STR 8.2 (Fall 2017): 51–75

From Reformation London to Contemporary Nashville: Changing Baptist Views of the Church

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How did Baptist views of the church develop from the English Reformation? And how have those views since changed? The author first traces the earliest Baptists' grounding of ecclesiology in Christology. He then provides a phenomenological description of contemporary anthropological ecclesiologies held among Southern Baptists. He then offers a concluding critique.

Key Words: Baptists, Church, English Reformation, humanity, Jesus Christ, Southern Baptist Convention

Periodically, Southern Baptist theologians are asked to explain and even defend their theological positions to other Baptists, to other evangelical theologians, or to representatives from the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church. The alternation between raised eyebrows and furrowed frowns, followed by intense questioning, indicates how this apparently exotic but vibrant expression of Christian communal life is perceived by other Western Christians.[1] The following essay responds to such queries by explaining both the commonalities

[1] Alongside the academic research cited below and in other articles, the post-seminarian experience that informs this essay includes six years in pastoral ministry, five years pursuing graduate research in non-Baptist universities (Duke University and Oxford University), and seventeen subsequent years in academic ministry. The author's ecumenical involvement includes active participation and leadership roles in both Baptist and interdenominational ministerial associations while serving as a pastor, followed by several years on the continuing committee of the Anglican Communion-Baptist World Alliance International Conversations, more than a decade with the North American Evangelical-Catholic Dialogue, and trustee service at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Wroclaw, Poland, all while serving as an academic. The author's ministry continues to include numerous speaking and worship opportunities beyond the local academy in both domestic and international Baptist and non-Baptist contexts alongside membership in numerous Christian academic societies. The author also significantly enjoys regular worship with and Bible exposition in a local Baptist church.

and peculiarities of contemporary Southern Baptist church life as it developed historically and theologically out of the fertile milieu of the European Reformation.

The Southern Baptist Convention represents the largest convention of Baptist churches in the world—there are over 40,000 Southern Baptist churches with a reported membership of some 15 million. The Southern Baptist Convention also fields full-time and temporary domestic and international missionaries in the tens of thousands. Moreover, they completed, with the turn of the century, a major theological realignment known as the "Conservative Resurgence" or "Conservative Reformation" by the political victors, but as the "Fundamentalist Takeover" by the vanquished.[2] Yet, in many ways, alongside their amazing numerical strength, vigorous missionary efforts, and concern for doctrine, Southern Baptists are perceived, and properly so, to be somewhat different.

Southern Baptists developed from the English Reformation, which made three overarching doctrinal claims: the necessity of faith in Jesus Christ for salvation; a typically high view of the Bible; and a great concern for the nature, composition, and role of the church. Much could and should be written on Southern Baptist participation in transitions in the first two doctrines, soteriology and Scripture, but we shall be concerned with the third doctrine. The emphasis is ecclesiological, because it is in the doctrine of the church that Baptists have differed most significantly from other Western churches. To elucidate changing understandings of the nature and role of the church, the development of Southern Baptists from the English Baptist tradition, which itself is a product of the Reformation-era Church of England, shall be considered. The story of the churches now represented institutionally in Nashville arguably originates in Reformation London. Their fluid ecclesial development continues to the present day and not without grave consequence.

After historical reflection upon the beginning of Baptist ecclesiology as essentially Christological in nature, the more functional beliefs and practices of Southern Baptists shall be summarily treated in a systematic manner. The functional role of the church is considered through a broadranging survey in relation to the churches' structures, the churches' activities, and the churches in their relations to others. It

[2] For a summary of Southern Baptist theological developments in the latter half of the twentieth century, see the journal issue entitled, "Southern Baptist Theology in the Late Twentieth Century," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 54.2 (Spring 2012).

will become evident that those Baptists who arose through the southern colonies appear by and large to have traded the early Baptists' Christological ecclesiology for a functional or programmatic ecclesiasticism.

The Historical Development of Southern Baptist Ecclesiology

In order to elucidate the changes in the understanding of the nature of the church according to Southern Baptists, we must first explore the Baptist basis in, and subsequent departure from, the established church in England during the "long Reformation" of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[3]

Baptist Foundations in the Reformation Church of England

Baptists share a common doctrinal and ecclesial heritage with their religious relatives in the Reformation Church of England. The leading documents of that church were shaped at the hands of the evangelical martyr, Thomas Cranmer. We shall examine three documents in particular, each of which were partially or wholly formulated while Cranmer was resident at his archiepiscopal palace in south London: the *Thirty-Nine Articles*, the *Book of Common Prayer*, and the *Ordinal*.

Many of the *Thirty-Nine Articles*, collected by Cranmer into forty-two articles during the short Protestant reign of Edward VI, and later edited and authoritatively promulgated during the long reign of Elizabeth I,[4] are quite acceptable to Baptists—indeed, some are considered necessary. The definition of the Trinity found in the first five articles (and in the creeds affirmed in the eighth article) did not stir controversy among the theological forerunners of the Baptists. More importantly, articles six and seven on the Bible would have received hearty approval by the early Baptists. It might be argued that their desire to know and proclaim Scripture, which "containeth all things necessary to salvation," is what began the drive towards separation.

Article six's statement that nothing is required for belief, except for what is found in the Bible, was emphasized by the Puritans in their regulative principle—nothing is to be practiced in the church beyond

[3] On the need to think in terms of a "long Reformation," see Nicholas Tyacke, "Introduction: Re-Thinking the 'English Reformation,'" in *England's Long Reformation: 1500–1800*, ed. Nicholas Tyacke (London: UCL Press, 1998), 1–32.

