that the Baptist association was an original development in church order for that time and place.

But what is the relation of Baptist doctrines of church order (ecclesiology) and the form of the association? Did Baptist faith help design this type of organizational relationship? Some factors prevented this design from assuming ecclesiastical functions. Other aspects of the design are permanent or normative and some are temporal or expedient. We need to consider these matters so that we practice what we teach, avoid subtle ecclesiasticism, and value the normative over the temporal. Good stewardship requires this.

FACTORS OF INTERDEPENDENCY IN ASSOCIATIONAL ORIGINS

Some Baptist churches voluntarily assume obligation for each other's welfare and joint missionary endeavors. Let's look at some factors that encouraged congregational interdependency among Baptists. The earliest such formal action that has historical verification dates back to 1644. Seven Particular Baptist congregations met in London to produce a written confession of their faith.[20] In describing the event J. T. Christian states, "Church order was made to rest on the principle of voluntariness under the authority of Christ."[21]

The pattern for this meeting may have been the Westminster (Presbyterian) Assembly. But the Baptist experiment of formal association through delegates soon became their accepted practice. Whitley summarizes the growth of associationalism: "Here then we see the informal co-operation of 1644 imitated in Wales within six years and rapidly spreading till associations had become a typical Baptist institution before the Protectorate closed. They revived with each cessation of persecution and with 1690 entered on continuous history."[22]

Through delegates or representatives (today commonly called "messengers") local Baptist congregations communicated with each other. They shared in the decisions and actions of this organized expression of Baptist connectional-ism. But the decisions of the delegated were personal and without binding commitment by the local congregation. In fact, their written documents explicitly deny the association any church power over the local congregation.

This type of connectional organization was unique among religious groups of that day. Of course, it can be justified by appeal to the New Testament as can most forms of church order. That appeal, however, can not totally explain the rise of the association. There is not just one but three sources of church order. They are (1) the biblical record, (2) historical precedent and (3) either expedient or charismatic decisions.[23]

By "expedient" I mean action taken without regard for God's guidance. It is convenient action that may be amoral or even immoral. By "charismatic" I refer to action subject to the prompting of God who is Spirit.[24] That which is convenient or existential is temporal. That which stems from the Spirit partakes of the permanent and is essential. Past expediences may no longer be normative. But experiences of God yesterday still offer light for today. Now which aspects of the origin of associationalism are charismatic and which are just convenient?

Hugh Wamble suggest five purposes that caused the Baptist association: (1) to provide security and fellowship for small isolated groups; (2) to issue a confession demonstrating theological orthodox, political innocence and moral purity; (3) to preserve denominational unity; (4) to propagate Baptist views; and (5) to maintain fellowship through information, assistance and cooperation.[25] The form the

association took to achieve these purposes may stem from essentials of their faith. It also may stem from circumstances of their temporal existence. Let us look at the later first.

EXISTENTIAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF ASSOCIATIONAL ORIGINS IN ENGLAND. Two major problems stimulated Baptists to develop associationalism: the mobility of Cromwell's army, which included many Baptists, and the scattered condition of the churches. We noted above the sociological thesis that religious form tends to be influenced by culture.[26] It is no surprise that the association originated during the development of Cromwell's New Model Army c. 1642. Counties were organized into "associations" for defense purposes.[27] The close connection between Baptists and Parliament's revolt made the associational pattern a natural form for expressing their views of connectionalism.[28]

Cromwell composed his army of pious men. His Baptist soldiers maintained ties with their home congregations by means of correspondence. They functioned like modern missionaries. The new congregations which they spawned were seen as expressions of the whole Baptist movement. As the Army moved from one locality to another, new Baptist churches were started.[29] They communicated with each other by correspondence and representatives.

Wamble agrees that the army significantly affected Baptist associational origins, but he denies that it was primary.[30] He suggests that the scattered condition of Baptist congregations under oppressive conditions fostered inter-congregational relationships.[31] Small, isolated churches needed the encouragement of occasional meetings with like-minded believers. When entire congregations could no longer assemble because of numbers, representatives met for them.

Sometimes there would be several congregations in one church.[32] The parts would assemble from separate communities on occasion as one church. Gradually each local congregation became a separate church but the assembly of the whole seems to have been continued on a representative basis in the associational pattern.

