Foreword by
James Leo Garrett Jr.

BAPTIST FOUNDATIONS

Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age

EDITED BY MARK DEVER AND JONATHAN LEEMAN

"*Baptist Foundations* is a book whose time has come. In fact it has been needed for quite a while! Written by both scholars and practitioners, this book is biblical, theological, and practical. And, it is thorough. Do not be intimidated by its length. Read it at your leisure and be sure to consult it again and again when you have important ecclesiological questions. The odds are it has a helpful word."

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"When it comes to biblical ecclesiology, Mark Dever, Jonathan Leeman, and 9Marks offer this generation's gold standard. *Baptist Foundations* is perhaps the most biblically robust and historically informed book on church government on the market today. I would encourage everyone who serves or loves the local church to read this book and implement its message."

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"When I teach students the doctrine of the church, and when I talk with pastors about the challenges that they face in their ministry, several issues always come to the forefront: how the leaders of the church—pastors, elders, deacons—and its members exercise authority in their respective spheres; the what/when/who/where/why/how of baptism and the Lord's Supper; and how to start or restore church discipline. The book you now have in your hands deals specifically with those issues! It is an accessible, easy-to-follow book that provides a solid foundation for Baptist pastors and laypeople who love the church of Jesus Christ."

Gregg R. Allison, professor of Christian Theology,
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman are to be commended and congratulated for putting together this extremely significant book, one that deserves a wide readership among Baptists and all interested in these vital matters of ecclesiology. The book as a whole makes a most significant contribution to the understanding of church polity and congregationalism, church membership, and church government, as well as the meaning of the ordinances and the nature of the church. The depth and serious reflection represented in the various chapters will pave the way for ongoing engagement, research, and conversation that will be immensely helpful for theologians, ministers, and church leaders, while strengthening churches across denominational lines. I am quite pleased to recommend this impressive and important volume."

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"Here is a superb collection of essays on Baptist congregationalism showing that 'church polity' is about more than organization, structure, and 'how to' matters of group dynamics. I commend this book to every Baptist pastor and church leader concerned with following Jesus Christ in a covenanted community of faithful disciples."

Timothy George, dean,
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"In *Baptist Foundations*, Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman offer a treasure trove of wisdom and practical advice regarding a highly neglected subject: ecclesiology and church governance. Church leaders will find themselves returning to these essays repeatedly for guidance on topics such as elders, deacons, membership, baptism, and the Lord's Supper."

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"The theological crises of our increasingly secular times are growing in both number and intensity. The collapse of cultural Christianity looms as one of the great events of our times. At the same time, we see a resurgent interest in the nature of the authentic church as displayed in Scripture, and this is exactly the right time for an urgent recovery of Baptist polity. To paraphrase Samuel Johnson, there is nothing like a theological emergency to clear the theological mind. This invaluable new work on Baptist polity is urgently needed, faithful in content, and comprehensive in scope. *Baptist Foundations* is the right book for the right time, written and edited by just the right team. I celebrate its arrival."

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"Historically informed, exegetically careful, and theologically substantial, *Baptist Foundations* tackles perennial issues in ecclesiology with verve and conviction. The church's nature, polity, ordinances, leadership, and attributes are ably treated and pastorally applied. Baptist pastors, ministry students, reflective church leaders, and professors will benefit from this significant volume."

Christopher W. Morgan, dean and professor of Theology,
School of Christian Ministries, California Baptist University

"This edited volume by Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman is much needed and fills a growing hole in the thinking and experience of present-day Baptists. This book will be valuable for every minister, and especially for seminarians, as they reflect upon and put into practice what it means to be a part of the church of the living Christ. Addressing issues of ordinances, organizational structures, and polity, the authors provide a powerful resource for those who want to live faithfully under the authority of the local church as the people of God."

Robert B. Sloan Jr., president,
Houston Baptist University

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James Leo Garrett

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Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age

B&H ACADEMIC
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

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Chapter 1

Some Historical Roots of Congregationalism

Michael A. G. Haykin

A comprehensive study of congregationalism, not simply as a denominational stream but as a conviction about church life that has been found in numerous Christian communities, would doubtless require a series of volumes. In what follows, I have taken my cue from Geoffrey F. Nuttall's brilliant study of congregationalism in the historical period between 1640 and 1660.[1] This present study, however, broadens the time frame to include congregationalist witness in the Reformation period as well as congregationalism among the most significant body of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Baptists, the Particular Baptists. Essential to the Particular Baptist vision in these two centuries was a view of church government that they shared with their Congregationalist brethren, a view that they believed best reflected the scriptural teaching.

Jean Morély: An Early Proponent of Congregationalism

The massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day (August 24, 1572) and the weeks following, when thousands of French Protestants were slaughtered in cold blood, comprised a tragedy of immeasurable proportions. The slaughter decapitated the French Protestant community and

[1] *Visible Saints: The Congregational Way 1640–1660* (1957 ed.; repr. Weston Rhyn, Oswestry, Shropshire: Quinta Press, 2001).

radicalized those who survived. And in the long run it was detrimental to the well-being of the French nation.[2]

Among the victims in Paris were the chief supporters of Jean Morély (ca. 1524–ca.1594), one of the earliest known advocates of congregationalism, whose *Traicté de la discipline et police Chrestienne* (*A Treatise on Christian Discipline and Polity*) had created a firestorm of controversy within the French Reformed community since its publication at Lyons ten years earlier.[3] Morély was a member of the nobility. Some of his humanist education had been in Zurich, where he was probably converted between 1546 and 1548. After a brief stay at Wittenberg, where he studied under the German reformer Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560), he completed his theological studies at Lausanne, where he became acquainted with Pierre Viret (1511–71), a close friend of John Calvin (1509–64). Between the early 1550s and 1561, Morély split his residence between Paris and Geneva, and in the latter city he completed his treatise on church government. He apparently showed it first to Calvin, but the French reformer was too involved in directing church planting and missions in France to read it.[4] Around 1561, Morély moved to Lyons, where Viret was pastoring. The latter gave Morély's manuscript a cursory read but did not study it closely enough to see any problems with its arguments. Morély thus went ahead in 1562 and had it printed in an elegant 350-page edition. He dedicated it to Viret[5] and presented it to the national assembly of the French Reformed Church, which was held in Orleans that year. The book was a bombshell.