[4] Gerald Bray, ed., *Documents of the English Reformation* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1994), 284–311.

that which is commanded by Scripture. The Calvinist regulative principle is distinctly different from the Lutheran principle of indifference or *adiaphora*. English conformists, though Calvinistic in soteriology, adopted the less literal principle of indifference in their struggle with the Puritans. The early Separatists took the Puritan position and radicalized it, in the words of Robert Browne calling for a scriptural "reformation without tarrying for any."[5] When Browne and like-minded radicals were denied episcopal preaching licenses, they looked elsewhere for the authorization they so desired. This internal compulsion to discern, discuss, and defend the doctrines of the Word, alongside their bishops' refusal to renew a sanctioned outlet for that desire, is what first drove the Elizabethan radical Puritans toward a separating ecclesiology. In a significant move with far-reaching implications, the English Separatists located authority, according to the detailed research of Barry White and Stephen Brachlow, in the covenanted congregation.[6]

John Smyth, the first English Baptist pastor, went a step further than Browne, advocating not only a separated and gathered covenantal church but also a covenant entered through the exclusive practice of believers' baptism. The English Separatists and their Baptist descendants did not disagree with their Church of England brethren about the basic theological doctrines of the Christian faith, for the official church's doctrines of Trinity, Christology, and Scripture were received largely intact.[7]

[5] Robert Browne, *A Treatise of reformation without tarying for anie* (1583), in *The Writings of Robert Harrison and Robert Browne*, ed. Albert Peel and Leland H. Carlson (London: Allen & Unwin, 1953), 150–70.

[6] B. R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition: From the Marian Martyrs to the Pilgrim Fathers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); Stephen Brachlow, *The Communion of Saints: Radical Puritan and Separatist Ecclesiology 1570–1625* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). Lollardy, an older tradition of radicalism stemming from John Wyclif, excelled in criticizing existing structures. As they failed to offer a coherent positive ecclesiology, the Lollards left little trace of continuing community. However, for a fascinating study of commonalities found in geographical areas of strength shared by both late medieval Lollards and the early modern dissenting churches, see *The World of Rural Dissenters 1520–1725*, ed. Margaret Spufford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[7] If the bishops had not been so reticent to allow these radical preachers their preaching licenses, one wonders whether their logical search for an alternative basis of ecclesial authority would have ended in Separatism—perhaps the fracturing of the Church of England might have been avoided or at the least delayed.

In addition to a shared appreciation for the classical Christian doctrines, the forefathers of modern Baptists and the forefathers of modern Anglicans would have equally affirmed those official confessional articles dealing with justification. Articles nine through eighteen, which discuss this crucial Reformation dogma, could have been ascribed by most of the early Baptists, although the sacramental conclusion to article nine, on original sin, would have been troublesome if it led to an argument for infant baptism. Baptists concurred with the Reformation doctrines that repeated the Pauline understanding of election, sin, and salvation. The magisterially enforced doctrines of God, the Bible, and salvation did not violate the consciences of the early Baptists and their theological forerunners, the Separatists. Where then arose the cause for Baptists and other congregationalists to separate?

The division occurred with regard to the final twenty-one articles of the *Thirty-Nine Articles*, which deal with ecclesiology.[8] All Protestants were dependent upon an understanding of the visible church as *congregatio fidelium*, the congregation of the faithful, as first advocated by Martin Luther and defined at the beginning of the Anglican article nineteen. Disagreement began with the next few words, which define the marks of the church to be "where the pure Word of God is preached" and "the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance." Besides the obvious disagreement over the application of the sacrament of baptism to infants, Baptists emulated the Puritans in affirming three marks of the visible church rather than two.[9]

The Separatists and their descendants, the Baptists, developed their radical ecclesiologies by absorbing and reacting to the political theology and ecclesiology of the Elizabethan-era Church of England. Most of their ecclesiological doctrines can be found in embryonic form in the

[8] A careful reading of the confessions collected by William L. Lumpkin should bear this out (Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed. [Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969]). Cf. James Leo Garrett, Jr., *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), 2–22; Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), chs. 1–2.

[9] Norman H. Maring and Winthrop S. Hudson, *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1991), 50–52; R. Albert Mohler Jr., "Discipline: The Missing Mark," in *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life*, ed. Mark Dever (Washington, DC: Center for Church Reform, 2001), 43–61.

Book of Common Prayer.[10] While they were radicals, they were nevertheless singing theology from the same book with the official church. They agreed that authority did descend as a gift of God and that that authority must be exercised responsibly. They, too, prayed for the Queen, her ministers, the clergy, and the people, at the morning and evening prayers. Like many Elizabethans, they embraced the ideal of a "mixed polity." Using the Aristotelian political categories of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, they learned from such magisterial luminaries and political philosophers as William Cecil and Thomas Smith that the best polity was some combination of the three.[11] These early Separatists and Baptists were neither anti-monarchical nor thorough democrats. They simply reflected upon and furthered the prevailing political theories of their day.

While affirming mixed polity, they began to envision a way in which they might give greater honor to the King of Kings, who was lauded in the authorized prayer book. They wanted to reify in their local gatherings the line of the official prayer, *Te Deum*—"Thou art the King of glory, O Christ." If these radical preachers and their followers were not authorized in their pursuit of godliness by the episcopal creatures of the Queen, where then could they find their divine, and thereby legitimate, authorization? At the end of both the morning and evening prayers as well as the litany, a collect of Chrysostom referred to the premier ecclesial text of the gospels: "when two or three are gathered together in Thy name."

This reference to Matthew 18, one of two and arguably the more important, in which Jesus spoke of "the church," played in the mind of these preachers. The presence of Christ had long been considered to contain the power of Christ.[12] In Matt 18:20, a text which served as the *locus classicus* for early Separatists and Baptists, it is explicitly stated that "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in their midst." Where is Christ and where is his authority? There, in the gathered congregation.

In the confessions of the official prayer book, the people are called to approach the throne of grace with the priest as equals. Prayer is truly

[10] *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI* (London: Prayer Book Society, 1999).

[11] Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *Royal Priesthood in the English Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 266–67.

[12] Cf. the soteriological and apotropaic claims of medieval Christians concerning the consecrated host as well as the political and theological claims of the Tudor monarchs as vividly portrayed on the flyleaf of the official vernacular Bibles.

a "common" and leveling exercise in Anglican theology. Prayer is likewise a "common" and leveling exercise in later Baptist theology. Prayer is the place where Baptists first found the authority they required to rebel against the perceived ungodly recalcitrance and illegitimate usurpation of authority by their bishops. If Christ and his authority are present amidst the people called to prayer, how can that authority be defined? At this point, the early Separatists and Baptists often turned to the Calvinist commonplace of the threefold office of Christ. Christ is prophet, priest, and king, and his people participate in his tripartite office. He is, in the words of the official communion alms prayer, "our only Mediator" and "our Lord." It is he who dispenses the authority to preach, to pray, and to rule.

