STR 7/1 (Summer 2016): 86–107

"Oh That All Bigotry Was Rooted Out of the Earth!" The Evangelical Catholicity of Oliver Hart and the Regular Baptists

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This article argues that Regular Baptist leader Oliver Hart (1723–95) embraced the "evangelical catholicity" of the Great Awakening. Following revival leaders like George Whitefield, Hart's emphasis on evangelical piety (especially the new birth, gospel holiness, and the desire for sinners to be converted by the Holy Spirit) allowed him to partner with Christians across the denominational spectrum to advance revival. Hart's friendships with evangelical Presbyterians, Methodists, and Anglicans are all explored, while his continued commitment to Baptist church order is also noted. Hart's catholicity is significant for understanding the Regular Baptist movement, indicating that the Regular Baptists shared in the revival spirituality of the Great Awakening to a far greater degree than has traditionally been acknowledged.

On October 27, 1754, Richard Clarke (1723–1802), rector of St. Philip's Anglican Church in Charleston, South Carolina, took ill. Scheduled to perform a funeral that afternoon, Clarke relayed a message to Oliver Hart (1723–95), pastor of the Charleston Baptist Church. In an apparently unprecedented move, Clarke asked the Regular Baptist minister to conduct the service for him, in his "own way." Though worlds apart ecclesiologically, Clarke recognized in Hart a fellow evangelical, and trusted him to preach Christ to his people. Hart later reflected,

> In the evening I buried a child in the church burying ground, and spoke extempore, perhaps the first instance of this nature ever known in this province. The church minister was sick and could not attend himself; therefore, gave me free liberty to speak in my own way; which discovered an extraordinary catholick spirit. Oh that all bigotry was rooted out of the earth; then would there subsist a greater harmony between persons, than what does; it is indeed a pity that our little outward differences should cause such a shyness between us.[1]

[1] Oliver Hart, diary, October 27, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman University.

The incident captures the spirit of evangelical "catholicity" which swept the north Atlantic Protestant world during the Great Awakening.[2] The experience of new birth, the hunger for gospel holiness, and the desire to see many converted to faith in Jesus Christ by the Spirit's power united Christians who differed over issues of church order. Thomas Kidd and Barry Hankins have recently observed that Hart, along with most Regular Baptists, adopted the revival's "catholic spirit." "Like his mentor [George] Whitefield, Hart took denominational boundaries lightly and focused primarily on promoting a vital relationship with God," they write.[3]

This observation is significant in discussions of Baptist identity, for the Regular Baptists of the colonial South are not remembered for their support of the Great Awakening. Their contributions to the revival have been overshadowed by the meteoric rise of the Separate Baptist movement in the same period. In the twentieth century, William L. Lumpkin and Walter B. Shurden argued that the Separate Baptists were responsible for bringing the spiritual "ardor" of the awakening to the Baptists of the South, while the Regulars, chiefly concerned with "order," stood aloof from the revival.[4] This thesis has been widely received at all levels of Southern Baptist life. Yet, while important cultural distinctions existed between the Regular and Separate Baptists, the "order-ardor" dichotomy is a misleading oversimplification.[5] Regular Baptists in fact shared the spirituality of the revival, and labored for awakening in the South before the Separates arrived in 1755. One key element of Regular Baptist revival spirituality is their "evangelical catholicity," exemplified in the ministry of Oliver Hart.

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[2] I am aware that some recent scholarship has argued that the Great Awakening was in fact an "interpretive fiction," as in Jon Butler, "Enthusiasm Described and Decried: The Great Awakening as Interpretive Fiction," *Journal of American History* 69, no. 2 (September 1982): 305–25, and Frank Lambert, *Inventing the Great Awakening* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). While these scholars offer a provocative thesis and have made important contributions to the field, I ultimately find their conclusions unsatisfying. I am more convinced by the position taken by Thomas S. Kidd in *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

[3] Thomas Kidd and Barry Hankins, *Baptists in America: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 28–29.

[4] William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations in the South: Tracing through the Separates the Influence of the Great Awakening, 1754–1787* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1961); and Walter B. Shurden, "The Southern Baptist Synthesis: Is It Cracking?," *Baptist History and Heritage* 16 (April 1981): 2–11.

[5] For a full-length treatment of the revival spirituality of Hart and the Regular Baptists see my "Order and Ardor: The Revival Spirituality of Regular Baptist Oliver Hart, 1723–1795" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015).

The Roots of Evangelical Catholicity

The catholicity of the awakening had its roots in a number of earlier movements. Among the most significant were the Continental Pietists, led by Philip Jacob Spener (1635–1705), August Herman Francke (1663–1727), and Gottfried Arnold (1666–1714). The Pietists believed that heart-devotion to Jesus Christ served as the true basis of unity for all Christians, not doctrinal formulations or worship forms. Consequently, they emphasized the priority of the invisible church of all regenerate souls, rather than the visible church of any particular denomination. In the following generation, Moravian Pietist Count Nicholas Ludwig Von Zinzendorf (1700–60) argued that every Christian tradition offered a *tropos paideia*, or "type of teaching." As the beauty of a diamond can be appreciated only when viewed from all angles, so the various traditions each offered their own needed and beautiful views of Christianity.[6]

Many English Puritans shared the Pietist burden to unite Christians around practical godliness. The non-conformist Richard Baxter (1615–91) famously referred to himself as a "meer Christian,"[7] and warned Christians of being "counfounded by the noise of sectaries, and divers opinions in religion." He prioritized the "one universal church of Christians in the world," which every believer entered "by being born of the Spirit." Like the Pietists, Baxter's chief concern was a life of vibrant holiness: "if then thou hast faith, and love, and the Spirit, thou art certainly a Christian, and a member of Christ, and of this universal church of Christians."[8] Among American Puritans, Cotton Mather (1663–1728) was an outspoken proponent of "the unity of the godly" at the turn of the eighteenth century. In Richard Lovelace's words, Mather believed "the key of a vitalized Christian experience was sufficient to unlock all the doors built up between genuine Christians through misunderstanding."[9] Indeed, to require precise doctrinal conformity of others was both unrealistic and uncharitable. "We must first forbear to impose one upon another. It is impossible for any but God who forms the Spirit of man within him, to form the understandings of men, into a belief of every Christian doctrine," Mather preached. He urged against "a Samaritan sort of crabbedenss, churlishness, forwardness, towards all that are not in everything just jumping with us," for this was "not the Spirit of the Gospel." Mather warned that "we must beware how we ever monopolize all godliness to our own little party . . . wherever we can see, *Alliquid Christi*, anything of

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[6] See Arthur Freeman, "Count Nicholas Ludwig Von Zinzendorf: An Ecumenical Pioneer," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 36, nos. 3–4 (Summer-Fall 1999): 297.