Traicté de la discipline is divided into four books. In the first Morély argued for the necessity of church discipline.[6] He was concerned that the Reformed churches of his day had significantly inferior moral

2 See Geoffrey Treasure, *The Huguenots* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 167–75. Estimates of the slain vary from 5,000 to 30,000. We should probably think in terms of between 5,000 and 10,000.

3 The best treatment of his life is Philippe Denis and Jean Rott, *Jean Morély (ca. 1524–1594) et l'utopie d'une démocratie dans l'église* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1993). See also Robert Kingdon, *Geneva and the Consolidation of the French Protestant Movement, 1564–1572* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 43–137, and S. K. Barker, *Protestantism, Poetry and Protest: The Vernacular Writings of Antoine de Chandieu (c. 1534–1591)* (Farnham, Surrey/Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 195ff.

4 On this mission, see Michael A. G. Haykin and C. Jeffrey Robinson Sr., *To the Ends of the Earth: Calvin's Missional Vision and Legacy* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 65–70.

5 *Traicté de la discipline et police Chrestienne* (Lyons, 1562), [i–vi]. Subsequent references to Morély's *Traicté de la discipline* will cite book and chapter where relevant and place the pagination in brackets.

6 *Traicté de la discipline* 1 [1–72].

and lifestyle standards in comparison to the early church (*la primitive Église*).[7] But how was one to recover the moral ethos of the early church? Morély argued that churches needed to recover the type of governance that marked those halcyon days in the church's history, namely, "democratic government" (*gouvernement Democratique*), where authority is vested in the hands of the congregation. Unlike today, the term *democracy* and its cognates were freighted with deep-seated negative connotations in the sixteenth century. Centuries of political reflection about the ideal type of government in late Antiquity and the medieval era led to the consensus that a monarchical arrangement was best. As a result there was an instinctive rejection of any type of governance that gave the people a major role in decision making. Such governance was regarded as little better than anarchy, lacking both a permanent body of law and administrators for that legal framework.[8] Morély sought to circumvent this instinctive dislike by insisting that the church government he had in mind was not a true or "pure" democracy in the ancient sense because there was a body of law—to be found in the Scriptures—and a body of administration, namely, the pastors and elders of the local church.[9] He further defined the local church as that "union of truly blessed souls chosen in Jesus Christ from eternity for eternal life, who assemble for the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments, who are a part and image of the universal church."[10]

Book 2 focused on the church's implementation of discipline as it related to excommunication and heresy. To whom has Christ given the authority to receive new members into the local church, or expel them if necessary? Morély is clear: such decisions are ultimately the responsibility of the local church. Pastors and elders must then execute decisions that come from the congregation.[11] On this point Pierre Viret took a similar stand to Morély, but during the controversy sparked by Morély's ideas, Viret kept his views to himself. To have done otherwise would have meant conflict with his closest friends, including Calvin in Geneva.[12] If the powers of reception and excommunication belong ultimately to the congregation, then it follows, as Morély argued in book 3,

7 *Traicté de la discipline* 1.8 [30–33].

8 Robert M. Kingdon, "Calvinism and Democracy: Some Political Implications of Debates on French Reformed Church Government, 1562–1572," *The American Historical Review* 69:2 (1964): 396.

9 *Traicté de la discipline* 1.8 [32–33].

10 *Traicté de la discipline* 1.12 [61–62], translation Michael A. G. Haykin.

11 *Traicté de la discipline* 2.17 [166–69].

12 Tadataka Maruyama, *The Ecclesiology of Theodore Beza, The Reform of the True Church* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1978), 97–98.

that the congregation also has the power to elect its own officers, pastors, elders, and deacons. And for scriptural proof Morély turned to the election of Matthias in Acts 1 and the election of Stephen in Acts 6.[13] The "voice of the church" elects its leaders.[14] The final book looks at a variety of ecclesiological issues: the role of ministerial meetings and synods,[15] how the church should take care of the poor,[16] the need for formal theological education,[17] and the importance of catechizing.[18]

Morély's book was printed in March 1562. A few weeks later, at the national synod of the French Reformed churches held in Orleans, it was condemned for its "wicked doctrine," doctrine that would subvert the Reformed cause in France if implemented.[19] Morély was asked to appear before the company of pastors in Geneva to give an account of his views. When he eventually did in July 1563, he offered to recant his views only if they were rejected publicly by the three recognized leaders of the French Reformation, namely, Calvin, Viret, and Guillaume Farel (1489–1565). Viret, as mentioned, sympathized with Morély, while Calvin refused to enter the discussion lest he undermine the synodal decision already made by the French elders at Orleans. The Genevan consistory, therefore, continued to press Morély to abandon his congregationalism. His response, Luther-like, was to refuse unless he was shown to be wrong by the Scriptures. In the face of such obstinacy, the consistory believed it had no choice but to condemn Morély as a schismatic and excommunicate him.[20]