The official church's doctrinal articles may have defined only two marks for the visible church, the Word and the sacraments, but the official *Ordinal* had the bishop pronounce three marks to the newly ordained priest: "Will you then give faithful diligence always so to minister the Doctrine and Sacraments, and the Discipline of Christ"?[13] Luther and the more traditional continental Reformers embraced only two marks and excluded the third mark, discipline, as a sign of perfectionism. John Calvin alternated between two and three marks, but Martin Bucer, Jan Łaski, and many later Calvinists elevated the mark of discipline. For these more thorough Reformers, the marks of the church must include the discipline of the church. "Discipline" was a synonym for "government," even for "rule."[14]

The Separatists and their Baptist disciples likewise spoke of three marks for the visible church, and these three marks were correlated with the threefold office of their ecclesiastical mediator, King Jesus.[15] In his role as prophet, Jesus mediates the office of proclamation to his church. In his role as priest, Jesus mediates the office of intercession to his church. In his role as king, Jesus mediates the office of rule to his church. The church participates communally in the threefold office of Christ: they are the prophecy, the priesthood, and the kingdom.[16] They

[13] *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI*, 310.

[14] J. William Black, "From Martin Bucer to Richard Baxter: Discipline and Reformation in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England," *Church History* 70.4 (2001): 644–73.

[15] E.g., *The Confession of Faith, of those Churches which are commonly (though falsly) called Anabaptists* (London, 1644), arts. 10–21.

[16] Malcolm B. Yarnell III, "Congregational Authority and the *Inventio* or Invention of Authority," *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 3.1 (2005): 110–

are, in the words of Peter, the prince of the apostles, a "royal priesthood . . . so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him" (1 Pet 2).

Another piece to the puzzle of the doctrines that formed the ecclesiology of the early Baptists is found in their localization of covenant theology. Christ's atonement enables the church to participate in the soteriological covenant, and his threefold office enables the church to participate in the ecclesiological covenant. The application of covenantal theology had been promoted in English evangelical circles at least since William Tyndale, but the Separatists added the threefold office.[17] How, then, does a church gather and make Christ present? The gathering of the church was accomplished through separation from the ungodly parishes and the adoption of a covenant. The ecclesiastical covenant could be neither reduced to a crass social contract, as in later Enlightenment political theory, nor elevated to a claim on God's grace, as in more Pelagian forms of Arminian soteriology. God and his people came together in covenant to form the local church. This church is where Christ is, where his offices are shared, and where the recently de-licensed preachers found their desired authorization to proclaim the Word.

Some may consider this stringing of Anglican theological statements into a Baptist ecclesiology incomplete. After all, did not Baptists reject the authority of the magistrate as defined by the official formularies? This is true. Baptists did build on certain concepts and bypass others, such as the ecclesiastical authority of the monarch. However, such an expression of continuity and discontinuity was consistent with early claims in the *Book of Common Prayer*. The Reformation's leading Archbishop of Canterbury believed the church "should keep the mean between the two extremes, of too much stuffiness in refusing, and of too much easiness in admitting any variation from it."[18] It could be argued that the early Separatists and Baptists were living out that belief through their radical yet Christological ecclesiology. However, it is also

35. After this essay was completed, Ian Birch published a book on the grounding of Particular Baptist ecclesiology in the kingship of Christ: *To Follow the Lambe Wheresoever He Goeth: The Ecclesial Polity of the English Calvinistic Baptists 1640–1660*, Monographs in Baptist History (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017).

[17] Ralph S. Werrell, *The Theology of William Tyndale* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2006). Benjamin Hawkins, whose forthcoming doctoral dissertation at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary focuses upon Tyndale, argues tangentially that Werrell overstates the covenantal structure of Tyndale's theology.

[18] Thomas Cranmer, "The Preface," in *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI*, 3–5.

doubtless true that Cranmer would have been horrified by the fissiparous trajectory of these radicals.

Southern Baptist Foundations

As the seventeenth century progressed, two important events occurred that prepared the context for Southern Baptist life. First, the civil wars redefined English society and made room for both General and Particular Baptists to thrive. Second, the newly discovered American continent was opened for immigration. In England, the ecclesiological ideals of the Baptists found expression not only in the church but also in the state. Baptists joined with other congregationalists in pursuing the reification of the kingdom of God. They concluded that the closet Romanist, Charles I, was not their true king; rather, Jesus is King; and the one they viewed as a usurper lost his head, literally. After the demise of the more radical Baptists with the Interregnum and in certain sectors of the Fifth Monarchy movement, English Baptists sought respectability. They found a measure of comradeship by allying themselves with the Independents and the Presbyterians. The First London Confession reflects the older radical ecclesiology, while the Second London Confession reshaped Baptist thought and made it more presentable and less revolutionary. The Presbyterians' *Westminster Confession* and the Independents' *Savoy Declaration* helped the Baptists repackage their ideology in terms more acceptable to the resurgent official church.

The first American Baptists appeared in the northern colonies, where they sought to establish the kingdom of God by planting congregations in the wilderness. (The stories of Roger Williams, Isaac Backus, and John Leland have been told before and need not be rehearsed here.) The first Baptists to appear in the south originally came from the west of England and settled in South Carolina. Prior to the awakenings, the Baptists who inhabited the southern colonies immigrated either from established Baptist churches in the other American colonies or from Britain. During the eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century evangelical awakenings, the "Regular [Particular] Baptists" and the "General Baptists" were joined by the fugitive "Separate Baptists." Together, they fought for religious liberty in the predominantly Anglican and Puritan colonies. Baptist support for the successful American Revolution won them important friends. Over time, Baptists were able to gain not only tolerance for their churches but also religious

freedom, which in post-revolutionary terms primarily meant the abolition of taxes to support their denominational opponents.[19]

With the growth of the American colonies came the movement of Baptists ever westward into the continent. As farms were established on large plots of land, many people found themselves isolated from one another and increasingly self-sufficient. Baptists, among others, brought the gospel to these frontier pioneers. In this heady environment of freedom and self-sufficiency, fortified by advances in technology and wealth, the Baptists were successful in establishing self-governing congregations. Local Baptists practiced a form of democratic government that correlated to a great extent with the forms of government common in the American hinterland, a phenomenon noted by the French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville of American churches generally and the German philosopher Max Weber of Baptist churches specifically.[20] These self-governing congregations were periodically susceptible to religious enthusiasm and doctrinal deviation. The Philadelphia Association, in response, sought to bring religious and doctrinal uniformity to American Baptists, but the need for a national organization was perceived. The first national Baptist organization, the Triennial Convention, was founded in 1814 to support foreign missionaries. It became the venue for discussions leading to American Baptist advances in higher education and missionary enterprises. The Triennial Convention was led in its first years by Richard Furman, a slave-holding southerner from Charleston, South Carolina.