[7] See the memorable quotation in Richard Baxter, *Church-History of the Government of Bishops and Their Councils Abbreviated* (London: John Kidgell, 1680), [xiv].

[8] Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory* (Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria, 2008), 52–53.

[9] Richard F. Lovelace, *The American Pietism of Cotton Mather: Origins of American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 274.

Christ, let it be dear to us."[10] For Mather, unity was the essential prerequisite for the worldwide revival that would usher in the millennium: "There will be no revival unless there is unity, and the converse is equally true."[11]

By the late 1730s, Mather's dream appeared to have reached its fulfillment in the ministry of George Whitefield (1714–70). Like his predecessors, Whitefield believed in the unifying power of heart religion over doctrine, the priority of the invisible communion of regenerate souls, and in evangelical harmony as essential to revival. What distinguished Whitefield was his unparalleled, firsthand experience of Christian diversity. Whitefield kneeled at the altar with Oxford Anglicans, preached in the fields to unlearned Methodists, served at the communion seasons of Scottish Presbyterians, and attended meetings of American Congregationalists, Baptists, and Quakers. Bruce Hindmarsh argues that Whitefield's unique experience as the grand itinerant raised his catholicity to previously unknown heights, causing him to "minimize church order, in order to maximize spiritual solidarity with individuals who had been born again."[12] As Whitefield wrote of himself, "Though I profess myself a minister of the Church of England, I am of a catholic spirit; and, if I see any man who loves the Lord Jesus in sincerity, I am not very solicitous to what outward communion he belongs."[13]

In 1740, Whitefield explained his ecumenical policy to five Anglican interrogators in Boston, Massachusetts. When asked about his endorsement of non-Anglican ministers, Whitefield asserted that "a catholic spirit was best," and that "it was best to preach the new birth, and the power of godliness, and not to insist so much on the form: for people would never be brought to one mind as to that; nor did Jesus Christ ever intend it." Bishop Timothy Cutler (1684–1765) pressed him here: surely Christ's prayer "that all may be one, even as Thou Father and I are one [John 17:21]," demanded a single, visible church (namely the Church of England). Whitefield offered a different interpretation. Echoing his Pietist forbears, Whitefield insisted that the reality of regeneration trumped all external expressions of the Christian faith. "That was spoken of the inward union of the souls of the believers with Jesus Christ, and not of the outward Church," he countered. "I saw regenerate souls among the Baptists, among the Presbyterians, among the Independents, and among the Church folks—all children of God, and yet all born again in a different way of worship: and who can tell which is the most evangelical?"[14] As Whitefield corresponded with a diverse range of Christians, he allowed

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[10] Cotton Mather, *Blessed Unions* (Boston: B. Green and J. Allen, 1692), 72–79.

[11] Mather advances this idea in his *Shaking Dispensations* (Boston: B. Green, 1715).

[12] D. Bruce Hindmarsh, "The Spirituality of George Whitefield" (paper presented at Whitefield and the Great Awakening, Andrew Fuller Conference, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, October 22, 2014).

[13] George Whitefield to Ralph Erskine, January 16, 1740, in *Works of the Reverend George Whitefield* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1771), 1:140.

[14] Whitefield, *Journals*, 458.

differences of church communion to fade into insignificance before the all-important reality of the new birth:

> What a divine sympathy and attraction is there between all those who by one spirit are made members of that mystical body, whereof Jesus Christ is the head! . . . Blessed be God that his love is so far shed abroad in our hearts, as to cause us to love one another, though we a little differ as to externals: for my part, I hate to mention them. My one soul question is, *Are you a Christian?* Are you sealed by Christ's spirit to the day of redemption? Are you hungering and thirsting after the perfect, everlasting righteousness of Jesus Christ? If so, you are my brother, my sister, and mother.[15]

These remarks demonstrate Hindmarsh's observation that a major shift in Protestant spirituality was taking place in the dawn of the Great Awakening. Eighteenth-century evangelicals like Whitefield "abandoned the Puritan-Reformed question, 'what constitutes a true church?' for the Evangelical-Pietist question, 'What constitutes a true Christian?'"[16] In some places, Whitefield almost treated church order as a taboo subject, as with one Baptist minister:

> If the Lord gives us a true catholic spirit, free from a party sectarian zeal, we shall do well. I am sorry to hear that there is so much narrowness among some of the brethren in Wales. Brother [Howell Harris] complains sadly of it. I hope dear Mr. O. will be kept free, and not fall into disputing about baptism, or other non-essentials. For I am persuaded, unless we all are content to preach Christ, and to keep off from disputable things, wherein we differ, God will not bless us long. If we act otherwise, however we may talk of a catholic spirit, we shall only be bringing people over to our own party, and there fetter them.[17]

As the Awakening wore on, however, Whitefield found this evangelical unity increasingly difficult to maintain. He experienced painful, public splits with John Wesley (1703–91), for instance, as well as with the Moravians. Still, Whitefield strove valiantly to hold evangelicals together, appealing to their common, heavenly destiny. "The divisions among the brethren sometimes grieve, but do not surprise me," he wrote. "O how do I long for heaven! Surely, *there* will be no differences, no strife there, but who shall sing with most affection to the Lamb that sitteth upon the throne."[18] Whitefield's tireless promotion of evangelical catholicity for the sake of revival deeply influenced the Regular Baptists of the eighteenth century.

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[15] George Whitefield to Mr. P., November 28, 1739, in *Works*, 1:126 (emphasis original).

[16] D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition: Between the Conversions of Wesley and Wilberforce* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 322.

[17] George Whitefield to Mr. [John] O[ulton], May 27, 1742, in *Works*, 1:394.

[18] George Whitefield to Mr. J. H., in *Works*, 1:224 (emphasis original).

Regular Baptist Catholicity

On the whole, Regular Baptists in the American colonies embraced the "catholic spirit" of the awakening. One early example is Jenkin Jones (c.1686–1760), pastor of the Baptist congregations at Pennepek and Philadelphia, and a leader in the Philadelphia Baptist Association from 1726–60. Whitefield sought Jones out on his first visit to Philadelphia on November 5, 1739, and quickly identified Jones as a fellow evangelical. "I was visited in the afternoon by the Presbyterian minister, and went afterward to see the Baptist teacher who seems to be a spiritual man," Whitefield wrote. The next night, Jones and the Presbyterian minister went to hear Whitefield in the Anglican Church, and were reportedly "much rejoiced to hear Jesus Christ preached in the Church."[19] When Whitefield returned to Philadelphia in April of 1740, he was delighted to find that Jones had been promoting the revival in his absence:

> It is impossible to express the joy many felt when they saw my face again. O how did they comfort my heart with the account of what God had done for their own and many other people's souls. The Baptist minister in particular, who has been instrumental in watering what God has planted, recounted to me many noble instances of God's power of free grace shown in the conviction and conversion of some ministers as well as common people.[20]

A few weeks later, it was Whitefield's turn to hear Jones. Greatly pleased, Whitefield reported that Jones "preached the truth as it is in Jesus." In fact, Whitefield called Jones "the only preacher that I know of in Philadelphia, who speaks feelingly and with authority. The poor people are much refreshed by him, and I trust the Lord will bless him more and more." For Jones, these experiences with Whitefield established sufficient grounds for an alliance. On May 9, he had Whitefield preach at the Pennepek meetinghouse, to over two thousand people.[21] In the days to come, Jones extended similar invitations to other revivalists outside the Baptist circle, including Presbyterians Gilbert Tennent (1703–64) and John "Hell-fire" Rowland (d.1745).