Morély left Geneva for Paris, where he soon acquired an influential circle of friends, including Odet de Coligny (1517–71), the Protestant cardinal of Châtillon; Jeanne d'Albret (1528–72), the queen of Navarre; and the philosopher Pierre Ramus (1515–72). But his book was deemed serious enough that during the 1560s his main opponents proved to be Théodore de Bèza (1519–1605), Calvin's lieutenant and theological heir in Geneva, and Antoine de la Roche Chandieu (1534–91), leader of the Protestant cause in Paris, who wrote a harsh rejoinder to Morély, *La confirmation de la discipline ecclésiastique observée ès églises réformées du royaume de France* (*The Confirmation of the Church Discipline*

13 *Traicté de la discipline* 3.1 [174–76].
14 *Traicté de la discipline* 3.2 [186–87].
15 *Traicté de la discipline* 4.4–8 [280–305].
16 *Traicté de la discipline* 4.9–13 [305–22].
17 *Traicté de la discipline* 4.14–15, 17 [322–34, 337–39].
18 *Traicté de la discipline* 4.16 [334].
19 Robert M. Kingdon, *Geneva and the Consolidation of the French Protestant Movement 1564–1572* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 64.
20 Ibid.

Observed in the Reformed Churches of the Kingdom of France). The essence of Chandieu's argument was that excommunication and church discipline, the determination of orthodoxy, and the election and dismissal of church officers were entirely within the purview of the ministerial consistory, not that of the gathered community.[21] Bèza, on the other hand, undertook a letter-writing campaign to destroy Morély's support and reputation. In a lengthy letter to the Swiss German reformer Heinrich Bullinger (1504–75), for example, Bèza focused on Morély's use of the term *democracy*. Bèza accused Morély of calling the French Reformed churches an "oligarchy" or "tyranny" and told Bullinger that if Morély had his way, he would undermine these churches by means of a "most troublesome and most seditious democracy." Bullinger admitted he had actually never heard of Morély but concluded from what Bèza told him that he must be a dreadful Anabaptist![22] Morély's conduct in this early controversy over church government, in turn, was far from blameless. In a letter to a Reformed pastor in Orleans, he called Bèza "this new Antichrist."[23] Little wonder that when Bèza discovered this, he told Morély point-blank in a final letter to him: "It is you who have violated the virginity of the French churches."[24]

Although Morély did not perish with many of those who supported him in the St. Bartholomew's Day massacres, the debate between him and Chandieu and Bèza was over, and the latters' presbyterian position had won the day. After the horrific savagery of 1572, Morély fled to England, where he lived until his death around 1594. Further research is needed to see what influence Morély's ideas may have had on English Separatists in the 1580s. But whatever the outcome of such research, Morély still needs to be recognized as a key pioneer of the way of congregationalism.

The Congregationalist Legacy of the Separatists

The Reformation came to England during the reign of Henry VIII (r. 1509–47), although it was not until the reign of his son Edward VI (r. 1547–53) and his daughter Elizabeth I (r. 1559–1603) that it gained a firm foothold. Elizabeth's ascension to the throne affirmed that

[21] *La confirmation de la discipline ecclésiastique observée en églises réformées de France* (Geneva, 1566), 149, 155, 205.
[22] Kingdon, "Calvinism and Democracy," 398–99.
[23] Treasure, *Huguenots*, 126.
[24] Ibid., dated March 25, 1567.

England would firmly fall into the Protestant orbit. The question that arose, though, was to what extent the Elizabethan state church would be reformed. Elizabeth was content with a church that was "Calvinistic in theology, [but] Erastian in Church order and government [i.e., the state was ascendant over the church in these areas], and largely mediaeval in liturgy."[25] As a response to this "settledness" in the Church of England, the Puritan movement arose.

Initially Puritanism sought to thoroughly reform the Elizabethan church after the model of the churches in Protestant Switzerland, especially those in Geneva and Zurich. These continental churches were attempting to include in the church's worship only that which was explicitly commanded by Scripture. For instance, John Calvin declared that "nothing pleases God but what he himself has commanded us in his Word" concerning a church's worship.[26] As Douglas Kelly has noted, this concern with proper worship arose out of the fact that Puritanism was a revival movement. In his words:

> They [i.e., the Puritans] were so concerned with worship because they were so concerned with God. Puritanism budded during a revival movement, an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which gave them an immediate sense of the nearness, the holiness, the beauty and the grace of the Triune God. . . . Everything less than God was secondary to knowing and serving Him aright. Worship was first; even the most legitimate concerns were second. If worship was of such supreme significance, what could matter more than to do it in a way that would please God?[27]

As the sixteenth century wore on, though, the goal of fully reforming the English state church seemed no closer. Consequently, in the latter part of that century, a number of Puritans concluded that the Church of England would never be fully reformed and decided to separate from the state church and organize their own congregations. These Puritans

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[25] Robert C. Walton, *The Gathered Community* (London: The Carey Press, 1946), 59.

[26] T. H. L. Parker, trans., *Daniel I (Chapters 1–6)* Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 20 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 1993), 130. Compare, though, the remarks of Douglas Kelly on Calvin's position: "The Puritan Regulative Principle and Contemporary Worship" in *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century, Essays in Remembrance of the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly*, ed. J. Ligon Duncan III (Fearn, Tain, Ross-shire, Scotland, UK: Mentor, 2004), 71–72.

[27] Kelly, "Puritan Regulative Principle," in Duncan, *Westminster Confession into the 21st Century*, 73.

were known as Separatists, and they argued for what was essentially a congregationalist form of church government.