Although they were integral to the foundation of the Triennial Convention and other national Baptist societies, Baptists in the south could not long remain in a national fold. The Southern Baptist Convention was formed in 1845 in reaction to the perceived encroachment of northern abolitionist values into the decision-making of the national missionary boards. Southern Baptists, for the most part, supported the Confederacy during the American Civil War, and some of their leading

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[19] On the historical development of religious liberty among Baptists in Europe and America, see chapters 2 and 3 of *First Freedom: The Beginning and End of Religious Liberty*, 2nd ed., ed. Jason G. Duesing, Thomas White, and Malcolm B. Yarnell III (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016). More generally, see Malcolm B. Yarnell III, "The Development of Religious Liberty: A Survey of Its Progress and Challenges in Christian History," *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 6.1 (2009): 119–38.

[20] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America and Two Essays on America*, trans. Gerald E. Bevan (New York: Penguin, 2003); Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Allen & Unwin, 1930).

pastor-theologians argued forcefully for a positive biblical opinion of slavery. (Most Southern Baptists, today, are somewhat ashamed of this episode, and the national convention has taken the step of apologizing for past offenses toward the African-American minority through public resolutions. In spite of their misappropriation of Scripture to subjugate the black population politically, Southern Baptists ironically saw great results from their religious influence upon the slave population.)

Through much of the nineteenth century and into the early years of the twentieth century, Southern Baptists were as concerned about orthodoxy in their ecclesiology as were their forefathers. Hints of the political philosophy and English Calvinist theology that influenced early Baptist development could still be found, but the general lack of education on the post-revolutionary frontier and in the post-bellum south, coupled with the self-sufficient nature of the churches, ultimately separated these later Baptists from their ideological roots. The original understanding of the nature of Baptist churches as congregations covenanted with Christ was eventually lost in the relative isolation and poverty of the predominantly rural American south.

The popular confessions and ecclesiological manuals available to nineteenth- and twentieth-century American Baptists tended to treat the church as a distinct locus primarily from a practical perspective using a cursory anthropological definition of the nature of the church. This can be seen in the work of John L. Dagg, the premier southern Baptist theologian of the mid-nineteenth century. Dagg left a detailed systematic theology that was accompanied with a book on church polity. Dagg's ecclesiology was functional and contained little ontological reflection.[21] There are discernable traces in nineteenth-century southern (later, Southern) Baptist literature of the Christological foundation of Baptist ecclesiology; however, the focus definitely shifted to a functional ecclesiasticism. J. L. Reynolds' *Church Polity* is one of the few

[21] J. L. Dagg, *A Manual of Theology* (reprint, Harrisonburg, VA: Gano, 1982); idem, *Manual of Theology. Second Part. A Treatise on Church Order* (reprint, Harrisonburg, VA: Gano, 1982). Dagg's ecclesiology was published separately and was more than three quarters the size of the systematic treatise. In the eighteenth century, John Gill began a trend by treating ecclesiology in a separate manual, but he was careful to ground the ecclesiology in the traditional threefold office of Christ. John Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity; or A System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures* (reprint, London: M. & S. Hingham, 1839), book 5, chs 9–14; idem, *A Body of Practical Divinity; or A System of Practical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures. Which Completes the Scheme of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* (reprint, London: M. & S. Hingham, 1839).

Christological pieces available on the nature of Baptist ecclesiology in America during that century, but even his discussion there is peremptorily shortened by more practical concerns.[22]

In case the south seems unduly isolated, amnesia concerning the Christological basis of the ideological nature of Baptist ecclesiology had parallels among northern American Baptists. In his highly influential *Church Manual*, James Madison Pendleton, whose ministry began in the south and ended in the north, succinctly offered an anthropological definition of the nature of the church, before proceeding to functional matters.[23] Similarly, Edward T. Hiscox, whose *Principles and Practices for Baptist Churches* was widely used throughout the United States, provided a primarily anthropological definition of the nature of the church before diving into practical considerations.[24] Both Pendleton and Dagg advocated the *New Hampshire Confession of Faith* and provided a complete copy, with commentary, in their books. This widely adopted confession, which became the basis of the internationally influential *Baptist Faith and Message*, defined the church first, according to its membership, second, according to its functions, and third, according to its officers.[25]

Anthropological, functional, and structural concerns, therefore, dominated American Baptist discussions of the church. However, as the medieval papacy learned much earlier, ecclesiastical practice requires a theology to justify its existence. Churches must have an ecclesiological ideology to justify their ecclesiastical practices. They may function for a time without a theological ecclesiology but they must eventually justify their ecclesiastical ways. In lieu of the Christological basis for the church, Baptists searched for new ideologies.

Among many Baptists, a type of succession of the persecuted, Landmarkism, provided the ideological glue needed by Baptists, but its tenure was attenuated by its historical implausibility and legal rigidity.[26] There was not a total amnesia, as attested by the research of Greg Wills

[22] J. L. Reynolds, *Church Polity or The Kingdom of Christ, In its Internal and External Development* (1849), in *Polity*, ed. Dever, 298–305.

[23] J. M. Pendleton, *Baptist Church Manual* (1867; reprint, Nashville: Broadman Press, 1966), 5.

[24] Edward T. Hiscox, *Principles and Practices for Baptist Churches* (1893; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1980), 15, 20–22, 44–47.

[25] *New Hampshire Confession of Faith*, article 14, in ibid., 556.

[26] James E. Tull, *High-Church Baptists in the South: The Origin, Nature, and Influence of Landmarkism* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000); James A. Patterson, *James Robinson Graves: Staking the Boundaries of Baptist Identity* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012).

on nineteenth-century Alabama Baptists.[27] However, the widespread loss of the original ideology that defined the nature of Baptist ecclesiology meant that functional concerns dominated discourse on the church. The functional ecclesiastical practices remained while ontological ecclesiology largely died off. Exegesis and polemic were focused on defending established practices rather than remembering and renewing theological foundations.