The people of Jones's churches generally received the awakeners with enthusiasm, but Jones did meet resistance from his assistant minister, Ebenezer Kinnersley (1711–78). Kinnersley, who later taught English at the University of Pennsylvania and assisted Benjamin Franklin in his research of electricity, found the emotionalism of the awakening disgusting. When filling Jones's pulpit in his absence, Kinnersley sharply criticized Whitefield, Rowland, and the whole revival. The church was deeply offended. Many walked out on Kinnersley's sermon, and later brought charges against him for undermining Jones's leadership. When Kinnersely refused to apologize, he was excluded

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[19] Whitefield, *Journals*, 342.
[20] Ibid., 406.
[21] Ibid., 419.

from the Lord's Table. Matters turned uglier still when Kinnersley aired his grievances in Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette*. He accused Jones of lying and showing ungodly favoritism toward Rowland, a fellow Welshman, and attacked the church for ill-treating him.[22] Incensed, the church responded by publishing its own letter, which exonerated Jones, condemned Kinnersley, and called the latter to repentance.[23] Kinnerseley responded in print once more before the controversy died out.[24] Kinnerseley was something of an outlier among Regular Baptists in his opposition to the revival, but the incident reveals the conflict which Baptist leaders like Jones could invite through their evangelical partnerships.

Whitefield travelled south after leaving Pennsylvania in 1740, and by July 7 was in Ashley Ferry, South Carolina, fourteen miles outside of Charleston. He had been invited by Regular Baptist Isaac Chanler (1701–49), who he called "a gracious Baptist minister." Whitefield preached at the Ashley Ferry meetinghouse "to the conviction of some and the comfort of others," though "the violent heat of the weather, and great expense of sweat," forced him to lie down afterwards. The next day, he preached twice at the Independent Presbyterian Church before lodging with Chanler for the night, still "very weak." On July 9, Whitefield awoke weaker still, but kept his appointment to preach for Chanler at ten in the morning. This time the meetinghouse could not contain the crowd, so Whitefield preached under a tree. "People seemed to come from all parts, and the Word came with convincing power," he wrote. By July 20, Whitefield was convinced that revival had come to Charleston. "Though the heat of the weather, and frequency of preaching, have perhaps given an irrevocable stroke to the health of my body; yet I rejoice, knowing it has been for the conviction, and I believe conversion of many souls," Whitefield wrote. "Numbers are seeking after Jesus."[25] Before leaving, Whitefield advised the local pastors to establish a weekly lecture to carry on the work of the revival. Chanler's first address at these meetings was published as *New Converts Instructed to Cleave to the Lord* (1740).[26] It stands as a remarkable testimony of the Regular Baptists' revival catholicity.

Chanler introduced the sermon by celebrating the revival, searching for adequate words to describe his "holy pleasure, as well as wonder" at God's "raising up and sending forth such eminent instruments of good to the souls

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[22] *Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 15, 1740.

[23] *Pennsylvania Gazette*, August 14, 1740, appendix D.

[24] See Thomas Ray, "Jenkin Jones (c. 1686–1760)," in *A Noble Company: Biographical Essays on Notable Particular-Regular Baptists in America* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2006), 200–10.

[25] Whitefield, *Journals*, 440–44.

[26] Isaac Chanler, *New Converts Exhorted to Cleave to the Lord. A Sermon on Acts XI 23 Preach'd July 30, 1740 at a Wednesday Evening-lecture, in Charlestown, Set Up at the Motion, and the Desire of the Rev. Mr. Whitefield; With a Brief Introduction Relating to the Character of that Excellent Man . . . With Preface by the Reverend Mr. Cooper of Boston, N.E.* (Boston: D. Fowle for S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1740).

of men, crowning their labour with so great and uncommon success." Here he could not restrain his enthusiasm over Whitefield, who he called "very dear unto all such as have felt the power of the word preached by him reaching their hearts." Chanler called his listeners to imitate Whitefield's virtues, particularly his "catholic spirit." "Let our love like his be catholic, breathing in a free and open air, abstracted from all bigotry and party zeal, loving the image of God on whomever we may see it impressed . . . that is to say, all the regenerate sons and daughters of God, howsoever they may be distinguished by different denominations amongst men."[27] The body of Chanler's sermon focused on the great evangelical themes Whitefield preached: the sovereign grace of God in salvation, the priority of conversion, and the call to evangelical holiness. Chanler warned new believers against returning to their worldly ways, recommended sound Puritan books for their edification, and closed with a fervent evangelistic appeal for those who had not yet closed with Christ.[28] Interesting enough, Chanler at no point instructed the young converts on issues of baptism or proper church order.

A mutual friend of Chanler and Whitefield at this time was Regular Baptist William Tilly (1698–1744). A native of Salisbury, England, Tilly came to America in 1721, was called to ministry at the Charleston Baptist Church, and ordained at Edisto Island Baptist Church (later Euhaw) in 1731.[29] Tilly travelled to Whitefield's orphanage in Savannah with a group of friends on July 31. The following Sunday, Whitefield found himself so sick that "I was struck, as I thought, with death." Several guests had arrived, eager to hear Whitefield, but he was so weak that he asked Tilly to preach for him instead. Tilly did not consent, encouraging Whitefield that "God would strengthen me if I began." Whitefield began. As he prayed, one guest fell to the ground, "as though shot with a gun." From there, "the influence spread." As the congregation listened, "Tears trickled down apace, and God manifested himself much amongst us at the Sacrament."[30] To Whitefield's astonishment, Tilly partook of communion with the Anglican guests. In a letter the next week, Whitefield commented, "The word runs like lightning in Charles-Town. A serious lively Baptist minister, named *Tilly*, is here also; he has preached often for me, and last Sunday received the sacrament in our way—O bigotry, thou

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[27] Ibid., 1–2, 4–5.

[28] Ibid., *New Converts*, 38–42. Whitefield wrote to Chanler the following year, sending his love to the flock at Ashley Ferry. See George Whitefield to Isaac Chanler, February 17, 1741, in *Works*, 1:237–38.

[29] For Tilly, see Leah Townsend, *South Carolina Baptists, 1670–1805* (Baltimore: Clearfield, 2003), 38; and David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America and Other Parts of the World* (New York: Lewis Colby and Company, 1850), 703.