One of their earliest leaders was Robert Browne (c.1550–1633), who in a tract entitled *A Treatise of Reformation Without Tarrying for Anie* (1582), provided the "clarion-call" of the Separatist movement.[28] In this influential tract Browne set forth the views that became, over the course of the next century, common property of all the theological children of the English Separatists, including the Independents or Congregationalists and the Baptists. First of all, Browne conceded the right of civil authorities to rule and to govern. However, he drew a distinct line between their powers in society at large and their power with regard to local churches. As citizens of the state, the individual members of these churches were to be subject to civil authorities. However, he emphasized, these authorities had no right "to compel religion, to plant Churches by power, and to force a submission to ecclesiastical government by laws and penalties."[29]

Then Browne conceived of the local church as a "gathered" church, a company of Christians who had covenanted together to live under the rule of Christ, the risen Lord, who made his will known through his Word and Spirit. Finally, the pastors and elders of the church ultimately received their authority and office from God, but they were to be appointed to their office by "due consent and agreement of the church . . . according to the number of the most which agree."[30]

Although Browne later recanted these views under torture in England, he had started a movement that could not be held in check. Browne's mantle fell to three men in particular—John Greenwood (c. 1560–93), Henry Barrow (c. 1550–93), and John Penry (1559–93)[31]—all of whom were hanged in 1593 for what was regarded by the state as an act of civil disobedience, namely secession from the established church. When Penry was being examined by the state authorities, he was adamant that

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[28] B. R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition from the Marian Martyrs to the Pilgrim Fathers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 42. On Browne, see White, *English Separatist Tradition*, 44–66, and Alan P. F. Sell, *Saints: Visible, Orderly and Catholic, The Congregational Idea of the Church* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1986), 13–16.

[29] White, *English Separatist Tradition*, 59.

[30] Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 30.

[31] On Barrow and Greenwood, see Sell, *Saints*, 16–20. For a study of Penry, see Geoffrey Thomas, "John Penry and the Marprelate Controversy" in *The Trials of Puritanism, Papers Read at the 1993 Westminster Conference* (London: The Westminster Conference, 1993), 45–71.

a true church was "a company of those whom the Word calleth Saints, which do not only profess in word that they know God, but also are subject unto his Laws and Ordinance indeed." This was a veiled criticism of the idea of a parish church whose membership consisted of everyone who lived within the geographic boundaries of the parish.[32] One gets a sense of how committed these men were to their understanding of the Bible from words spoken by Penry shortly before his execution. He affirmed that "imprisonment, judgments, yea, death itself, are not meet weapons to convince men's consciences, grounded on the word of God."[33]

Before their deaths, the preaching and writings of these three men led a significant number in London to adopt Separatist principles. The English Baptist historian Barrie White has noted, "For many it was but a short step from impatient Puritanism within the established Church to convinced Separatism outside it."[34] To curb the growth of these Separatists, state and ecclesiastical authorities passed a law in April 1593 requiring everyone over the age of sixteen to attend their local parish church. Failure to do so for an entire month meant imprisonment. If a person still refused to conform three months following his or her release, the person was given a choice of exile or death. The Elizabethan church and state hoped to rid itself of the Separatist problem by sending the recalcitrant into exile.

Understandably, when faced with a choice of death or exile, most Separatists chose the latter and initially emigrated to Holland. From there a number of them sailed across the Atlantic in 1620 heading for Virginia. Blown off course, they landed after sixty-six days at sea at Plymouth in Cape Cod Bay. In 1691, Plymouth Plantation was absorbed into another Congregationalist colony, Massachusetts.

A Consistent Congregationalist, Oliver Cromwell

The first settlers of the Massachusetts Bay colony landed at Salem in 1628. Unlike the Separatists at Plymouth Plantation, though, these Puritans were congregationalists who had remained in the Church of England, seeking to reform her from within. During the 1630s, however, William Laud (1573–1645), the archbishop of Canterbury, used savage

32 *The Examinations of Henry Barrow, John Greenwood, and John Penry, Before the High Commissioners and Lords of the Council* (London, 1635), 41.

33 Watts, *Dissenters*, 39.

34 White, *English Separatist Tradition*, 84.

measures to repress the Puritans, both presbyterians and congregationalists, in order to bring about religious uniformity within the state church. Many of the Puritans thus quit England to find religious freedom in the new world of New England. Twenty or so years later, the quintessential Puritan Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658) recalled why they went and why those who had stayed in England had taken up arms against their sovereign Charles I (1600–49) in the British Civil Wars (1642–51):

> Is not Liberty of Conscience in religion a fundamental? . . . Indeed, that hath been one of the vanities of our contests. Every sect saith, "Oh! Give me liberty." But give him it, and to his power he will not yield it to anybody else. Where is our ingenuity? Truly, that's a thing ought to be very reciprocal. The magistrate hath his supremacy, and he may settle religion according to his conscience. And I may say it to you, I can say it: All the money of this nation would not have tempted men to fight upon such an account as they have engaged, if they had not had hopes of liberty, better than they had from Episcopacy, or than would have been afforded them from a Scottish Presbytery, or an English either. . . .
>
> This I say is a fundamental. It ought to be so; it is for us, and the generations to come. And if there be an absoluteness in the imposer, without fitting allowances and exceptions from the rule, we shall have our people driven into wildernesses, as they were when those poor and afflicted people, that forsook their estates and inheritances here, where they lived plentifully and comfortably, for the enjoyment of their liberty, and were necessitated to go into a vast howling wilderness in New England, where they have for liberty sake stript themselves of all their comfort and the full enjoyment they had, embracing rather loss of friends and want, than to be so ensnared and in bondage.[35]

Such religious liberty, afforded under Cromwell's leadership, proved fertile ground for the development of congregationalism. Cromwell had made similar remarks about religious freedom at the outset of a military

[35] *Speech to Parliament* (September 12, 1654) in Thomas Carlyle, *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches with Elucidations* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), 3:147–48. There are a multitude of biographies of Cromwell. See especially John Buchan, *Oliver Cromwell* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1934); Antonia Fraser, *Cromwell, Our Chief of Men* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973); and recently, Martyn Bennett, *Oliver Cromwell* (London/New York: Routledge, 2006).