Francis Wayland, earlier in the north, and E. Y. Mullins, later in the south, helped supply a new ideology by appealing to the American experience of Individualism. Both men, brilliant and influential, admittedly lacked formal training in classical history and theology, and both embraced the currents of American culture as reflective of Baptist values. Mullins's emphasis on a solipsistic "soul competency," which is complemented by the atomistic doctrine of "the priesthood of the believer," coupled with a mild but cancerous anti-ecclesiasticism, convincingly appealed to those looking for the essence of what it means to be Baptist.[28] In the twentieth century, Southern Baptist literature on the church became functional on the one hand and ideologically individualistic on the other. By the 1930s this new ideology furthered the demise of the practice of church discipline, where church discipline was earlier considered a major indicator of communal integrity.

With the belated introduction of scholarly liberalism into Southern Baptist theological circles, the move to a crassly voluntaristic understanding of the nature of the church was nearly complete. The research of Ernst Troeltsch classified nineteenth-century Baptist churches as sectarian.[29] The best description of the dominant twentieth-century Southern Baptist ecclesial ideology in Troeltschean terms is neither church-type nor sect-type, but mystic. The Southern Baptist "mystic" is only loosely and suspiciously related to an association of like-minded people. At this point, we end our discussion of developments in the Southern Baptist understanding of the nature of the church and turn to a phenomenological description of the churches today.

[27] Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South 1785–1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[28] Malcolm B. Yarnell III, "Mullins, Edgar Young (1860–1928)," in *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, ed. Timothy Larsen (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 458–60; idem, "Changing Baptist Concepts of Royal Priesthood: John Smyth and Edgar Young Mullins," in *The Rise of the Laity in Evangelical Protestantism*, ed. Deryck W. Lovegrove (New York: Routledge, 2002), 243–49.

[29] Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*, 2 vols., trans. Olive Wyon (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1931), 461–65.

A Functional Ecclesiasticism for Southern Baptists

The functional ecclesiasticism of Southern Baptist churches today shall be considered under three rubrics: the structures of the churches, the activities of the churches, and the churches in relation to others. The role of the church in relation to its own people may be partially discerned in its structures. The role of the church in relation to God may be grasped by examining its activities. The role of the church in relation to the rest of the world may be detected by an evaluation of its external values. From a philosophical perspective, this ecclesiology could be described as a form of pragmatism;[30] from a phenomenological perspective, it could be described as functional or programmatic. What follows is the author's phenomenological description of contemporary Southern Baptist church life. It is not intended to be exhaustive and particular but broadly descriptive and impressionistic.

Southern Baptist Churches in Relation to their People: Structures

Considered under the rubric of church structures are the local church, the officers of the church, and the members of the church. Southern Baptists emphasize the local church above any other expression of Christian community. Indeed, any communal expression other than *the local church* will likely find detractors rising to voice their objections that the authority of the local church is being compromised. Over the years, most denominational leaders (but not all, as I can personally attest) have distanced themselves from any centralizing rhetoric. Although our leading denominational body, the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, is located in Nashville, Tennessee, the leaders of that body properly identify the local churches and not Nashville as the headquarters for Southern Baptists. Local church "autonomy" is the doctrinal description that Southern Baptists have typically assigned to this attitude.[31] To threaten this autonomy is to threaten the integrity of Southern Baptist ecclesiastical practice.

Baptists have always given some emphasis to the local church, but during the Landmark movement of the nineteenth century, Southern Baptists came to fear any external influences whatsoever. While most Protestant theologians would recognize the truth of both the local

[30] Pragmatism has its philosophical basis in the writings of Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey, among others. Louis Menard, ed., *Pragmatism: A Reader* (New York: Random House, 1997).

[31] *The Baptist Faith and Message* (Nashville: Southern Baptist Convention, 2000), article 6.

church and the universal church, it was not until 1963 that Southern Baptists officially recognized the existence of the universal church, and that not without resistance. Even today, Southern Baptists see their local churches as sacrosanct. Many are still reluctant to invite non-Baptist preachers to step into their pulpits, to accept non-Baptists into church membership, or to encourage open communion.

That said, even the most ardent defenders of Southern Baptist local church autonomy realize the influence the denomination can have upon the life of the local churches. This explains why proponents of local church autonomy, whether fundamentalist or conservative or moderate or liberal in orientation, found the recent battle for control of the conventions to be so important. The groups that control the national convention or the larger state conventions have an enormous amount of patronage at their disposal in the short term. Moreover, in the long term, they may set the theological direction of Southern Baptist seminaries and colleges, and thus influence the direction of the local churches. The colleges and seminaries train the pastors who will eventually lead the churches.

In most local churches, the ultimate authority is still held by the congregation. This authority was originally outlined in a church covenant, constitution, and/or articles of incorporation. While the doctrinal matters addressed by church covenants and constitutions are now often ignored, the issue of authority seems a perennial concern. There is a constant give-and-take occurring in the churches between various members. This is because operational authority in the church is variously delegated, officially or unofficially, to the pastor, the church staff, the deacons, the elders, or some powerful committee of laypersons. These operational authorities may be defined in the constitution and by-laws of the church. Where they are not clearly delineated or remembered, these operational authorities, exercised by church officers, can compete with one another, in healthy or unhealthy ways.

Generally, the congregation calls a pastor, the primary figure among the *church officers*, to lead in worship and business. The calling of a pastor is an important event in the life of the church, so important that the method of calling is defined in the constitution. A "search committee" is appointed by the church in one of its business meetings to begin accepting vitas and interviewing candidates. The hope is that the committee will soon discern "God's man" and present that candidate to the church as a prospective pastor, usually after a sermon delivered to the church "in view of a call." Unfortunately, some churches are in the habit of forming a search committee on an annual or bi-annual basis, either because of some type of disagreement or because the new pastor

has found "a better field of service." Pastors are expected to have a real sense that God, and not only the church, is calling them to fill their role as the church's spiritual leader. The qualifications applied to bishops and elders in 1 Timothy and Titus are used to determine the spiritual fitness of a candidate. For Southern Baptists, "pastors" are "elders" are "bishops." The more intense examination of a new candidate for a pastorate usually occurs in an ordination council formed with the support of other local churches at the request of the local church that has decided to call the new minister.