[30] Whitefield, *Journals*, 447.

art tumbling down a-pace!"[31] Jones, Chanler, and Tilly exemplify the catholicity that characterized Regular Baptists during the early days of the evangelical revival. They were willing to unite on the basis of evangelical piety to advance the gospel in the revival, though, as will be seen, this catholicity had limits. In the next generation, Oliver Hart carried on the Regular Baptist catholic spirit.

Oliver Hart's Catholicity

Hart would have observed a remarkable example of evangelical catholicity in the city of Charleston during the mid-1750s. A monthly society formed for prayer and the discussion of "some literary or religious topic which had been previously agreed on."[32] This ecumenical "holy club" counted among its members some of the leading figures of Charleston society, including the French Huguenot Gabriel Manigault (1704–81); Henry Laurens (1724–92) and Christopher Gadsden (1724–1805) of the Anglican church, both of whom would later serve the Continental Congress; and the eminent lawyer John Rattray (d.1761) of the Presbyterian Church. Among the ministers known to belong to the society were Richard Clarke, rector of St. Philip's, and the Presbyterians William Hutson (1720–61) and John J. Zubly (1724–81). Whether or not Hart participated in "Charleston's holy club," is unknown, though his prominence in the religious community and his friendship with virtually all of the above makes this plausible. At any rate, Hart certainly counted himself part of a transdenominational revival movement, one he had been immersed in from his childhood days in Jenkin Jones's Pennepek Baptist Church. This is evidenced by the "catholic" quality of his friendships in Charleston.

Hart and the Presbyterians

Presbyterians represented the shortest theological leap for a Regular Baptist, whose own Second London Confession consciously followed the Westminster Confession so closely.[33] So when two young Rhode Island College graduates were sent by their Presbytery "on a preaching excursion" to the

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[31] George Whitefield to Mr. N., August 15, 1740, in *Works*, 1:203.

[32] See David Ramsay, *The History of South Carolina, from its first settlement in 1670, to the year 1808* (Charleston: David Longworth, 1809), 2:452–53; Frederick Dalcho, *An Historical Account of the Protestant Episcopal Church in South Carolina, from the first settlement of the province, to the war of the Revolution* (Charleston: E. Thayer, 1820), 180–83; and Samuel C. Smith, "Charleston's Holy Club," in *A Cautious Enthusiasm: Mystical Piety and Evangelicalism in Colonial South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2013), 94–107.

[33] William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 235–38.

Carolinas, Hart happily broke bread with them.[34] One Presbyterian Hart especially admired was Samuel Davies (1723–61), who established an evangelical presence in Virginia from 1748–59. In 1759, Davies accepted the presidency of New Jersey College, which had already trained several of Hart's Regular Baptist colleagues. Tragically, Davies died less than two years into his administration, at the age of thirty-seven. In a letter on April 27, 1761, Hart mourned Davies's death as a blow to the evangelical movement. The remarkable letter is worth quoting at length:

> I lament with you (and surely all the friends of Zion must mourn) the loss of the justly celebrated President Davies. Oh, what floods of sorrow must have overwhelmed the minds of many, when it was echoed from house to house and from village to village, as in the dismal sound of hoarse thunder, *President Davies is no more!* Oh, sad and melancholy dispensation! Arise, all ye sons of pity, and mourn with those that mourn. And thou, my soul, let drop the flowing tear while commiserating the bereaved and distressed. Alas for the dear woman, whose beloved is taken away with a stroke! May Jesus be her husband, her strength, and her stay. Alas for the bereaved children! May their father's God be their God in covenant. Alas for the church of Christ! Deprived of one of the principal pillars, how grievous the stroke to thee! But Jesus, thy head and foundation, ever lives.
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> And thou, Nassau Hall, lately so flourishing, so promising, under the auspicious management of so worthy a President—what might we not have expected from thee! But alas! How is the mighty fallen in thee! How doth the large and beautiful house appear as a widow in sable weeds! And thy sons, lately so gay and pleasant, as well as promising and contented—how do they retire into their apartments, and there with bitter sighs, heavy groans, and broken accents, languish out, My Father, my Father!—the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof! But I can write no more.[35]

Hart also worked closely with Presbyterian William Tennent III (1740–77) during the American Revolution. They travelled the Carolina Backcountry together in 1775 on a special mission from the South Carolina government, and afterward petitioned the congress for religious liberty under the new constitution. These shared labors under such intense circumstances forged a strong friendship between the two men. When Tennent died on August 11, 1777, Hart preached a memorial sermon for him in the Baptist

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[34] Hart, *Original Diary*, December 12, 1778, 12.

[35] Oliver Hart to James Manning, April 27, 1761, Manning MSS, Brown.

meetinghouse.[36] He based his message on a popular eighteenth century funeral text, 2 Sam 3:38, "Know ye not that there is—a great man fallen this day in Israel?" He considered how Tennent displayed five essential qualities of "a great man": a distinguished pedigree, good natural parts and abilities, intelligence and learning, a benevolent heart, and devotion to religion. Hart dedicated the sermon, "preached from pure regard to his memory," to the bereaved mother, wife, and congregation, "with much affection."[37]

Hart also counted William Hutson among his Presbyterian friends. Hutson had been converted under Whitefield in 1740, while a stage player in New York. Hutson went on to teach in a slave school on the estate of Hugh Bryan (1689–1753), served a brief stint at Whitefield's Bethesda Orphan House, then helped pastor two Independent Presbyterian churches in the Charleston area. At every post, Hutson actively promoted revival, including publishing his late wife's letters and diaries under the title *Living Christianly, Delineated* (1760).[38] Hart was often "much refreshed" by Hutson's visits.[39] He invited Hutson to preach from his pulpit on several occasions, and supported Hutson when he stood against Charleston's vices. Hart praised Hutson for his "plain excellent discourse" from Matt 22:5, as the former actor, now walking in evangelical holiness, "bore his testimony also against stage plays." The sermon stirred Hart, though Hutson's other listeners "made light of it."[40]

Hart and Hutson also shared a friendship with John J. Zubly, pastor of the Independent Presbyterian church. Zubly later gained infamy for switching to the Loyalist position during the Revolution, but Hart valued him as a trusted gospel partner in Charleston.[41] In August of 1754, Hart spent a week at Zubly's home "very agreeably," and commented, "Oh how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell in unity!"[42] The next month, Zubly returned the favor, staying with Hart and preaching several times, as "the Lord owned it for comfort to many souls."[43] Zubly returned again the next month, proclaiming Christ from the Prodigal Son parable, and bearing "a faithful and excellent

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[36] Oliver Hart, *The Character of a Truly Great Man Delineated, and His Death Deplored as a Public Loss: A Funeral Sermon, Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. William Tennent, A.M.* (Charleston: David Bruce, 1777).