campaign he had undertaken in Scotland in 1650–51. He was reluctant to enter into war against the presbyterian Scots because he shared the Reformed faith with them. Yet he utterly opposed how they exalted their distinctives and desired to coerce others into embracing them. Presbyterianism or any forms of church government, he told the Scots,

> are not by the Covenant to be imposed by force; yet we do and are ready to embrace so much as doth, or shall be made appear to us to be according to the Word of God. Are we to be dealt with as enemies, because we come not to your way? Is all religion wrapped up in that or any one form? Doth that name, or thing, give the difference between those that are the members of Christ and those that are not? We think not so. We say, faith working by love is the true character of a Christian; and, God is our witness, in whomsoever we see any thing of Christ to be, there we reckon our duty to love, waiting for a more plentiful effusion of the Spirit of God to make all those Christians, who, by the malice of the world, are diversified, and by their own carnal-mindedness, do diversify themselves by several names of reproach, to be of one heart and one mind, worshipping God with one consent.[36]

The Christian is called to love all in whom Christ dwells regardless of their denominational affiliation. After all, such denominational divisions, Cromwell felt, originate in worldliness and fleshly reasoning. Cromwell overlooked the fact that sometimes genuinely positive reasons exist for developing differing ecclesial bodies. For instance, godly congregations should leave a church connection that has abandoned the vital truths of the faith. But Cromwell was certainly correct to say that a significant amount of disagreement among genuine Christians is carnal narrow-mindedness. Waiting (and praying?) for an outpouring of the Spirit to unify God's people in love was thus an essential aspect of Cromwellian spirituality. Cromwell's final words were to pray for God to give his people "one heart and mutual love."[37]

Thus, it's no surprise that Cromwell, when appointed Lord Protector in 1653, sought to create a climate that made room for the differences

[36] *A Declaration of the Army of England upon Their March into Scotland, To All that Are Saints, and Partakers of the Faith of God's Elect, in Scotland* (July 19, 1650) in Wilbur Cortez Abbott with Catherine D. Crane, *The Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939), 2:285–86.

[37] Carlyle, *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*, 4:204–5.

of conviction between professing Christians. Scholars differ over Cromwell's motives as well as the parameters of his policy of religious toleration.[38] There is, however, little gainsaying the fact that Cromwell had a burning desire for an atmosphere of religious toleration that precious few in his day were willing to sanction. Probably the most noteworthy statement by Cromwell in favor of such toleration is his 1652 remark that he "had rather that Mahumetanism [i.e., Mohammedanism] were permitted amongst us, than that one of God's children should be persecuted."[39] Cromwell believed that if Christians could not be immediately united, then liberty of conscience was an acceptable second best.[40] This statement also reveals, as Geoffrey F. Nuttall has noted, a sturdy faith in the might of the Holy Spirit to lead Christian men and women of differing views into unity.[41] Thus Cromwell could write to the governor of Edinburgh Castle, Walter Dundas, "Your pretended fear lest error should step in, is like the man that would keep all the wine out of the country lest men should be drunk. It will be found an unjust and unwise jealousy, to deny a man the liberty he hath by nature upon a supposition that he may abuse it."[42]

Oliver Cromwell never actually belonged to a specific congregation, but his religious convictions were definitely those of the Independents or Congregationalists. His one-time chaplain, John Owen (1616–83), expressed those convictions regarding religious liberty well when he wrote in the preface to *The Savoy Declaration*: "The Spirit of Christ

[38] See, for instance, Robert S. Paul, *The Lord Protector: Religion and Politics in the Life of Oliver Cromwell* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 324–33; H. F. Lovell Cocks, *The Religious Life of Oliver Cromwell* (London: Independent Press Ltd., 1960), 45–63; George A. Drake, "Oliver Cromwell and the Quest for Religious Toleration" in *The Impact of the Church upon Its Culture*, ed. Jerald C. Brauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 267–91; Roger Howell Jr., "Cromwell and English Liberty" in *Freedom and the English Revolution, Essays in History and Literature*, eds. R. C. Richardson and G. M. Ridden (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 25–44; Blair Worden, "Toleration and the Cromwellian Protectorate" in *Persecution and Toleration*, ed. W. J. Sheils (Oxford: Basil Blackwell for the Ecclesiastical History Society, 1984), 199–233; J. C. Davis, "Cromwell's Religion" in *Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution*, ed. John Morrill (London/New York: Longman, 1990), 191–99; and Michael A. G. Haykin, *"To Honour God": The Spirituality of Oliver Cromwell* (Dundas, ON: Joshua Press, 1999).

[39] Cited Roger Williams, "To the Truly Christian Reader" in *The Fourth Paper, Presented by Maior Butler, To the Honourable Committee of Parliament, for the Propagating the Gospel of Christ Jesus* (London: Giles Calvert, 1652), ii.

[40] Davis, "Cromwell's Religion," in Morrill, *Cromwell and the English Revolution*, 198–99.

[41] *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1947), 127.

[42] Carlyle, *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*, 2:235; dated September 12, 1650.

is in himself too *free*, great and generous a Spirit, to suffer himself to be used by any human arm, to whip men into belief; he drives not, but *gently leads into all truth*, and *persuades* men to *dwell in the tents of like precious Faith*; which would lose of its preciousness and value, if that sparkle of freeness shone not in it."[43]

The Congregationalism of the Particular Baptists

Among those Christian communities that espoused a congregational polity during the era of Oliver Cromwell were the Particular or Calvinistic Baptists. By the mid-1640s there were at least seven Particular Baptist congregations, all of them coming out of a Puritan background and all of them located in the metropolis of London.[44] Among their key leaders in the early years of their existence were such men as John Spilsbury (1593–c. 1668), William Kiffin (1616–1701), and Samuel Richardson (fl. 1643–58). Because of their commitment to baptizing believers, many in London confused them with the Anabaptists of the previous century. In order to dispel this confusion, refute other charges that had been leveled against them, and demonstrate their fundamental solidarity with Calvinists throughout western Europe, these Particular Baptists issued the First London Confession of Faith in 1644.[45] As the exemplary historical research of Barrie R. White has shown, this confession gave these early Particular Baptists an extremely clear and self-conscious sense of who they were, what they were seeking to achieve, and how they differed from other Puritan bodies.[46] This First London Confession also

[43] "Preface" to *The Savoy Declaration* (1658), accessed January 7, 2014, http://www.creeds.net/congregational/savoy.