ESSENTIAL PRESUPPOSITIONS OF ASSOCIATIONAL ORIGINS IN ENGLAND. In addition to these two existential circumstances, mobility of the army and the scattered churches, there were some matters of faith – normative, essential presuppositions – that influenced the beginning of associations. A primary influence was the Baptist conviction about church. The Church of England viewed local congregations as part of the whole. Their local church derived its being from the larger ecclesiastical structure.[33] Presbyterianism assumed the same.[34] They assumed a particular congregation derived its life from the church universal. Baptists developed in this religious environment and accepted the idea of congregational interdependency.

In an article on early Baptist confessions, C. R. Andrews demonstrates that these confessions were not intended to show how Baptists differed from other denominations. Their purpose was precisely the opposite. Baptists then were seeking recognition within the established Christian community. They conversed with non-Baptists whom they hoped to influence and by whom they expected to be influenced.[35] As part of the body of Christ each congregation was obligated to express mutual care for others.

At the same time Baptists believed that each congregation derived its life from the Lord, not some ecclesiastical structure. They refused to equate the universal church with some organizational

expression.[36] The obligation of churches to care for one another did not require bishops nor ecclesiastical structures. The local church was a voluntary assembly. It was not subject to the control of the state nor to the authority of men. The obligation of interdependency did not require organizational authority.

Secondly, our Baptist view of the clergy also influenced the development of the association. While Roman Catholic doctrine made the congregation dependent upon the clergy, Baptists saw the church as fundamental. God's gathering of the people, not his calling of the minister, produced the church. The congregation produced the clergy. The gift of service within the church was not an office for authority. This subordination of the clergy to the local congregation allowed Baptists to develop interchurch communication without depending on ministerial initiaition.[37] Associational relations were based directly on the congregation and not mediated through the clergy.

This subordination of clergy to laity may account for the religious vitality of Baptists to some degree. The conservative nature of organization resides in leadership rather than membership. Power protects its turf. Talcott Parsons illustrates this practice in other cultures: "For example, creativity in classical Greece parallels the absence of a priestly class with great social power. Conversely, the Brahman priestly caste in India may have produced the most conservative large-scale society in history."[38] The Baptist emphasis on laity rather than hierarchy may encourage our occasional revivals within the denomination.

Third, another normative, theological factor causing Particular Baptists to develop associationalism lies in their Calvinistic heritage. Calvinism rejected medieval asceticism which stressed individual preparation for life here-after. Instead Calvinism advocated activism – not escape from but mastery over conditions. The activist feels responsible for bringing in the Kingdom on earth. "Be doers of the word."

This overtone in Baptist theology would allow individuals or local congregations to be content with their own spiritual prosperity. They were obligated to help a neighbor in need. This activism from Calvinistic theology prompted Baptists to create structures that enabled mutual care for churches. Isolationism was not acceptable. Associationalism arose within a theological concern to create a good society which included sister congregations.

In summary, seventeenth century English Baptists were motivated by theoretical belief as well as by practical need to develop inter-congregational relationships. Thus, the form of the association was a consequence of their conviction as well as climate. Their understanding of the nature of the church was made manifest in her order. It was not just an expedient copy of contemporary religious movements. The association was a charismatic development that allowed mutual communication among congregations. Of Mutual care – the concern for fellowship (koinonia) – was a practical as well as a theoretical basis for Baptist connectionalism as expressed in the association.[39] The association thus may be the most significant contribution we have made to ecclesiology. It may be important to God's pleasure.

FACTORS OF CONGREGATIONAL INDEPENDENCY IN ASSOCIATIONAL ORIGINS

Baptist views of church order have two foci: the logical congregation and the association.[40] Sources of the tradition of congregational autonomy are our next concern. While Baptist churches may

recognize their mutual obligations in Christ, they are also fiercely independent of ecclesiastical structures. How did they develop an organization that can respect both? What are both the expedient and the normative aspects of church autonomy?