Pastors are typically expected, though by no means required, to have a seminary education. Ordination involves ordained ministers from the association, who are invited to lay hands upon the ordinand. Female candidates for the role of senior pastor are officially discouraged by the denomination's latest confession of faith, and many of the local churches would never consider a female candidate, whatever the national denomination determines.

Although most churches are small and can only support one ministerial staff member, larger churches will have a senior pastor who is aided by numerous staff members. These staff members are employees of the church and not the denomination nor the pastor, though they report to the pastor. Staff members can be either ministerial (ordained) or non-ministerial (support). Some churches call their ordained staff members "pastors" or "elders," effectively resulting in a multiple-elder model, though most of the churches remain single-elder institutions. The most common ministerial staff members assist the pastor by leading in music, organizing the educational ministries of the church, ministering to the youth or some other age group, leading the outreach ministries of the church, or managing the non-ministerial support staff. A ministerial staff member's tenure can be of various length and enjoyment, dependent upon reception by the senior pastor and/or the church membership.

Southern Baptists have traditionally affirmed two offices in the church, that of pastors and that of deacons. Periodically in Southern Baptist history, there have been movements away from this understanding. Recently, for instance, there has been a growing interest in the plural-elder model for the structure of the church. It is yet to be seen whether this is driven more by the questionable exposition of the plural in some New Testament passages or by the desire of some pastors to dilute the rival authority of these often troublesome deacons. Because there has been great turnover in the pastorate—some studies say the average tenure of a pastor is less than two years—the laity have been required to provide continuity of leadership in many churches.

Such congregations naturally look to their deacons for leadership during the interim between pastors. "Boards" of deacons have often lost their original purpose of aiding the pastor by serving the church's more mundane needs and may even begin functioning as a corporate board of directors or trustees. (The latter trend is confused by the presence of a distinct body required by articles of incorporation, the literal "trustees" of the church.)

Theologically, the *members* of the church should be considered prior to the officers of the church. However, in practice, many Southern Baptist churches pay more attention to their officers than to their members. Indeed, in some larger churches, or "super churches," which can contain multiple thousands of members, the pastor has been compared to a rock-n-roll or movie "star" and the worship service has taken on the air of a performance. The members are seen as "consumers" whom the ministries of the church serve with ever more elaboration in the concern that these consumers will find a better service provider in a competing church. Although one might be tempted to focus on the problems at the top end of the local church food chain, the impact of modern individualism (and postmodern pluralism) can also be detected in the older "First Baptist" urban and suburban churches and the smaller rural and inner-city churches.

New members usually join a church based upon "transfer by letter," "transfer by statement," or "believer's baptism." "Transfer by letter" describes the process of a sister Baptist church verifying that this candidate for membership has been a member in good standing. Such transfers of membership have often become rubber-stamps rather than indicators of whether the member was actually faithful and good. "Transfer by statement" can be of two types, either a statement from a church "of like faith and practice" that this church member is eligible for membership or a statement from the proposed member that he once belonged to a church "of like faith and practice." This category is troubling as even cursory communal oversight is effectively bypassed. Membership "by believer's baptism" is required of all new Christians. This form of membership is often, but not always, required of Christians who have been baptized as infants in another Christian tradition.

Over time, the membership requirements for becoming and remaining as members have been loosened by the churches. The old categories have been maintained but new definitions are being offered. "Open membership" no longer carries the stigma it once held among Southern Baptists, although the idea is still not officially countenanced. Similarly, it appears that all that is required to get on the rolls of many churches is to "walk down the aisle" during the "invitation" and have

the pastor declare one a new member by one of the above-mentioned forms. Some churches still maintain a separate vote during the monthly or quarterly business meeting, but even that can be perfunctory. Requirements made of those who have become members are no longer particularly measurable. Once a person is a church member, churches are reluctant to remove their name except in the event of death. These trends beyond even the individualistic association of like-minded individuals are probably a function of a number of factors: the non-judgmental nature of postmodernity, the desire of pastors on a career path to increase their membership sizes, and the anti-historical bias many Americans possess. The barriers to entering the community and maintaining membership are relatively low.

In their role of relating to themselves, Southern Baptists organize themselves primarily at the local level. The local churches choose church officers to lead the church in its activities. They now have comparatively low barriers to the granting and maintenance of membership. Now, let us examine the functioning of the churches through their activities.

Southern Baptist Churches in Relation to God: Activities

Considered under the rubric of church activities are the roles in the churches' relation to God of worship and proclamation, baptism, the Lord's Supper, and church discipline. Southern Baptists in *worship and proclamation* are not liturgical, at least in the sense of a written liturgy. Worship, however, is important, so important that rearranging or omitting portions of the unwritten liturgy can be detrimental to a preacher's tenure. Baptists typically worship in a formal way on Sunday morning; smaller numbers attend the less formal Sunday evening and mid-week prayer services, if they still exist. In the more traditional churches, the hymnal provides the musical portion of the service, while more contemporary churches choose popular short choruses, often with limited theological content. Prayers, mostly extemporaneous, are uttered by the pastor or a deacon or a special guest at the beginning of the service, before the offering, perhaps before the sermon, and as the benediction. The offering as an expression of tithing or sacrificial giving is periodically emphasized.

The affective zenith of the typical worship service is experienced towards the end of the sermon and during the "invitation." The invitation or "altar call" became popular during the later evangelical awakenings as a time for public commitments by individuals, either members or visitors. A public commitment, also known as "walking the aisle,"

can be made when one accepts Christ personally as Lord and Savior, wishes to join the church, "surrenders" to the ministry, or "rededicates" one's life to Christ. The invitation is now considered an essential aspect of public worship in many churches. Indeed, it would appear to the casual observer that walking the aisle rather than baptism is requisite for church membership.

The central place in a worship service is given to a sermon from the pastor or a special guest. The sermons are ideally scriptural expositions although the topical sermon is having a strong run in Southern Baptist pulpits. The quality of the sermon from the viewpoint of content or style is dependent upon the preacher. Some preachers are very committed to verse-by-verse exposition; others alternate book studies with topical studies; yet others are more than ready to preach "how to" sermons that appeal to their audience's "felt needs." The average sermon will begin with the biblical text. The body of the sermon will arrange the material under a few perhaps alliterative headings, explain the text, illustrate the text, and then apply the text to the audience. Explanations come from linguistic studies, commentary references, and the preacher's personal encounters with the Word. Illustrations are pulled from the Bible itself, history, personal experience, or contemporary events. Applications are personalized to what the preacher perceives are the audience's greatest spiritual needs.