[37] Ibid., 4.

[38] William Hutson, *Living Christianity, delineated, in the Diaries and Letters of two Eminently pious Persons, lately deceased; vis. Mr. Hugh Bryan, and Mrs. Mary Hutson, Both of South Carolina. With a Preface by the Reverend Mr. John Conder, and the Reverend Mr. Thomas Gibbons* (London: J. Buckland, 1760).

[39] Hart, diary, October 16, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman. For the Pauline theme of "spiritual refreshment" through friendships, see Rom 15:32; 1 Cor 16:17–18; 2 Cor 7:13; Phlm 7, 20.

[40] Hart, diary, October 18, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[41] See Randall M. Miller, *"A Warm & Zealous Spirit": John J. Zubly and the American Revolution: A Selection of his Writings* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1982).

[42] Hart, diary, August 17, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[43] Hart, diary September 17–18, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

testimony against the stage plays."[44] When Hart's congregation experienced revival that fall, Zubly helped Hart to discern it as a true work of God.[45] Despite differences in ecclesiology, the mutual concern for conversion, revival, and holiness united Hart with many Presbyterians.

Hart and the Methodists

In the fall of 1769, as Whitefield was preparing for his final journey to America, John Wesley's Methodists were also making plans to send their first missionaries. In the Conference at Leeds on August 3, 1769, Wesley announced that two of their number, Richard Boardman (1738–82) and Joseph Pilmoor (1739–1825), would soon depart for the colonies, and he took up a collection for them as "a token of brotherly love." Whitefield also sent for the two young men. "As he had long been in America, he knew what directions to give us, and treated us with all the kindness and tenderness of a father in Christ," Pilmoor wrote. "Difference of sentiment made no difference in love and affection."[46] After Whitefield "prayed heartily for us," the two men sailed for America on August 21, 1769, believing "we had full power, according to the New Testament, to preach the everlasting gospel and do all possible good to mankind."[47]

Pilmoor eventually journeyed south, arriving in Charleston after a "very rugged" passage on January 19, 1772. He received a dismal first impression when he inquired about family prayers in the house where he lodged. Pilmoor's host informed him that the practice "might not be agreeable" to "the mixed multitude" in his house, because "family prayer is very uncommon in Charleston."[48] Taking his leave of these "sons of Belial," Pilmoor struck out for the General Baptist meetinghouse. Knowing they would share his Arminian theology, Pilmoor offered to preach for them, and the next day delivered his first sermon in Charleston. The crowd was small on short notice, but "two ministers were present all the time, and behaved very well." One was Oliver Hart. Pilmoor recorded that "the Baptist minister, Mr. Hart, returned me thanks for my sermon and invited me to preach in his pulpit." Hart's invitation encouraged Pilmoor that God had work prepared for him in the city. After preaching to the General Baptists the following Sunday morning, he travelled to Hart's meetinghouse. Pilmoor stuck with standard evangelical subjects: the salvation of God from Psalm 18 in the afternoon, and the unity of the regenerate from Rom 8:14, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." Pilmoor reported the Baptist meetinghouse was

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[44] Hart, diary October 17–18, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[45] Hart, diary, August 30, 1764, Hart MSS, Furman.

[46] Albert Micajah Shipp, *The History of Methodism in South Carolina* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1834), 123.

[47] Ibid., 124.

[48] Ibid., 127.

"as full as it could hold," and that "the Lord was remarkably present."[49] He preached several more times from Hart's pulpit before leaving Charleston, and even stayed in the home of a Baptist church member.

Given Hart's commitment to Calvinism, his acceptance of the Arminian Pilmoor into his pulpit is striking. Their partnership was possible for the same reason that both Wesley and Whitefield could send Pilmoor out with their full blessing: all viewed themselves as part of the same international, trans-denominational, evangelical revival movement. Pilmoor preached the gospel, called for conversions, and prayed for awakening, just as Hart did. After addressing Hart's congregation on "the law as a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ," Pilmoor commented, "I am not so much satisfied with preaching the Law, as I am with the gospel; but it is necessary, and therefore I must submit for the good of mankind and glory of God." Hart could have made the same statement, and for this he received the young Methodist warmly. Pilmoor, in turn, left Charleston remembering Hart as "not only sensible, but truly evangelical, and very devout."[50]

Hart and the Anglicans

Anglicanism historically represented the furthest stretch for a Baptist's ecumenism. In a 1751 tract *The Dissenters' Reasons for Separating from the Church of England*, English Baptist John Gill articulated eleven matters of conscience that kept Baptists and other dissenters from uniting with the established church. These included the Church of England's man-made constitution, its national rather than congregational form and order, its unregenerate membership, its corrupt and unbiblical doctrines, its wrongly-administered ordinances, its creation of unbiblical ecclesiastical offices, its recognition of the King as head of the church, its pagan and Judaistic rites and ceremonies, its imposition of the Book of Common Prayer, and finally its "persecuting spirit" against all dissenters. Gill's pointed work left no doubt that disagreements between Baptists and Anglicans were numerous and significant. Indeed, Gill did not hesitate to announce, "we cannot think such a church is a true church of Christ."[51] *Dissenters' Reasons* resonated with nonconformists of all stripes, seeing multiple editions in Gill's own lifetime. Baptists in Virginia, for instance, knew firsthand the "persecuting spirit" of established Anglicanism, as David Thomas's *The Virginian Baptist* (1774) clearly demonstrates.[52]

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[49] Ibid., 128–29.

[50] Pilmoor's diary during this period is reproduced in Shipp, *History of Methodism*, 128–34.

[51] John Gill, *The Dissenters' Reasons for Separating from the Church of England. Which were published at the end of Dr. Gill's Answer to a Welch Clergyman, and Occasioned by the said writer*, 4th ed. (London: 1760), 14.

[52] David Thomas, *The Virginian Baptist, or A View and Defence of the Christian Religion, as it is professed by the Baptists of Virginia* (Baltimore: Enoch Story, 1774). See also

Despite the historic enmity between the two traditions, Hart was happy to work with clergymen who shared his evangelical commitments. This began with Whitefield, under whose preaching Hart had been converted. As a pastor, Hart supported Whitefield whenever he came through Charleston, as when the two men partnered in the conversion of future black evangelist John Marrant (1755–91).[53] Whitefield admired Hart, and once advised a correspondent, "I would have you write to Mr. H[ar]t by the bearer, who is an experimental Baptist preacher from the northward. O that he may say something, that may do my dear family some good."[54]

Hart also befriended Richard Clarke, who served St. Philip's in Charleston from 1753–59, during which time he strongly supported the revival. In later years, Clarke gained notoriety for his wild apocalyptic predictions, as when his "enthusiasm rose to such a height that he let his beard grow and ran about the streets crying, Repent, Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, but on the 25th he resigned his Benefice and embarked for England."[55] Clarke sadly ended his life impoverished and espousing universalism,[56] but in his Charleston years, Hart loved Clarke's evangelical fervor, and enjoyed a most cordial relationship with him. "Waited, this afternoon, on the Rev. Mr. Clark, Rector of this place, who received me with all possible expressions of kindness; and after we had spent some time agreeably together, he took me in his chair to a funeral," Hart wrote. "I am heartily pleased to see the catholic spirit of which this man is possess'd; and I hope, and believe, he will be a blessing to this town."[57] For the rector of St. Philip's to invite the Regular Baptist minister to ride in his carriage was unusual enough, but Clarke later outdid this gesture by inviting Hart to conduct a funeral at the church cemetery in his place. This, to Hart, "discovered an extraordinary catholic spirit."[58]

The variety of personal friendships Hart maintained across the denominational spectrum testifies that the same "extraordinary catholic spirit" resided in him. By focusing on a mutual commitment to the gospel and a shared experience of evangelical piety, Hart was able to establish effective gospel

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Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740–1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 161–77.