The polar nature of the association – If commitment to mutual care led Baptists to reject the independency espoused by Congregationalism, why did they also reject Presbyterian ecclesiasticism in their interdependency? They were subject to the same social influences as these other denominations. Perhaps Baptists sought balance – or compromise – between connection and isolation of the local church. The association allowed and encouraged the particular congregations to fellowship while retaining autonomy.[41] Each local church was subject directly to the Lordship of Christ but not to the authority of an ecclesiastical organization.

Thus the association functioned to related congregations as objects of mutual Christian concern. It did not relate them as subjects to one another's authority. Baptist connectionalism is a field or tension between two poles: the particular church and the universal church, between one family and the entire household of God. Both traditions – congregational autonomy and congregational community – exist together in associational history. The heritage of interdependent fellowship produced ecclesiological organization. The heritage of immediate Lordship prevented ecclesiastical structures.

Essential Presuppositions – The Baptist movement protested against hierarchical and authoritarian centralization.[42] Doubtless it was influenced by individualistic capitalism.[43] Particular Baptists were theological Calvinists, which is the religious parallel of capitalism. (General Baptists, who were Arminian, were largely swallowed up by Unitarianism.)[44] Calvin had tried to subordinate dynamic individualism to social asceticism, but to no avail against rising prosperity and impending industrial revolution.[45] Nevertheless, Baptist concern for independence was not just culturally induced. There was considerable theological and biblical justification.

First, Baptists affirmed the local church. A believers church could exist without ecclesiastical authorization. "The priesthood of the believer" allowed each person direct access to God through Christ without the necessity of clergy or ecclesiastical structure. If this privilege belonged to the individual, it could not be denied the local group. Each congregation had as much right to the Lord as did any individual member. No hierarchy was needed over the local congregation. The presence of Christ fully authenticated the fellowship as "body of Christ." In fact, human councils with coercive power might hinder the freedom of God to guide his congregation.

Second, Baptists believed in the "free church." This term concerned the government of the church by her Lord rather than by human agency. It stemmed from the voluntary nature of discipleship. No one was compelled to the altar of the living God. "Whosoever will may come." Free from the law, no one should be compelled by external authority to accept religious tenets. Even the state had no right to interfere with individual conscience. Church was to be separate from state. Only believers who voluntarily accept discipleship were allowed to assume the covenant responsibilities of church membership.

Likewise, the local congregation as a whole was under grace, not law. Ecclesiastical councils with coercive authority would violate the voluntary basis of Baptist faith. So would religious laws made

by the state. Coercion may yield assent but not faith.[46] The commands of the Spirit could not be coerced by the flesh.[47]

Finally, Baptists accepted the doctrine of the "gathered church." Neither apostolic succession nor sacramental institutions were essential to the local church. Only the presence of Christ with two or more believers was necessary to constitute a church. (Mt. 18:20) The church was body of Christ, not a unit of ecclesiastical structure. The validity of a particular church did not require tangible participation in some ecclesiastical organization. The local congregation did not derive its reality from some visible church organization but from the spiritual presence of Christ. The local Baptist church did not exist because of the association. The association existed because of the local church. The local church needed a wiser fellowship of faith and was obligated to care for sister congregations. But the fundamental necessity of church – the presence of Christ – could not be compelled by man or organization. The association could not replace the Lordship of Christ.[48]

But why do Baptists tend to exalt independency more than interdependency? The rise of capitalism is part of the social crisis that marked the end of the Middle Ages. Protestantism arose in that milieu.[49] Capitalism doubtless influenced the form of Baptist church order.[50] Granting that Baptists were children of their time, however, does not deny that they were also children of God in Christ. The persistent emphasis on individualism in Baptist church order must have some deeper ethical reason than economics.

As an economic movement, capitalism drew most of its theoretical foundations from the field of law. Law is the language of national community.[51] Every legal system is forced by its society to establish some theoretical presuppositions concerning the nature of group action and individual responsibility of the group member.[52] For example, Roman law acknowledged co-ownership but not corporate ownership. Maitland states, "(Rome's) tests were the law of an unassociative people … for the thought of the living group it can find no place; it is condemned to be 'atomistic' and 'mechanical'."[53]

English law, however, recognized both the manyness of members and the oneness of body in terms of 'trusts' or 'corporations'. In a trust sovereign individual could empower the trustee to act in their behalf as individuals, so that the group as such neither owned property nor performed acts. In a corporation, the group both possessed and acted as a body.