[44] For the full story of the emergence of the Calvinistic Baptists from the Puritan-Separatist matrix, see especially B. R. White, *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*, rev. ed. (London: The Baptist Historical Society, 1996).

[45] For a readily accessible copy of this confession, see William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 153–71. The confession was issued as the Westminster Assembly was meeting and went through at least two printings in its first year of existence. It was then reissued in a slightly amended second edition on November 30, 1646 (four days after the Presbyterian Westminster Confession of Faith had been completed, though not yet published). Two further editions subsequently appeared in the early 1650s. See Murray Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints, The Separate Churches of London 1616–1649* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 61–65; B. R. White, "The Origins and Convictions of the First Calvinistic Baptists," *Baptist History and Heritage*, 25:4 (1990), 45.

[46] See, in particular, the following publications by White: "The Organisation of the Particular Baptists, 1644–1660," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 17 (1966): 209–26; "The Doctrine of the Church in the Particular Baptist Confession of 1644," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s., 19 (1968): 570–90; "Thomas Patient in Ireland," *Irish*

demonstrated for many that the Particular Baptists were not guilty of heterodoxy or fundamental error.

The local church, article 33 of the confession affirms, "is a company of visible Saints, called & separated from the world, by the word and the Spirit of God, to the visible profession of the faith of the Gospel, being baptized into that faith, and joyned to the Lord, and each other, by mutuall agreement."[47] In other words, the local church should consist only of those who have experienced conversion and who have borne visible witness to that experience by being baptized. As Benjamin Keach (1640–1704), a General Baptist who became the single most important theologian of the Particular Baptist movement at the end of the seventeenth century, put it: an essential part of a local church's "Beauty and Glory" is the fact that it is built with "all precious Stones, lively Stones; all regenerated Persons."[48] Especially noteworthy in the article from the First London Confession is the "mutualism" in the description of the church.[49] Believers are "joined to the Lord, and each other, by mutual agreement," says the confession. A church is envisaged as not simply a group of individuals who have put their faith in Christ. It is a community of belief—men and women who have owned Christ, been baptized as believers, and in so doing committed themselves to one another.[50]

This vision of the church clearly ran counter to a major aspect of the *mentalité* of seventeenth-century Anglicans, Presbyterians, and even the Congregationalists in New England, namely the idea of an ecclesio-political establishment, where religious uniformity was maintained by the arm of the state and infant baptism all but required for citizenship. Baptists were convinced that the church is ultimately a fellowship of those who have personally embraced the salvation freely offered in Christ, not an army of conscripted men and women who have no choice in the matter. Placing the phrase "being baptized into that faith" after the words "profession of the faith of the Gospel" in the above text underscores this conviction. Only those who have knowingly professed faith

Baptist Historical Society Journal 2 (1969–70), 36–48, especially 40–41; "Origins and Convictions of the First Calvinistic Baptists," 39–47; *English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*, 59–94.

47 Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 165.

48 *The Glory of a True Church, and Its Discipline Display'd* (London, 1697), iii, 56.

49 For this term, see Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, "'A Company of Professed Believers Ecclesiastically Confederate': the Message of the Cambridge Platform," accessed January 7, 2014, http://www.ucc.org/beliefs/theology/a-company-of-professed.html. This paper was given as part of a conference marking the 350th anniversary of the *Cambridge Platform* (1649).

50 Ibid.

should be baptized. Given the Cromwellian regime's understanding of religious liberty, it is not surprising that these Baptists flourished during the era when Cromwell ruled.

Articles 36 and 42–45 in this confession offer a classic description of congregational church government. On the basis of Matthew 18:17 and 1 Corinthians 5:4, the confession affirms that "Christ has . . . given power to his whole Church to receive in and cast out, by way of Excommunication, any member; and this power is given to every particular Congregation, and not one particular person, either member or Officer, but the whole."[51] The members of the local church acting together have the authority and power to receive new members into their midst as well as to excommunicate those who refuse to walk under Christ's lordship. Furthermore, "every Church has power given them from Christ, to choose to themselves meet persons into the office of Pastors, Teachers, Elders, Deacons."[52] It was also stressed that "none other have power to impose" leaders on the congregation from the outside. While later editions limited the names of the leaders of the congregation to "Elders" and "Deacons," there was no retreat from the fact that "the ministry was . . . firmly subordinated to the immediate authority of the covenanted community."[53] White has pointed out that these early Baptists maintained a jealous concern for congregational autonomy out of a deep desire to be free to obey Christ and not be bound by the dictates of men and human traditions.[54] Undergirding this was a profound concern for God's freedom to be Lord of his church. They regarded human religious traditions that were not sanctioned by God's Word as affronts to God's sovereign freedom and violations of his prerogatives.[55]

Balancing this strong affirmation of congregational autonomy, which could easily lead to isolationism, was article 47, which declared that "although the particular Congregations be distinct and several Bodies, every one a compact and knit City in itself; yet are they all to walk by one and the same Rule, and by all means convenient to have the counsel and help of one another in all needful affaires of the Church, as members of one body in the common faith under Christ their only head."[56] The

51 First London Confession of Faith XLII (Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 168).

52 First London Confession of Faith XXXVI (Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 166).

53 White, "Doctrine of the Church," 581, and his "Origins and Convictions of the First Calvinistic Baptists," 46. On the fact that there should be only two church offices, those of elder and deacon, see the remarks of Keach, *Glory of a True Church*, 15–16.