[53] For this story, see John Marrant and William Aldridge, *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, a Black* (London: Gilbert and Plummer, 1785), 12–13.

[54] George Whitefield, *Works of the Reverend George Whitefield* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1771), 2:116.

[55] William Henry Lyttleton to Board of Trade, September 1, 1759, British Public Record Office, Transcripts of records relating to South Caorlina, 1663–1782, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, 28:213, cited in Little, *Southern Evangelicalism*, 148.

[56] See Dalcho, *Protestant Episcopal Church*, 183.

[57] Hart, diary, September 23, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[58] Hart, diary, October 27, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

partnerships with Christians of sometimes vastly different doctrinal convictions. As David Bebbington has written, Hart's life demonstrates that the "experience of the revival brought Baptists closer to other Christian traditions. Evangelicals were sure that what united them, the gospel of salvation, was far more important than what divided them."[59] Hart's catholicity provides one clear signal of the revival's influence on Regular Baptist spirituality.

Oliver Hart's Regular Baptist Convictions

Hart's ecumenism had its limits. Kidd has called Hart "less a precisionist Baptist than a revivalist and moral reformer," but his Baptist convictions should not be undersold.[60] While Regular Baptists affirmed their solidarity with other evangelicals, they also remained passionate about biblical church order. This is evidenced by the Charleston Baptist Association's adoption of *A Summary of Church Discipline* (1774), which Hart and Francis Pelot had prepared for use in the churches.[61] The Charleston Confession asserted that "the catholick or universal church, which (with respect to the internal work of the Spirit and truth of grace) may be called invisible" included "the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into One, under Christ."[62] Yet, Hart also declared that membership in a local church, ordered according to the Scriptures, was vital to Christian spirituality. He described "a particular gospel church" as consisting of "a company of saints, incorporated by a special covenant into one distinct body and meeting together in one place for the enjoyment of fellowship with each other and with Christ their Head in all his institutions to their mutual edification and the glory of God through the Spirit."[63] With other Regular Baptists, Hart continued to care deeply about biblically-ordered local church life, especially the issues of baptism, communion, and church membership.

"Agreeable to the Ancient Practice"

The ordinance of baptism was "the defining rite of the Baptist religion," and represented the most obvious point of difference between Regular Baptists and their evangelical friends. Unlike virtually all other participants in the Great Awakening, Baptists rejected the sprinkling of infants as a sign of covenant membership, insisting instead that biblical baptism was only "by immersion, upon a profession of their faith, agreeable to the ancient practice of

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[59] David W. Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries: A History of a Global People* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 80–81.

[60] Kidd, *Great Awakening*, 257.

[61] *A Confession of Faith, Put Forth by the Elders and Brethren of Many Congregations of Christians (Baptized upon Profession of their Faith) in London and the Country. Adopted by the Baptist Association in Charlestown, South-Carolina. To which is annexed, A Summary of Church Discipline* (Charleston: David Bruce, 1774).

[62] Ibid., 71.

[63] *Summary of Church Discipline*, 2.

John the Baptist and the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ."[64] Other traditions looked on immersion as a radical, offensive practice, as David Thomas wrote in *The Virginian Baptist*:

> [D]ecency one might think, would constrain you to administer that ordinance, in a more agreeable and becoming manner than you do. What need dipping of people? Is not a drop or two of water as good as the whole ocean? And is not pouring or sprinkling much better modes of baptism, than plunging; especially in such a freezing cold country as this is? Why then are you so bigotted to such an obsolete, unfashionable, odious ceremony, as to differ with all the rest of the Christian world about it? It is your obstinate attachment to this ridiculous manner of baptizing your converts, that chiefly serves to render your sect odious, so contemptible in the eyes of every other denomination that practices water baptism at all. There is no peculiar mode essential to the ordinance, therefore one will answer as well as another, and it is very impudent not to choose that which is the easiest, the latest and of greatest reputation. How vain must you then be to persist in your odd way! When there are so many learned remonstrances made against it; since it exposes you to universal derision and makes your very name a laughing stock; surely it would be your wisest course to alter it immediately and bear the reproach of so needless a deviation from the common custom of Christians no longer.[65]

Baptists were unmoved by these scoffs. For them, only the immersion of a confessing believer conformed to Scripture's pattern of baptism and communicated the rich symbolism "of our fellowship with Christ, in his death, burial, and resurrection—of the remission of our sins, and of our resurrection from the death of sin to new and holy life."[66] And so Hart rejoiced with Richard Furman over the significance of the baptisms of his wife and daughter: "But when you had the happiness of leading a wife and a daughter into the water and burying them with Christ in baptism; and having thus symbolically washed away their sins, of receiving them into Christ's sheepfold, methinks your soul was in raptures."[67]

Hart did not shrink from trying to persuade non-Baptists of his position. In 1780, Hart preached for several weeks to the people of Stoney River Presbyterian Church. One night, Captain John Stephenson, a member of the church, told Hart he was "convinced of the invalidity of infant sprinkling and the validity of believer's baptism, to which he desired to submit." Hart examined Stephenson, who satisfied Hart with his "gracious experience and

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[64] Ibid., 17.

[65] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, 50.

[66] Oliver *Hart, An Humble Attempt to Repair the Christian Temple, shewing the business of officers and private members in the church of Christ, and how their work should be performed; with some motives to excite professors ardently to engage in it* (Philadelphia: Aitken, 1785), 16.