The concept of incorporation, as developed in English law, may have affected the individualistic attitude of the local Baptist congregation. First, the corporation was a personality before law – a fictious personality created by the state. As a creation of the state, the corporation was subject to the law of the state. Second, acts of a corporation were amoral, that is, not subject to personal punishment. Third, individuals who comprise the corporation are liable only to the amount of their investment. (This is illustrated by the English use of "Ltd." to identify a corporation.)

A trust, on the other hand, involved only individual action that was personal and, therefore, subject to moral judgment. The trust was the creation of the will of the individual members and not the creation of the state. Private property owners in seventeenth century England used the trust, which reflects the concern for manyness rather than oneness, to avoid state control or dominance by the crown of their individual initiative. Maitland describes this ingenious use of the trust as follows: "The trust deed might be long; the lawyer's bill might be longer; new trustees would be wanted from time to time; and now and

again an awkward obstacle would require ingenious evasion; but the organized group could live and prosper, and be all the more autonomous because it fell under no solemn legal rubruc."[54]

At least two reasons suggest that early English Baptists viewed local associations as trusts rather that corporations. First, they refused on theological grounds to acknowledge their association as a fictious personality created by the state. State control was avoided to allow voluntary obedience to the immediate lordship of Christ. They believed that God should be free from all human fetters in guiding his people. In their society the trust represented the hope of free persons. It acknowledged the law of the state but not its dominance in religious matters. The trust was a vanguard of emerging democracy

But democracy was not the social context of the sixteenth century. Its tendency to absolutism is reflected in and defined by the works of John Bodin, who in his *Republique*, affirms that the king is above law and sovereign overall human associations. "A corporation or a guild is a legal right of communal organization, subject to sovereign power. 'Legal' implies that authorization is by the sovereign, for without his permission no guild can be authorized."[55] In effect the trust prevented and denied this. The Baptist hope for freedom of religion would tend to adopt the trust as a pattern for group relations.

Second, these early Baptists rejected any action that could not be subject to divine judgment. Such would have been the case if the action of a corporation as a fictious personality were amoral. Seventeenth century Baptists could not see their participation in an association as exempt form God's judgment. They rather would view their connectional organization as a trust in which they were still individually accountable. Congregational representatives at associational meetings would be considered trustees, not corporate attorneys. The concept of manyness in the congregation would prevent corporate representation in the association.

The trust was conceived as a social contract, a political creation, not a theological product. The theological bases for congregational independence still pertain today, but the cultural climate of yesterday may be negative today. Cultural climate is expedient, not normative. A living faith adapts to a fluctuating society – not in conviction but in design. If the questions change, so do the answers.

The theory behind the trust has a Greek heritage, not Hebrew-Christian. It expresses Aristotelian manyness but not corporate oneness. The trust may have been an expedient deception for "the really fictious fiction of English law was, not that its corporation was a person, but that its unincorporate body (trust) was not person, or (as you so suggestively say) was nobody."[56] The biblical tradition stresses corporate oneness rather than manyness (I Co. 15:22). One individual can represent the group as a corporate whole.[57]

Moreover, groups can be incorporated on an authority other than that of the state. "Body of Christ" affirms that incorporation can be an act of God. "The image of body preserves the truth that the church is incorporated in Christ."[58] As the local congregation can be a real whole, an individual member can be responsible for the assigned actions of the entire body. (As janitor of Urbandale Baptist Church, I was responsible cleaning the commodes for the entire congregation. They delegated that sovereignty to me.) Or as Paul says, "If one members suffers, all the members suffer with him, or if a member is glorified, all members rejoice with him" (I Co. 12:36)

The social climate of today differs from our English heritage. This is easily seen, for example, in the legal world. Ellul says: "We notice, for instance, the historically decisive transition from the traditionally individualistic concept of private law to the social concept of public law."[59] The environment that spawned the association had changed. How can the association then not become an organizational dinosaur, a useless relic?