The conclusion of the sermon usually includes a strong appeal to action. An evangelistic appeal to "invite Jesus into your heart" is to be expected from most. Some evangelistic appeals can be quite forceful in their psychical impact. A confident, boisterous style with a harmonic rise and fall in tone and pitch building to a climactic call to come to Jesus can temporarily overcome deficiencies in content. Strong content with a retiring style is appreciated but such preachers are rarely asked to appear before their fellows in preaching conferences. Church members expect a fresh, exciting sermon each Sunday morning. Sunday evening and week-day prayer meetings require less preparation. The sermon is the primary means of restoring human relations with God and because of their concern for personal salvation, Baptists give it pride of place in worship.

The "sacraments," which Southern Baptists prefer to call "ordinances," are celebrated, ideally, out of a sense of joyous obedience and responsive confession to the work of God in their lives. The ordinances are not necessarily effective means of grace although they may be viewed as providing a blessing to the church. Those who participate in the ordinances profess their initial conversion in baptism and their continuing fellowship with God and his church in the Lord's Supper.

Baptism is a condition for church membership and is intended for believers only. After the new believer is greeted during the invitation and received verbally into the church, either by pastoral proclamation or a cursory church vote, the baptizand will conference with the pastor or a staff member. The basics of the faith—God, Christ, salvation, personal Bible reading, prayer, tithing, the meaning of baptism—will be reasserted by the pastor and affirmed by the baptizand. After the conference a date will be arranged for baptism in a public worship service. Baptism is not seen as a requirement for regeneration but as an expression of spiritual rebirth. It is performed by a minister or deacon or other designated church member.

The mode of baptism is full immersion, which symbolizes the convert's identification with the death of Jesus (and personal death to sin) and with his resurrection (and commitment to live a Christian life and express hope in eternal life). The Trinitarian formula of the Great Commission is viewed as a proclamation of the convert's identification with the Christian God. Southern Baptists have been steadily losing their insistence upon baptism for believers only as their primary distinctive. Although Southern Baptists have not experimented with paedo-baptism, our churches are baptizing ever younger new members. Even if Southern Baptists are not guilty of "cradle" baptism, they might be accused of "preschool" baptism; some scholars question the effective difference. As an alternative to paedo-baptism, many churches have "baby dedication services" in which God is thanked for the new arrival, to whom the church and the parents commit themselves to discipling.

The Lord's Supper is sometimes called "communion," rarely called "the Eucharist," and never called "the Mass." Most Southern Baptists appear to hold either a Zwinglian view of communion at best or a Schwenckfeldian suspension of meaningful celebration at worst. Often the Lord's Supper is simply tacked on other worship services on a quarterly basis. If a sermon is preached on the Lord's Supper, it will inevitably include a diatribe against the Roman understanding and an affirmation of memorialism. There is a rising sense among younger Southern Baptists that the Lord's Supper should be understood in a Calvinistic sense as a spiritual communion with the risen Christ and his body and that it deserves a more central place in the life of the churches.

During the nineteenth century, the Landmark movement encouraged Southern Baptists in the middle and western south to serve communion only to the particular members of that local church in a practice known as "strict communion." In the twentieth century, most churches would allow other believing baptized Christians to participate

in a local church communion in a practice known as "close communion." Today, more churches are inviting any Christian to participate in a practice known as "open communion." Reflecting their individualistic tendencies, the churches generally dispense the grape juice—wine is eschewed in deference to the temperance movement—in personal cups and the bread in separate small crackers. The communicant is usually exhorted to examine oneself for holiness and faithfulness prior to consumption; the older communal understanding of examination has been largely forgotten.

As has already been hinted at, *church discipline* has largely fallen into disuse. Baptist church members seemed more concerned to misinterpret Jesus' statement, "judge not lest ye be judged," as an undiscerning tolerance and to avoid the heartaches of controversy, than to reveal the church as the body of a holy Christ. It is rare for a church to practice discipline except in the case of the pastor or another staff member. Most churches find it scandalous to keep a minister who has fallen into open sin, but sinful laypersons are regularly countenanced. Many churches have embraced the goal of numerical growth, and, in an effort to bring in new members, they made the decision, consciously or unconsciously, to lay fewer requirements upon church members. It is not very common for a church to purge its rolls of non-attending church members. The purging of the rolls is seen as too radical, and some ministers have faced difficulty when seeking such.

In their role of relating themselves to God, the churches engage in worship, proclaim the Word, habitually practice the ordinance of believers' baptism, haphazardly practice the ordinance of communion, and almost never practice church discipline.

Southern Baptist Churches in Relation to Others

By "others," we mean those who are not members of this particular local Southern Baptist church. It cannot be emphasized enough that Southern Baptists have an impulse to emphasize the local churches. Those groups outside the local Southern Baptist church are the others. Considered under the rubric of churches in relation to others are the mission of the church, associations and conventions, religious liberty, and ecumenism. Southern Baptists define their mission as shaping their relation to the world. They form associations and conventions to cooperate with other Baptist churches. They emphasize religious liberty in their dealings with the culture and the state. And they have an intentionally limited view of what constitutes valid cooperation with other Christian traditions.

Southern Baptist churches define *the mission of the church* in an evangelistic manner: the churches make concerted and sustained efforts to reach those who are lost with the good news of the atoning death and powerful resurrection of the God-man, Jesus Christ. The mission of the church is accomplished on a local level by evangelistic outreach. Local evangelistic outreach may be accomplished through lifestyle evangelism, servant evangelism, and confrontational evangelism, and during worship. Local churches sometimes employ professional evangelists on a temporary basis both to call the church to revival and to appeal in crusades for the conversion of the lost.

The mission of the church is accomplished beyond the local church's immediate area through the commissioning and support of both professional and short-term missionaries. Some non-SBC southern Baptist churches see the convention missionary boards as impinging on the local church's autonomy and send and support their own missionaries. Churches affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention support missions through the Cooperative Program and through special annual offerings. Members of these affiliated churches may be encouraged to consider God's call upon their lives to become missionaries. Those sensing such are put through a rigorous application process with the International Mission Board or North American Mission Board. Appointed missionaries are held in high esteem by the churches as they leave a comfortable culture to take the good news of Jesus Christ across national and linguistic boundaries. The impact of these mission endeavors, especially in the international arena, has been numerically positive. Other effects are best left to the judgment of the beneficiaries of these efforts. The ultimate judge, of course, is God.