[67] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, November 26, 1793, Hart MSS, Furman.

knowledge of gospel doctrines."[68] A few weeks later, Hart gathered "a large congregation" for a service "under the shade of trees, near the banks of N. River." Though all were "professed Presbyterians," Hart preached for half an hour from Mark 16:16, "from which first I endeavoured to prove that believers are the only proper subjects of baptism, and that dipping is the mode of administration." He confessed that "How the people felt I don't know," though they all "behaved decently, and heard with much attention." After the sermon, Hart stepped down into the river. There, "in the face of the whole congregation, I baptized Capt. John Stephenson, a man of good character, and member of the Presbyterian Church." The ritual held the pedobaptist crowd spellbound: Stephenson was "the first person ever baptized in these parts or in this river, hope numbers may follow the example, though a new and strange thing to almost all who saw it. Never did I see people behave with more decorum." Afterward Hart added, "I hope he will not disgrace the Baptists by embracing their principles."[69]

"Though We Walk Not Together"

Hart's convictions regarding baptism carried significant implications for church membership. As he noted in the *Summary of Church Discipline*, all who are received into church communion "ought to be truly baptized in water, i.e., by immersion, upon a profession of their faith, agreeable to the ancient practice of John the Baptist and the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ."[70] Requiring baptism before membership and communion at the Lord's table was not unique to Baptists; it was a fact "allowed by all," Baptist and pedobaptist alike. Baptists simply did not recognize pedobaptists to have been "truly baptized in water," and were convinced that "there is not one instance in the Word of God of any being admitted without it."[71] Thus, while Hart felt free to invite the Methodist Joseph Pilmoor or the Presbyterian John Zubly to preach in his pulpit, he could not admit them to church membership or to the Lord's table.

This position did not square with the ecumenical ethos of the revival, and Whitefield regularly confronted his Baptist friends over their "narrowness." He pleaded with Jenkin Jones, "Oh admit of a *mixed communion*. I think the glory of God requires this at your hands. May the Lord give you a right understanding in all things."[72] The Philadelphia Association would, in fact, speak to this issue at their meeting just months later. Prompted by the cath-

[68] Oliver Hart, diary, July 14, 1780, Hart MSS, SCL.

[69] Oliver Hart, diary, August 3, 1780, Hart MSS, SCL.

[70] *Summary of Church Discipline*, 17.

[71] *Summary of Church Discipline*, 17. Hart and Pelot cited Acts 2:41; 8:12; 16:15; 18:8; 19:5; Rom 6:3–4; Gal 3:27; and Col 2:12 as establishing the biblical pattern of baptism preceding church membership.

[72] George Whitefield to Jenkin Jones, May 12, 1740, in *Works*, 1:175.

olicity of the revival, the Cohansie Baptist Church inquired if a pious pedobaptist may be admitted to communion without baptism, and, furthermore, "doth not refusing admittance to such an one, discover want of charity in a church so refusing?" The association unanimously answered in the negative.[73]

The discussion was not new in Baptist life, as Whitefield pointed out in a 1767 preface to the *Works of John Bunyan*. Bunyan (1628–88), beloved by all evangelicals for his *Pilgrim's Progress*, had served as a Baptist pastor in Bedford, England, in the late seventeenth century. He invited controversy in 1672 by publishing *A Confession of my Faith, and A Reason of my Practice; or With who and who not, I can hold church-fellowship, or the communion of saints*. Here he announced that while he dared not fellowship with the openly profane, he would "with those that are visible saints by calling: with those that, by the word of the gospel, have been brought over to faith and holiness."[74] In classic Pietist fashion, Bunyan prioritized the invisible church of all the regenerate over any visible church form. Differences over water baptism should not bar God's children from communion in the local church, for "the edification of souls in the faith and holiness of the gospel, is of greater concernment, than an agreement in outward things."[75] When Christians differed over baptism, Bunyan advised, "love them still, forgive them, bear with them, and maintain church communion with them. Why? Because they are new creatures, because they are Christ's: for this swallows up all distinctions."[76] Bunyan even accused those who made baptism grounds for separation in church communion of being "carnal," "babyish Christians."[77] Several Particular Baptist ministers immediately "fell with might and main" upon Bunyan. Unmoved, he responded with *Differences in Judgment About Water Baptism No Bar to Communion*,[78] and *Peaceable Principles and True*.[79] He maintained that "baptism with water, is neither a bar nor bolt to communion of saints, nor a door nor inlet to communion of saints."[80] He prayed, "God, banish bitterness out of the

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[73] A. D. Gillette, ed., *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, from 1707 to 1807* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1851), 42–43. The association cited three reasons for this ruling: first, they found in the commission of Christ no unbaptized persons admitted to communion (Matt 28:19–20; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:41; 1 Cor 12:13); second, it is the church's duty to maintain the ordinances as delivered in Scripture (2 Thess 2:15; 1 Cor 11:2; Isa 8:20); and third, "because we cannot see it agreeable, in any respect, for the procuring that unity, unfeigned love, and undisturbed peace, which is required, and ought to be in and among Christian communities (1 Cor 1:10; Eph 4:3)."

[74] John Bunyan, *Works*, ed. George Offor (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 2:604.

[75] Ibid., 2:611.

[76] Ibid., 2:612.

[77] Ibid., 2:613.

[78] Ibid., 2:616–47.

[79] Ibid., 2:648–57.

[80] Ibid., 2:656.

churches and pardon them that are the maintainers of schisms and divisions among the godly."[81] Whitefield praised Bunyan for his stance:

> But this, I must own, more particularly endears Mr. Bunyan to my heart; he was of a catholic spirit, the want of water adult baptism with this man of God, was no bar to outward Christian communion. And I am persuaded that if, like him, we were more deeply and experimentally baptized in to the benign and gracious influences of the blessed Spirit, we should be less baptized into the waters of strife, about circumstances and non-essentials. For being thereby rooted and grounded in the love of God, we should necessarily be constrained to think, and let think, bear with and forbear one another in love; and without saying "I am of Paul, Apollos, or Cephas," have but one grand, laudable, disinterested strife, namely who should live, preach and exalt the ever-loving, altogether lovely Jesus most.[82]

While Hart celebrated the unity of the universal church, he did not believe Scripture permitted him to adopt these more liberal standards of local church communion. In 1782, Hart and the rest of the Philadelphia Association responded to the question, "what measures ought to be taken with a sister church who holds and actually admits unbaptized persons to the Lord's Supper?" Again, their response was unequivocal: "We observe, that such a church may and ought in the first instance, to be written to by a sister church, exhorting them to desist from such a practice, and to keep the ordinances as they were delivered to them in the word of God."[83]

Hart addressed this issue at length in a 1790 letter to Furman. [84] The Charleston Association, led by Furman, had recently approved the admittance of some Baptists into membership in a pedobaptist congregation. From his home in Hopewell, New Jersey, Hart vigorously objected. He noted that both Baptists and pedobaptists agreed that baptism was "essential to church membership and communion." With this point established, "it naturally follows that no society of Christians, however pious, can impose a regular orderly church, upon a gospel plan, without baptism." From this ground, Hart concluded that "it cannot be consistent with good order to dismiss our members to any church whatever which is so disorderly as to set aside an ordinance, which Christ in his gospel holds as essentially necessary to church communion and fellowship." Hart believed that pedobaptists were consistent in their position, and that Baptists should be, too. Pedobaptists would "never do" what the Association had done, and dismiss their members into communion with a Baptist church. This would legitimize believer's baptism, which "would end to bring down their infant-sprinkling." In the same way, Hart argued, the Association's approval of its members joining pedobaptist

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[81] Ibid., 2:657.