The only evidence of life is change – growth, not deterioration, A rigid associationalism is dead and useless to a living God. The organizing idea that constitutes the unity of associationalism must be entertained by living minds and be capable of modification in order to live.[60] Human association in an age of freedom can assume real personality without legal consent of the state. A return to organic social philosophy, replacing the co-ownership of individuals, allows for reappraisal of Baptist tradition, biblical types and charismatic action. The Baptist historian can now recognize the distinction between an independent tradition that affirms the freedom of a sovereign God and one that affirms the isolation of a sovereign individual. Our Baptist heritage includes both congregational independence and interdenpendence.[61]

For Baptist associationalism today's choice is neither individualism nor corporateness. The Gospel allows <u>both</u> manyness and oneness. Independent congregations can voluntarily be interdependent as congregations. A defense of such conclusion appears in *The Baptist Way of Life* by Hays and Steeley who point out that the idea of local independence has been exaggerated. They contend that the occasional appearance of a Baptist congregation that disdains ties with others does not negate the stronger tradition that stresses interdependence.[63]

<u>Independence</u> <u>and</u> <u>power</u>. How can an organization function with members that are both autonomous and mutually dependent? Doesn't the inclusion of such antithetical elements make for impotence? Respect for congregational independence deprived the association of coercive authority. But the association was more than a social convenience or a denominational luxury. The spiritual interdependency of the associated congregations provided a persuasive power Moreover, Handy notes that the association has power "in particular to determine the mind of Christ as made known in the Scripture through the guidance of the Spirit, and to exclude a defective or disorderly church from its membership."[64]

The history of English Baptist associations demonstrates the necessity of harmony of sentiment for successful functioning. The just live by faith in each other as well as in God.[65] General Baptists may have made the bounds of agreement too narrow. So that the association became divisive.[66] Particular Baptists allowed a latitude that provided for differences but maintained basic agreement in theology and ecclesiology. In guarding these boundaries the association incurred considerable power. Such negative power could prevent a deviant congregation from fulfilling its need for communication with congregations of like faith and order.[67] The affirmative power in associational authority provided for fellowship, constructive discipline and arbitration of denominational conflict.

<u>Conclusion</u>

In developing the association as their connectional organization Baptists affirmed the interdependency of their congregations. Their interdependency was motivated by several factors: the hostile environment encountered in the rise of a "deviant sect," the tradition in that culture of the

universal church (i.e. the church of God composed of all believers), the Holy Spirit that makes the many one, and the spirit of Calvinistic activism which tried to create the good community in this present world.

On the other hand seventeenth century associationalism also affirmed the independency of Baptist congregations. They recognized that the local body was fully church. Theologically the association reflects both universal and local church concepts. English Baptist viewed the particular church as (1) free – voluntary in discipleship; (2) local – immediate in lordship of Christ; and (3) gathered – congregational in polity. Their fear of state control caused them to design the organization of the association as a trust, a view which may theoretically violate the true corporate nature of associationalism. The Baptist association in its English origins affirmed both the corporate relatedness and also the local autonomy of our churches. Such proper concern for the church, body of Christ, surely pleases God.

FOOTNOTES

1. John Gardner, *No Easy Victories* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), pp. 39-51.

2. Willard D. Sperry, *Religion in America* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1946, p. 69

3. Aristotle, *The Physics*, 194, b, 19-20, in *Society, Culture and Personality*, trans. P. A. Sorokin (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1947) p. 696.

4. See J. C. Bradley, *A Baptist Association: Churches on Mission Together* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1984), for a recent description of associational organization. The first such publication was S. F. Dowis, *Associational Guidebook* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1959). For a detailed study of first associations see R. D. Conner, "Early English Baptist Associations," *Foundations* XV, No. 2, April-June, 1972, 163-185.

5. P. L. Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies* (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1961), p. 108

6. "Free" here refers both to the freedom of God to direct the local congregation as well as that of the local congregation from the restrictions of state control or ecclesiastical councils. Note R. G. Torbett, *A History of Baptists,* 1st ed., rev. (Valley Forge: The Judson Press, 1963), p. 29. Separation is not to be identified with independency even though both movements influenced Baptist origins.