54 "Doctrine of the Church," 584.

55 Philip E. Thompson, "People of the Free God: The Passion of the Seventeenth-Century Baptists," *American Baptist Quarterly* 15:3 (1991): 226–31.

56 Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 168–69, modernized.

autonomy of each local congregation was recognized as a biblical given but so was the fact that each congregation ultimately belonged to only one body and each shared the same head, the Lord Christ. It was incumbent upon local congregations, therefore, to help one another.[57]

Baptists Covenanting Together—The Praxis of Congregationalism

An excellent window into early Baptist thinking about belonging to a Christian community can be found in their church covenants. These used to be common in Baptist churches but have fallen into disuse in recent days. But a good number of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Baptist churches sought to promote and safeguard their experience as communities of Christian disciples by adopting written covenants.[58] Champlin Burrage, writing on this subject in 1904, suggested that the idea of a church covenanting together may well have originated among German Anabaptist communities in the 1520s.[59] Be this as it may, by the seventeenth century, written covenants were common to both Scottish Presbyterians—where they eventually took the form of a national covenant rather than ones agreed to by individual local congregations—and the Puritans who had separated from the Church of England, among whom were the Baptists.[60]

[57] The sort of help envisioned by the authors of this confession can be discerned in the proof texts that were placed alongside this article in both its 1644 and 1646 editions. The first edition cited, among others, 1 Cor 16:1, which refers to the collection of money that Paul gathered from congregations in Greece and Asia Minor for the poor in the church at Jerusalem, and Col 4:16, in which the church at Colossae is urged to share Paul's letter to them with the church at Laodicea and vice versa. In the 1646 edition, some proof texts were dropped and among those added were Acts 15:2–3, which deals with the Jerusalem Council, and 2 Cor 8:1, 4, which has to do with the collection of money for the church at Jerusalem. In other words the authors of this confession envisioned the churches helping one another in areas of financial need as well as giving advice with regard to doctrinal and ethical matters. Ultimately the churches were bound together by their determination to walk according to the "one and the same Rule," that is, the Scriptures. See further White, "Doctrine of the Church," 583–84.

[58] For the views of those Baptist leaders who felt that a church need not have a written covenant, see Champlin Burrage, *The Church Covenant Idea: Its Origin and Its Development* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1904), 113–21, 124–25; Charles W. Deweese, *Baptist Church Covenants* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), 26–27; Gwyn Davies, *Covenanting with God, The Story of Personal and Church Covenants and Their Lessons for Today* (Bryntirion, Bridgend, Mid Glamorgan: Evangelical Library of Wales, 1994), 51–52.

[59] *Church Covenant Idea*, 13–25. See also Deweese, *Baptist Church Covenants*, 20–21.

[60] Davies, *Covenanting with God*, 39; Deweese, *Baptist Church Covenants*, 22–23.

The heart and substance of these church covenants usually consisted of a series of carefully formulated commitments that were biblically based and that church members voluntarily made to God and to one another. Whereas confessions of faith are centered mainly on vital doctrinal issues, these covenants deal primarily with Christian conduct.[61] In the words of Charles Deweese, a Southern Baptist historian, they were designed to "deepen the quality of a church's fellowship, sharpen a church's awareness of vital moral and spiritual commitments, clarify biblical standards for Christian growth, and create and maintain a disciplined church membership."[62]

Church covenants greatly aided in the attempt to form Christian disciples. First of all, they served as filters by which a local church could determine to some degree who was or who was not a disciple of Christ.[63] The covenant was also a means of reclaiming recalcitrant members who had left the pathway of discipleship. It could be used to remind such individuals of what they had once promised to do and to observe.[64] Finally, covenants gave expression to a distinct view of the Christian life as one of a voluntary, wholehearted commitment to God and to his church. Christian discipleship begins with dedicating the entirety of one's being to God. And the best piece of evidence of this dedication is found in living wholeheartedly for him in the context of the local church.[65]

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61 Deweese, *Baptist Church Covenants*, viii–ix; David Fountain, "Can the Old Church Covenants Help Us Today?" *Sword & Trowel* (December 4, 1985), 8.

62 Deweese, *Baptist Church Covenants*, x.

63 Thus, William Carey (1761–1834), plagued by drunken deacons and bitter strife among a number of unruly members in his pastorate at Leicester, proceeded to recommend the dissolution of the church in September 1790. This was agreed to by a majority of the members. Then, with the support of this majority, the church was reconstituted on the basis of a covenant, so as "to bind them to a strict and faithful New Testament discipline, let it affect whom it might." The result, according to Carey's grandson, was that "they filled the fellowship with faithful love" and the "nettles gave place to the Spirit's flowers and fruits." See S. Pearce Carey, *William Carey* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, [1923]), 57–60.

64 Davies, *Covenanting with God*, 52. In the concluding words of the church covenant drawn up by Benjamin Keach for his London congregation: "Can anything lay a greater obligation up the Conscience, than this Covenant, what then is the sin of such who violate it?" (cited Deweese, *Baptist Church Covenants*, 121). When Christmas Evans (1766–1838), who for more than forty years was the most celebrated Baptist preacher in Wales, arrived in the island of Anglesey, off the northern coast of Wales, he found the life of the Baptist churches there at quite a low ebb. His response was to hold a day of prayer so that the members of these churches might be brought to repentance and a recommitment to the promises they had made when they signed their church covenants. See Davies, *Covenanting with God*, 53.