[82] Whitefield, *Works*, 4:307–8.

[83] Gillette, *Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 200.

[84] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, March 2, 1790, Hart MSS, Furman.

churches comprised "a tacit acknowledgement that infant sprinkling is equally valid with believer's baptism," and opened the door for its members to "slide into the bosom of pedobaptist churches." He closed by emphatically stating that "there need be no dismissing of members to churches with whom we are not in communion; for we ought to hold communion with all 'true Christian churches.'"

Hart realized that his strong ecclesiological statements did not savor of the "catholic spirit" he exhibited on so many other occasions. Hart did not intend to be sectarian, simply obedient to Christ's commands:

> I hope nothing that I have said will be construed into bigotry, or the want of Christian regard to pedobaptists. I think the whole tenor of my conduct acquits me from such a charge. I sincerely declare, that I esteem a number of pedobaptists as Christians, in preference to many Baptists, and could freely commune with them at the Lord's Table, if my Master did not forbid by making Baptism an *essential* prerequisite to church membership; and we are to walk by this. With regard to our pedobaptist brethren I wish them well and forbid them not, though they walk not with us.[85]

Hart's letter to Furman supplies valuable insight into the ecumenical tensions Regular Baptists experienced in the wake of the revival. Evangelical piety provided sufficient grounds for cooperation in preaching the gospel and spreading the revival. Yet, sincere piety did not set aside what to him were clear biblical directives regarding "a regular orderly church, upon a gospel plan." Regular Baptists held church order to be far more significant than did Whitefield or Bunyan. On the other side of the new birth, both Baptists and pedobaptists must walk in obedience to Christ as best they both knew how, even if they could not walk together.

"Associating with the Humble Baptists"

Though Hart enjoyed a wide acceptance in Charleston society, he understood that a stigma was attached to being Baptist. He wrote to Furman, "I wish for the interest of the religion we profess, we may all grow in grace, knowledge, and understanding, that the Baptists may be distinguished by something superior to folly and meanness."[86] This negative perception was more pronounced in Virginia, but Baptists everywhere occupied a lower rung

[85] Ibid. (emphasis original).
[86] Ibid.

on the social ladder.[87] This is clearly seen in the journals of Charles Woodmason (1720?–89).[88] In 1766, Woodmason took ordination vows in the Anglican Church and accepted an itinerant mission to the Carolina backcountry. During this mission, Woodmason regularly skewered the "New Light Baptists" in his journal, including Regulars and Separates alike. He condemned Baptists for revival enthusiasm: "They set about effecting in an instant, what requires both labour and time—they apply to the passions, not the understanding of the people." He also accused them of hypocrisy and immorality: "does your assembling together to see a few worthless wretches dipp'd in water, and viewing their nakedness (which some have purposely expos'd to your view) tend to edification?" he asked his congregation. The Baptists did not help the relationship. Among other abuses he suffered, Woodmason reported, "The people took up two others for entering the house where I was when in bed—stealing my gown—putting it on—and then visiting a woman in bed, and getting to bed to her, and making her give out next day, that the Parson came to bed to her—this was a scheme laid by the Baptists—and man and woman prepared for the purpose." Still, Woodmason did not condemn all Baptists. "I know, and greatly respect, many worthy persons among them and I wish that there were many more such," he admitted; "it is very plain that the errors of some of our neighbors do not so much proceed from a bad heart (as is the case with another sect) as from a wrong head . . ."[89]

Hart appears to be one of the wrongheaded Baptists Woodmason tolerated, for he records delivering a parcel of letters and books to "the Reverend Mr. Hart" in Charleston on September 7, 1766.[90] Nevertheless, Hart happily identified himself with the frontier Baptists Woodmason despised, and accepted the scorn that came along with it. He remembered his hero, Whitefield, scoffing at immersion. "The great and good Mr. Whitfield exclaim'd—"These Anabaptists are stealing sheep, they wash my sheep and they fleece my sheep,'" Whitefield clearly intending "'washing'" as "a term of aspersion."[91] On one occasion, Hart mentioned a young woman whom he feared was "perhaps raised too high to associate with the humble Baptists." In reflecting on the young lady's hesitancy, he remembered a similar case from his past experience: a lady who became convinced of Baptist principles, yet remained unwilling to hold communion with the Baptists. She "wished me to baptize her, that she might join the Church of England. I could not find a

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[87] See Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, 161–71; David Thomas, *The Virginian Baptist: or A View and defence of the Christian religion, as it is professed by the Baptists of Virginia* (Baltimore: Enoch Story, 1774).

[88] See Richard J. Hooker, "Introduction," in Charles Woodmason, *The Carolina Backcountry on the Eve of the Revolution*, ed. Richard J. Hooker (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953), xi–xxxix.

[89] Woodmason, *Carolina Backcountry*, 117, 45.

[90] Ibid., 6.

[91] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, March 2, 1790, Hart MSS, Furman.

freedom to do it," Hart recalled. "It is a pity that grandeur should have so much influence on the minds of those who would be deem'd followers of that humble Jesus, who had nowhere to lay his head."[92]

Conclusion

In the end, Furman was right to remember Hart as "a consistent, liberal Baptist."[93] Hart described his own principled ecumenism when he praised his friend William Tennent III:

> It may not be amiss to observe, that his religious sentiments were open, free and generous, built upon principles of true catholocism [sic]; not influenced by bigotry or party spirit. He thought that religion should be left entirely free, and that there should be no manner of constraint upon the conscience. He was of opinion, that there was a wise providence in permitting people to think differently about modes of worship, and therefore valued good men of every denomination.[94]

The evangelical catholicity of Oliver Hart and his Regular Baptist friends stands as a lasting testimony to their participation in the Great Awakening. This should cause readers to reconsider the popular perception of Regular Baptists as standing outside the revival tradition. The stories of Hart, Jenkin Jones, Isaac Chanler, and other Regular Baptists reveal a rich, revival spirituality demonstrated not only by their catholicity, but their commitment to the Spirit's work, love of revival narrative, and vigorous evangelistic and missionary activity, to name a few prominent themes.[95] In truth, theirs was a piety of both order and ardor.

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[92] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, November 9, 1791, Hart MSS, Furman.

[93] Richard Furman, *Rewards of Grace Conferred on Christ's Faithful People: A Sermon, Occasioned by the Decease of the Rev. Oliver Hart, A.M.* (Charleston: J. McIver, 1796), 24.

[94] Hart, *Great Man*, 26.

[95] I explore each of these themes and more in "Order and Ardor."