7. J. H. Nichols, *History of Christianity* (New York: The Ronald Press, 1956), p. 57.

8. A.T. Boisen, *Religion in Crisis and Culture* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955), p. 138.

9. Ibid., p. 38.

10. Christopher Dawson, *Religion and Culture* (New York: Meridan Books, Inc., 1958), pp. 47-48.

11. W. K. Ferguson and Geoffrey Brunn, *A Survey of European Civilization* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1947), pp. 522-25.

12. H. G. Wells, *The Outline of History* (New York: Garden City Books, 1949), pp. 646 ff.

13. Nichols, p. 59.

14. Ibid., p. 58.

15. W. B. Shurden, "The Historical Background of Baptist Associations," *Review and Expositor* (Louisville: Faculty of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary), LXXVII, No. 2, p. 161.

16. H.R. Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (Hamden: The Shoes String Press, 1954), p. 89.

17. W. I. Whitley, "Associational Life Till 1815", *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society* (London: Baptist Union Publication Department), V (1916-17), 22.

18. Ibid.

19. H. C. Vedder, *A History of the Baptists in the Middle States* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1898), p. 92.

20. See Whitley, "Associational Life Till 1815," p. 19-34, for a more detailed review of Particular Baptist Associations.

21. J. T. Christian, *A History of Baptists* (Nashville: Sunday School Board, SBC, 1922), I, 313-314.

22. Whitley, p. 34.

23. J. D. Hughey, "What Determines Church Polity?", *Review and Expositor*, LII (April, 1955), 206.

24. cf. Marney, pp. 11-16.

25. Hugh Wamble, "The Beginnings of Associationalism Among English Baptists," *Review and Expositor*, LVI, No. 4 (October, 1957), 544-549.

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27. Torbet, p. 44.

28. W. L. Lampkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1959), p. 150.

29. Porter Routh, An untitled address delivered at Glorieta Baptist Conference Center, Glorieta, New Mexico, n. d., pp 19-20.

30. Hugh Wamble, "The Concept and Practice of Christian Fellowship: The Connectional and Interdenominational Aspects Thereof, Among Seventeenth Century English Baptists" (Th. D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, 1955), p. 234.

31. Ibid., p. 237.

32. Ibid., p. 254.

33. Geddes MacGreggor, *Corpus Christi* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1958), p. 12.

34. Ibid., p. 20.

35. C. R. Andrews, "The Maine Wheele That Gets Us Aworke," *Foundations*, I, No. 3 (July, 1958), 29.

36. Wamble, "The Concept and Practice …," p. 242.

37. Ibid., p. 237.

38. Talcott Parsons, *Religious Perspectives of College Teaching in Sociology and Social Psychology* (New Haven: Hazen Foundation, 1951), p. 29.

39. Wamble, "The Concept and Practice …," p. 251.

40. R. T. Handy, "Biblical, Historical and Theological Roots of the Associational Principle," (a paper presented to the General Council of the American Baptist Convention, 1961), p. 1.

41. Christian, p. 321. However, autonomy is not synonymous with separateness.

42. Paul M. Harrison, *Authority and Power in the Free Church Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), p. 11.

43. Note J. M. Yinger, *Religion, Society and the Individual* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1957), pp. 529-541, for discussion of this relationship.

44. Ibid, p. 533.

45. Niebuhr, p. 99.

46. C. P. St. Amant, "Baptist Heritage and Religious Liberty," *The Baptist Training Union Magazine*, XXX, No. 3 (March, 1964), 17 (153).

47. See W. S. Hudson, ed., *The Great Tradition of the American Churches* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), for a discussion of the voluntary principle in religion as it relates to separation of church and state.

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56. Maitland, p. xxxiv, in Gierke.

57. See T. W. Manson, *The Servant-Messiah* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1953), pp. 74-75; or H. Wheeler Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964).

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59. Ellul, p. 9.

60. Ernest Barker, "Introduction," in Otto Gierke, *Natural Law and the Theory of Society* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1950), p. lxxviii.

61. Ibid., p. xii.

62. Ibid., p. lxxvii.

63. Hays and Steeley, p. 10.

64. Handy, p. 8.

65. Ro. 1:17; cf. John 17:21; I John 4:20.

66. Wamble, "The Concept and Practice …," p.318.

67. Ibid., p. 275.

R: footnote RB:1/31/90