65 Fountain, "Church Covenants," 8–10.

While some of these church covenants were general, many of them were fairly detailed. A good example of the latter is that of the Baptist cause at Bourton-on-the-Water, Gloucestershire, dated January 30, 1720.[66] After the death of their pastor Joshua Head in 1719, who had served in this capacity for the previous nineteen years, the church was divided over the choice of a successor to Head. So deep was the division that the church actually dissolved for a brief period of time. In January 1720, though, a majority of the members formally recommitted themselves to one another as a body of believers and Christian disciples: "We . . . freely & heartily give up our selves afresh," they declared, "to God the Father & his only Son our Lord and Lawgiver; & to one another according to his will." Documenting this act of recommitment was a covenant composed of thirteen articles.

Nearly a quarter of the articles commit members to preserving their unity in Christ, perhaps because of their recent experience of fractious disagreement over the choice of a new pastor. "We will, to the utmost of our power," they affirm in the first article, "walk together in one Body, & as near as may be with one mind, in all sweetness of Spirit, and saint-like love to each other, as highly becomes the disciples of Christ." Article 3 draws on the language of Ephesians 4:3, a classic text with regard to church unity, to make essentially the same point: "We will with all care, diligence, & conscience labour & study, to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, both in the Church in general, & in particular between one another."

This concern for church unity, however, did not mean indiscriminately embracing all who affirmed that they were Christian disciples. Those who signed this covenant declared their readiness to "shun those that are seducers & false preachers of errors and heresies" (article 4). And in the second article the signators stated their determination to "jointly contend, & strive together for the Faith & purity of the Gospel," which they further defined as "the truths of Jesus Christ, & the order, ordinances, honour, liberty, & privileges of this his Church." The fifth and sixth articles asked them to promise to bear one another's burdens and weaknesses because doing this fulfilled "the end of our near relation." In other words, "being there" for one another was part of their *raison d'être* as a community of believers. Christian discipleship and the Christian pilgrimage cannot exist in isolation—they require community.

[66] For a copy of this covenant, see either "The Bourton Church-Covenant," *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society* 1 (1901–4), 270–74, or Deweese, *Baptist Church Covenants*, 122–24. In the citations from it that follow, the spelling and capitalization have been modernized.

Article 7 addresses persecution:

> We will, as our God shall enable us, cleave fast to each other to the utmost of our power; & that if perilous times should come, & a time of persecution . . . we will not draw back from our holy profession, but will endeavour to strengthen one another's hands, & encourage one another to perseverance.

For any in the Bourton church who were roughly fifty years of age or older, persecution for the faith was a vivid memory because, apart from the brief period when England had been ruled by Cromwell in the 1650s, genuine religious toleration had not existed until 1688. In fact, in 1714, only six years before this covenant was drawn up, Anglican diehards had unsuccessfully attempted to close down all of the academies and seminaries run by anyone outside of the Church of England.[67] This pledge takes seriously that a Christian disciple's ultimate loyalty is to Christ. He or she must be prepared to give up everything for his sake. But also noteworthy is the communal context in which this test of discipleship is placed. The persecution of a believer affects the entire community. And as God gives them grace, these believers promise to stand alongside one another in suffering for the gospel.

Then members vow to be circumspect in speaking about the church's inner life to outsiders: "We do promise to keep the secrets of our Church entire without divulging them to any that are not members of this particular Body, though they may be otherwise near & dear to us." The reason given for this is drawn from the imagery of the Song of Solomon 4:12: "For we believe the Church ought to be as a garden enclosed & a fountain sealed." This comparison of the local church to an enclosed garden was commonplace in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Baptist documents that talked about the nature of the church.

The next vow, article 9, is based on 2 Corinthians 6:14 (where Paul urged Christians not to be "unequally yoked together with unbelievers," NKJV) and 1 Corinthians 7:39 (Paul's command to marry "only in the Lord," NKJV). Members promise not to marry an unbeliever, for, they state, "We believe it to be a sin to be unequally yoked, that it is contrary to the Rule of Christ, & the ready way to hinder our souls' peace, growth, & eternal welfare." The tenth article pledges them to help one another materially, while article 11 focuses on the spiritual help believers must give one another. The latter is designed especially to encourage

[67] For details, see Watts, *Dissenters*, 265–66.

a pastoral attitude on the part of the members toward one another. If they see a brother or sister harboring a sinful lifestyle, they promise "to remove it by using all possible means to bring the person to repentance & reformation of life." In article 12 the church members committed themselves to worshipping "on the Lord's days" and on other occasions the church deemed fit. The final commitment, article 13, entailed a promise to engage in private devotion, including prayer for one another, the growth of the church, and especially for their "ministers & the success of their ministry."

This covenant, like other Baptist church covenants of this era, gives expression to a distinct view of the Christian life: it is a voluntary, wholehearted commitment to God and to his church. Christian discipleship involves dedicating the entirety of one's being to God, the evidence for which is demonstrated in the context of the life of the local community of believers.[68]

Much more could be said about the historical development of congregationalism in this era. However, in contrast to other Reformed conceptions of the church, these early congregationalists viewed the church as a regenerate community, born of the Holy Spirit and united to Christ. Given this understanding of the church's nature, its government should follow. As a result, proponents of congregationalism contended that the church is comprised of all of God's people covenanting together and making decisions under the supreme authority of the head of the church, our Lord Jesus Christ, and under the leadership of Christ's appointed leaders within individual churches. Yet the entire congregation has a role to play in these decisions and in governing the affairs of the church because they are a regenerate people.

Historically this is how congregationalism developed. Yet ultimately Scripture should drive our view of church governance, as these early proponents of congregationalism made clear.

[68] Fountain, "Church Covenants," 8–10.