In order to cooperate with one another, local Southern Baptist churches formed *associations and conventions*. Associations fulfill three primary purposes: the promotion of missions, the pooling of resources for higher education, and the enablement of benevolence ministries. In their cooperative model, Southern Baptists have opted for a "convention" method rather than the "society" method preferred by northern Baptists. Only churches may join a convention while societies are open to churches, individuals, and other organizations. There are three primary levels of cooperation between Southern Baptist churches: the local association, the state convention, and the national convention. There are other affinity groups, but these three are the most common.

For some churches, the local association is the place where the overhead projector is kept; for others, it is where doctrinal controversies are settled; for yet others, it is a lifeline of Christian fellowship and the Director of Missions is a resource of wisdom in times of trouble.

Churches place the association in their annual budget and send messengers to monthly and annual meetings. The association can exclude churches considered heretical or unethical, but the association has no coercive power or legal claim upon the local churches. It is a voluntary organization, though its voluntarism is not to be understood in a libertarian sense. The authority flows from the churches to the association. The same can be said of the state and national conventions.

The Cooperative Program is the financial lifeline by which the churches maintain the state and national conventions. Most churches put the state convention in their budget and a substantial percentage is passed by the state to the national convention. As a result of the Controversy and the Great Commission Resurgence that came later, these time-worn methods of funding state and national convention ministries have been changing. Indeed, in a number of states—Virginia, Texas, and Missouri being most prominent—rival conventions have been formed to compete for local church dollars and commitment. Southern Baptists cooperated in the establishment of the Baptist World Alliance, but the national denomination's relationship with the BWA has been severed. Some Southern Baptists have formed various societies to further their own particular doctrinal or missiological priorities.

Through various committees or commissions on public affairs, Southern Baptists relate themselves to issues that impact the wider culture. The primary cultural concern of Southern Baptists has been to promote *religious liberty*. With the rise of the conservatives, however, two different views of religious liberty came to dominate the discussion. The view of the now-eclipsed Christian Life Commission was to argue for the strict separation of church and state, but the new Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission favors an accommodationist position in which the state ideally makes room for the church to proclaim the Word and have a positive social influence. Under the previous moderate regime, Southern Baptists were equivocal on abortion and other hot-button cultural issues, except for the issue of racism, which they eventually opposed. Under the conservative regime, Southern Baptists declared themselves combatants in the culture wars, taking positions on the abortion issue as pro-life, on homosexuality as only allowing sexual relations in a faithful marriage between a man and a woman, and on the races as against bigotry. Southern Baptists have raised funds to combat world hunger.

Conservative Southern Baptists are more traditional in their views of the roles of men and women in the family while moderates are more attuned to the culture. Southern Baptists have tried to convince the American government to promote genuine religious liberty not only at

home but throughout the world. Interestingly, the sectarian nature of their forefathers has sometimes been forgotten as Southern Baptists have grown in number. So large have Baptists become that they have by default inherited the mantle of an established church in numerous communities in the south. This is disheartening to those who cherish the dissenting nature of their history but encouraging to those who see the church leavening society.

Southern Baptists have been typically reluctant to affiliate themselves formally with supporters of *ecumenism*. The article on cooperation in the *Baptist Faith and Message* states:

> Christian unity in the New Testament sense is spiritual harmony and voluntary cooperation for common ends by various groups of Christ's people. Cooperation is desirable between the various Christian denominations, when the end to be attained is itself justified, and when such cooperation involves no violation of conscience or compromise of loyalty to Christ and His Word as revealed in the New Testament.

The qualifying clauses are interpreted in an evangelistic and doctrinally orthodox manner. There is little desire for formal ecumenical discussions intended to lead to shared ministries and sacraments or ordinances. Southern Baptists are quite suspicious of any efforts to bring about structural unity. Currently, "spiritual harmony" is the best that other Christian denominations can hope for.

Conclusion

This historical review of popular Southern Baptist views of the changing nature and role of the churches raises three major theological concerns. First, the ontological grounding of the church in the threefold office of Jesus Christ, which arose during England's long Reformation, has largely disappeared from contemporary popular discussions in Southern Baptist ecclesiology. In effect, the churches traded a Christological foundation for an anthropological one. We now see ourselves more as religious associations of independent persons than as the localized body of our Lord and Savior.[32]

[32] Discussions have wisely begun regarding the need for reviving a proper theological definition of the nature of the church in the Southern Baptist academy. Cf. W. Madison Grace, II, "The Church as Place in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Theology" (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary,

Second, sensing an ecclesiological lacuna, Southern Baptists cast about for a replacement ideology to justify their existence and practice. However, the two major proffered options, Landmarkism and Individualism, ought now both be deemed deficient. At their root each relies upon anthropological rather than theological resources. In the one case, the key is a succession of churches; in the other, an exaltation of individual human persons. Almost imperceptibly, the effective theological norm in Baptist ecclesiology has transferred from the Lord of the Church to one of two options focused on the human membership of the churches.

Third, because of these conceptual deficiencies regarding the nature of the church, the practices of the churches more easily depart from historic forms. Loosened from its Christological mooring, the ship of the local church is now restrained only by the relatively weightless anchor of anthropological conviction. Many departures from traditional practices, especially those dealing with the membership of the churches, the worship of the churches, and the relationship of the churches with others, indicate an ongoing diminution of ecclesiological integrity.

In this author's opinion, the problem will be resolved only through a return to those grounds revealed in Scripture and rediscovered during the Reformation. Baptist churches do not need to return to London, of course, but our doctrine of the church must again be grounded theologically. If Jesus is not entirely submitted to as the one Lord of the Church, who stands in his threefold Lordship over all of the churches' structures, activities, and relationships, our churches are, to state it bluntly, preparing for judgment.

2012). The major recent academic ecclesiological contributions of John Hammett, Thomas White, and Gregg Allison, *inter alia*, have been bracketed from this essay. These recent academic contributions, on the one hand, have not as yet reached deeply into popular discourse and, on the other hand, deserve more careful attention than space here allows.